Reading Assessment Framework in pre-A1 ESOL classes in England for LESLLA learners

R Day

PhD

2024

Reading Assessment Framework in pre-A1 ESOL classes in England for LESLLA learners

Rim Day

The thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Northumbria

School of Arts & Humanities

Dec 2024

Abstract

LESLLA learners (Literacy Education and Second Language Learning for Adults) are normally placed in pre-A1 ESOL classes as it is the lowest level of language classes provided in England. This level is non-accredited and there is no standardised assessment used, causing teachers to design their own assessment tools based on their own judgment or their institutions', which means that there is no comprehensive assessment used among institutions in pre-A1 level in England similar to the standardised ones used in Entry levels and above. Various studies have focused on second language acquisition for learners with focus on educational background and child language acquisition, but language acquisition for low-literate or illiterate learners is still a developing topic. Although the topic has been a main interest of some researchers over the last 20 years, there is still a dearth of research on how to fairly assess LESLLA learners in the ESOL provision. Therefore, this study aims to provide a holistic view of the reading assessment framework used with LESLLA in pre-A1 ESOL classes in England to investigate the credibility and reliability of this assessment to LESLLA learners. Utilising a mixed-method participatory action research approach, this exploratory research has engaged key stakeholders involved with LESLLA learners' reading assessment, namely ESOL LESLLA learners, practitioners and managers to ensure fair assessment for the former. The research integrated the perspectives of 25 ESOL practitioners/managers through open-ended questionnaires and semiotic multifunctional analysis of samples of the reading assessment materials and criteria used by ESOL providers in England. Moreover, quantitative data was collected from 8 LESLLA learners via pre-test, post-test phonemic awareness tasks (PAT) and reading tasks to provide a holistic overview of the suitability of assessment tools and rubric used at colleges for such learners. Findings reveal that the assessment tools are not based on research and there are no specific criteria used to design these tools. Due to a lack of standardised assessment, practices vary, and the assessments used are biased towards literate learners. These tools fail to capture the real progress made by the LESLLA population; it rather shows that they are not ready for Entry level 1, which may have detrimental consequences particularly for LESLLA refugees and asylum seekers. To ensure that the assessment used with LESLLA learners is fair, valid and reliable, a review to the current assessment practice should be taken into consideration and it is recommended that better collaboration between policy makers, ESOL practitioners, test-designers and researchers take place. Assessment could be enhanced by utilising performance-based assessment, such as individual learning profiles, particularly for LESLLA learners, to better address the diverse and complex abilities of this group. Implementing standardised rubrics, such as the newly established reference guide by the Council of Europe's LASLLIAM, can help measure the micro-achievements of LESLLA learners. This approach will offer ESOL practitioners improved support, enabling them to provide comprehensive and constructive feedback to their LESLLA students.

Table of Contents

Table of Figures

Table of Tables

The Acknowledgment

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to those who have supported me throughout my PhD journey. To my family; parents & siblings, your unwavering encouragement has been my foundation. Thank you for your patience, understanding, and belief in my abilities during this challenging process.

I am especially grateful to my supervisors, Rola Naeb & Alex Ho-Cheong Leung, for their invaluable guidance and mentorship. Your insights and support have been instrumental in shaping my research and helping me grow as a scholar.

I would like to take a moment to extend a heartfelt and special acknowledgment to my incredible husband and children. Your unwavering love, support, and sacrifices have been the foundation upon which I built this achievement. Thank you for being my constant rock, and for always lifting me up with your encouragement and belief in me. Your patience and understanding during this journey have been invaluable. You have endured my moments of doubt and frustration with grace, and your cheerful spirits have inspired me to keep moving forward. This accomplishment is as much yours as it is mine; it reflects the strength of our family bond and the love that drives me every day. I am immensely grateful for each of you, and I carry your support in my heart as I take this momentous step. Together, we have achieved something truly special, and I look forward to celebrating this milestone with you. Thank you for everything.

To everyone who has played a part in my journey, I sincerely thank you.

Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others. The work was done in collaboration with Northumbria University.

Any ethical clearance for the research presented in this commentary has been approved. Approval has been sought and granted through the Researcher's submission to Northumbria University's Ethics Online System.

I declare that the Word Count of this Thesis is 73,004 words

Name: Rim Day

Date: 05/12/2024

Chapter One: Introduction

1 Overview

Although the topic of how low-literate learners acquire a second language has been a main interest to many researchers, such as Kurvers, Van Hout & Vallen (2006) and Young-Scholten & Naeb (2010), Bagna, et al. (2017), Carlsen (2017), Gonzalves (2017), Carlsen & Rocca (2021) Altherr Flores (2021) & O'Sullivan et al. (2021), little research has focused on the topic of the assessment system that is being used in ESOL institutions for low-literate or illiterate learners. Studies have shown that low-literate learners face challenges when they are aiming to be literate for the first time, but in a second or additional language. Such people can be found in language classes in a pre-entry or pre-A1 according to the Common European Framework (CEFR). As part of the integration process, LESLLA learners are expected to take part in high stakes written exams (Carlsen, 2021; Rocca et al., 2019). However, there is a dearth of research on how this subset of people can be fairly assessed and there is a lack of suitable assessment approaches developed to suit the needs of LESLLA learners (Young-Scholten, 2008; Allemano, 2013; Tarone & Bigelow, 2012; Hooft et.al., 2021), especially when it comes to providing a fair chance for these people in testing in language classes (Carlsen, 2017). Therefore, this study has widely investigated this topic based on an exploratory research design involving key stakeholders in the assessment process to investigate the suitability of the assessment tools used with LESLLA learners. The study has aimed to examine the materials that are currently used to assess low-literate learners, the criteria used to design the assessments, and the views of stakeholders (ESOL practitioners and managers) on those assessments. Moreover, the effectiveness of these assessments in relation to assessment tasks based on phonemic awareness tasks (PATs) as well as the effectiveness of the rubric used in colleges have been investigated to understand the suitability of the assessment tools and rubric in measuring learners' progress, even the small achievements. Education-based Participatory action research (PAR) has been adopted, and a mixed methods have been used to collect the data and answer the research questions. Education-based PAR offers a structure for harnessing the potential of practitioner inquiry to facilitate significant change. Participatory Action Research (PAR) broadens the definition of researcher by incorporating various

stakeholders who work together throughout all stages of the action-reflection process (Brydon-Miller & Maguire, 2009). The quantitative method is the PAT pre-test post-test method that has examined the effectiveness of the assessment approach used in colleges in England. The qualitative methods have included a semiotic multimodal analysis, which is an analytical approach that examines how meaning is created and communicated through various modes of communication and representation, such as language, visuals, gestures, sounds, and spatial arrangements (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020). This method recognises that meaning is not solely conveyed through text; instead, it emerges from the combination and interaction of multiple modes, each contributing to the overall message (ibid). In semiotic multimodal analysis, researchers focus on how these different modes work together in specific contexts, considering factors like cultural background, audience interpretation, and the intended purpose of the communication. By analysing texts, images, videos, and other forms of media through this lens, practitioners seek to understand how meaning is constructed and how various modalities influence the interpretation of a message (ibid). the other two qualitative methods used are an open-ended questionnaire with the ESOL practitioners and comparison between the traditionally used rubric and the new framework from the Council of Europe LASLLIAM (see section 1.4 for more information about the framework, also see appendices 7 & 8 for the descriptors used from LASLLIAM).

1.1 Migration in Context

Globalisation during the 21st century has been featured by the growth of the number of people who move from their countries to others for various reasons, including migration. It is estimated that one in 35 people in the UK are migrants as Simpson (2016) states. People choose to migrate to a different country because of unemployment in their countries, poverty, joining their family members, persecution in their home countries or escaping civil unrests and wars. The migrations to more prosperous countries grow, even though some governments are working on restricting it (Simpson, 2016). For example, the UK has worked on reducing the number of EU immigrants arriving in the UK, especially low-skilled workers as they are competing with the British workers (McTague, 2017). Countries, where English is the first language, experienced different patterns of migration. For instance, Britain has been receiving migrants since the nineteenth century as Rosenberg (2007) indicates. In the middle of the 20th century, migrants from Britain's previous colonies, such as the

Caribbean and India, have settled in the UK because the country was experiencing shortage in labour. However, the range of migration has changed from the previous waves due to the globalisation and modernity (Appadurai, 1996; Giddens, 1999). The net migration to the UK has sharply increased in 2021 to reach its highest level in 2022 (Sturge, 2024). The UK is one of the 145 countries that ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention treaty, which includes offering asylum to those who arrive in the UK and need protection (Harvey, 2015). While people migrate to the UK for various reasons, 11% of immigrants in 2023 are asylum seekers and refugees, who moved to the UK due to fear from persecution practices against them in their home countries for various reasons, such as political or religion opinions and economic instability (ibid). In 2018, it has been reported that the biggest number of asylum seekers who arrive to the UK are mainly from Eritrea, Pakistan and Syria (White, 2018) and after 2021, asylum seekers are mainly from Ukraine, Afghanistan, Iran, Sudan & Syria (The Migration Observatory, 2024).

The government supports those immigrants to integrate in the British society through various ways, including the provision of free ESOL classes (English for speakers of other languages) to help immigrants learn the host language, which is also one of the requirements for being granted the British citizenship (Foster & Bolton, 2018). ESOL is one of the ESL branches that can deal with the consequences of globalisation and migration. Britain is now highly experiencing superdiversity that has not been encountered earlier (Blommaert and Rampton, 2011; Vertovec, 2006). Migration (Baynham, 2011) and globalisation (Blommaert, 2010) have a clear impact on the use of today's language, which shed light on two notions; translanguaging (Creese and Blackledge, 2010) and metrolingualism (Pennycook and Otsuji, 2015) (see definitions in section 1.4), in an age where people with multilingual resources are in contact with each other. Moreover, there is a noticeable increase in the number of illiterate people who migrate to different countries (United Nations, 2017) and seek to become literate and learn to read and write in a new language for the first time (Young Scholten, 2021). According to the UNISCO (2017), it is estimated that 750 million people are illiterate worldwide. People might be deprived from education for various reasons, such as poverty, civil unrest, wars and not prioritising education in some societies, especially for girls as Bigelow and King (2015) indicate. With the increase of immigration, the number of illiterate people who are seeking to be literate for the first time, in a new

language is increasing (Young Scholten, 2008). Young Scholten (2008; 2021) has referred to them as "low-literate" or can fit under the category of Literacy Education and Second Language Learning for Adults (LESLLA) (see section 1.4 for definition). Even though illiteracy is gradually decreasing worldwide, around three quarters of the population worldwide are living in economic instability due to being in conflicted areas, which prevent many people from accessing formal education or they might experience interruption in their educational journey due to relocation (World Demographic Profile, 2021). The most affected population in this case are females, who are disadvantaged when it comes to education as they are more likely to be prevented from joining schools which restrict them from gaining literacy in their first language (Young-Scholten & Kreeft Peyton, 2020). Most of these disadvantaged groups are forced to migrate to a safer haven and required to be literate for the first time but in a new language (Young-Scholten & Kreeft Peyton, 2020).

One of the main migration destinations is the UK due to offering protection to asylum seekers. It is undeniable that there is a considerable number of refugees in the UK who are illiterate or low literate. Whatever the reason of illiteracy is, lack of literacy to migrants who live in literate communities is a struggle and cause huge implications for adult migrants. Such adults had not considered their low literacy a problem until they migrate to a different country, where they are required to learn how to read and write in the host language as a second or third language and sometimes when they are facing the stress of migration at the same time (Baynham and De Fina, 2005). For example, Cooke and Simpson (2008) report on the case of Kamal from Sri Lanka, an asylum seeker in the UK who expressed the difficulty he is facing when receiving important letters from the Home Office and he could not understand them properly. Even though immigrants have access to resources and networks that help them in translations and interpretations, they feel uncomfortable with their dependency on others to fulfil their needs. Therefore, they seek to learn the language of the host country to fulfil their daily needs with the less support possible (Simpson, 2016). According to a report done by Robinson (2017), it is found that such learners need to start from a pre-entry level or pre-A1 level according to the CEFR (see section 2.3 for more details).

1.2 Research Problem

Assessment primarily refers to formal evaluation in many countries, such as in England and while pre-A1 course is non-accredited, learners are still expected to take high-stakes attainment assessment for accountability reasons to progress to the higher level as ESOL is part of the Adult and Further Education courses. Yet, there is no standardised assessment at this level; thus, ESOL tutors are faced with the challenge of developing assessment tools for their learners and assessments are created in-house by each provider or tutor while they are not prepared nor trained to be test-developers (Allemano, 2018) especially as previous studies have concluded that LESLLA learners who are studying at a beginner level are not always capable of engaging with the test questions in the expected and anticipated way that test-developers have because such learners have almost no schooling and testing experiences (Allemano, 2013; Allemano, 2018 & Altherr Flores, 2021a). This can be further challenging for learners whose first language is spoken with no written script (Florez and Terrill 2003).

In pre-A1 level, learners need to develop their literacy as they possess no English knowledge, or literacy skills in their own language; most do not know how to use sophisticated learning skills and are not used to being in a formal learning setting. Therefore, ESOL classes now include a variety and a big number of learners with a big diversity that can be noticed in their educational background, schooling experiences and their command of literacy to their first language (Simpson, 2016). Simpson et al (2011) argue that it is no wonder to have students with university degree in the same class with people who almost received no schooling experience, which often means low literacy in their first language. Those individuals come to host countries with little to no literacy skills and/or limited or interrupted formal education in their native language, and they need to learn a new language. In literature and research, they are known as Literacy Education and Second Language Learning for Adults learners (referred to as LESLLA learners from this point forward) (see section 1.4 for full definition).

Teaching English as an additional language (EAL) to LESLLA learners who are learning to read and write for the first time in a second or additional language is considered one of the most difficult areas in the ESOL field (Young-Scholten, 2015). This is an unsurprising fact about people who are learning to read and write for the

first time of their lives in an adult age and in a new language. Tarone et al. (2009) state that adults who learn a new language with no functional literacy, which is obtaining reading, writing and maths skills and applying these skills in their daily lives, usually face cognitive problems on different aspects of language processing. Reder (2015) explains why it is difficult for LESLLA learners to learn to read and write in a second language for the first time. Teachers do not only engrave in their adult learners the basic techniques required to read and write, but also teachers have to inculcate "the system of values and practices associated with the institutional sponsor of literacy" (Reder, 2015: 2). LESLLA learners struggle in second-language classes not only because they are acquiring a new language and the new literacy abilities required in such a program, but they are doing so in unfamiliar institutional context, in which learners are exposed to implicit assumptions about how the education experience and literacy are connected (ibid).

While many researchers, including Kurvers, Van Hout, & Vallen (2006) and Young-Scholten & Naeb (2010), have shown interest in how low-literate learners learn a second language, there has been limited research on the assessment materials employed in ESOL institutions and how well they cater to LESLLA learners. Research by Kurvers et al. (2006) and Young-Scholten and Naeb (2010) indicate that low-literate learners encounter challenges as they strive to become literate in a second language, requiring more time compared to literate individuals to progress. Carlsen (2017) argues that this group is disadvantaged in language testing within educational settings due to the UK's prevailing national policy, which mandates formal assessments for learners to advance levels in adult education courses, including ESOL programs (Higton et al., 2019). ESOL providers receive funding based on learners' qualification achievements, necessitating courses tailored towards Skills for Life qualifications. This poses a difficulty for LESLLA learners, who may take over a year to reach Entry Level 1 (A1), the minimum qualification level encompassing reading, writing, listening, and speaking assessments (Allemano, 2013; Simpson et al., 2008; Simpson, 2015). The situation is especially challenging for learners at the lowest level, with some possessing varied literacy backgrounds while others have minimal literacy experience in their native language and limited English proficiency.

The primary obstacle in evaluating novice readers seems to lie within the assessment process itself (Allemano, 2013), a topic that will be explored in more detail within the

literature review. Essentially, traditional assessments in language classes rely on the ability to recognise written texts and possess fundamental study skills needed to comprehend instructions, a requirement that poses a challenge for LESLLA learners. Despite these learners being able to extract meaning from texts by the time they reach the level-promotion test, they often struggle with conventional institutional assessments. Their difficulties in showcasing their knowledge stem from these tests being structured around familiarity with assessment materials and procedures, assuming a certain level of literacy. These factors will be elaborated on in the literature review. Research from the past decade emphasises the necessity of extending the CEFR to incorporate assessment criteria below A1 to accurately reflect the progress made by such learners (Gonzalves, 2017; Carlsen, 2017), given their unique needs and tendency to make gradual advancements, especially in the initial stages of their language learning journey (Tammelin-Laine, 2014).

1.3 Rationale of the study

A current government policy in the UK has raised concerns of many researchers (including Allemano, 2013; 2018) regarding the assessment of ESOL courses to low-literate learners, especially the assessment of their reading skill (see section 2.2 for details). The policy indicates that all plus 16 learners are required to work toward a qualification in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, including the provision of ESOL. Providers for ESOL courses receive 10% funding for learners based on their achievements and qualifications. This policy has urged rewarding bodies to develop external certifications for all ESOL levels. Some awarding bodies depend on research in developing their assessment criteria to the three skills of the English language to non-native learners. However, little attention has been paid to the LESLLA learners who lack functional and test literacy. For example, no standardised tests exist below pre-A1 level. Even with the CEFR, there are no descriptors below A1.

Even though recent studies have focused on the topic of fair assessment to LESLLA ESOL learners (Carlsen, 2017; Gonzalves, 2017; O'Sullivan *et al.*, 2021), this PhD study will add to the field by focusing on the opinions of key stakeholders involved in the assessment process, namely learners, teachers and managers in An Education-based Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Brydon-Miller & Maguire, 2009). The study has will also analyse the materials used in assessing learners and study how

effective they are in assessing the progress of learners. By doing so, the study will investigated how valid and reliable are the assessment tools and rubrics used in pre-A1 ESOL classes with low-literate learners based on their suitability to measure LESLLA learners' micro achievements that they make during their course of study.

1.4 Study focus /scope/ objectives

This study will provide an in-depth knowledge about the challenges that low-literate learners face when their reading skill is being assessed, and it will also provide a better insight for ESOL providers on how to fairly assess the reading skill of low-literate learners. Therefore, this study will focus on low-literate learners who are studying ESOL in the pre-A1 level in England and their tutors and managers too. In order to examine the fairness and effectiveness of assessment tools in the pre-A1 level to low-literate learners, four methods will be used to collect the data in a participatory action research design.

This study has aims to:

- explore ESOL practitioners' points of view regarding the assessment process at this level to understand their views and needs of change in the assessment system through an open-ended questionnaire.
- investigate the suitability of the reading assessment tools to LESLLA learners in pre-A1 ESOL classes in England through analysing the reading assessment materials and criteria used by ESOL providers and investigate how effective they are in assessing the progress of learners. The materials that are used to assess this group of learners have been analysed using a semiotic multimodal analyses method.
- measure LESLLA learners' progress in reading after a course of intervention and compare this to their actual assessment results. This has been measured through PATs pre-test post-test.
- And compare the rubric used by colleges with the newly established reference guide by Council of Europe LASLLIAM to compare the suitability of the former by using both rubrics to compare the progress made by LESLLA learners in a reading pre-test & post-test.

As some key terms, like 'LESLLA', 'test', 'assessment' etc.., will be repetitively used in the literature review chapter, the next section has established the meaning of these terms.

1.5 Key terms

1.5.1 LESLLA

Literacy Education and Second Language Learning for Adults (LESLLA) is an international organisation that allows the coordination and cooperation of policy makers, researchers, program leaders, tutors and volunteers who share similar interests in adult migrants with limited or no literacy skills before entering the host country in which they live and the development of second language learning (Faux & Watson, 2018; Young-Scholten, 2021). Young-Scholten (2008:5) has referred to learners who received little or no schooling education as "low-literate" learners who can fit under the category of LESLLA. She (2008: 5) defines them as the

> *adults who are beyond the age of compulsory schooling upon immigration; ….*
> *who (are) working on becoming literate for the first time in a language in which*
> *this oral competence may not yet be well established.*

LESLLA learners as immigrants are always inclined to learn the host language not only to facilitate their integration in the new society, but also to prove their English language proficiency when applying for residence permit or naturalisation (Beacco, 2021). Therefore, many have enrolled in free English classes to master the language. However, learners could face many challenges during the learning process (Foster & Bolton, 2018). As stated above, there is a considerate number of LESLLA learners who live in England and aim to be literate for the first time in a second language. Due to lack of print awareness and study skills, such learners need to start from a pre-A1 ESOL level, which is an unaccredited course (Young-Scholten & Kreeft Peyton, 2020) with inconsistency in funding in England (Simpson, 2021). Moreover, LESLLA learners take three times longer to learn how to read and write compared to their educated peers as the former lack the pre-existing framework that literate learners have, such as study and literacy skills, on which the new knowledge will be built (Faux & Watson, 2018; Young-Scholten & Naeb, 2010). LESLLA learners could be more disadvantaged if their first language has a non-alphabetical system or use a non-Roman alphabetical script and they write from right to left, like Arabic, which is the case of the LESLLA

participants in this study. This makes L2 literacy acquisition more challenging due to the difference in script. Not only this, but also when the sound and shape of the letter are not connected to the spoken words in L2, an extra layer of challenge is added, especially when learners do not recognise the meanings of symbols, images and scripts associated with the language. Recognising the relationship between the shape and sound of letters is a vital stage to read and write in L2, but many learners in pre-A1 level aim to improve their oral communication using everyday language (Educational & Training Foundation, 2021), not necessarily to learn to read and write. With the inconsistency of funding and lack of policy support for ESOL (Simpson, 2021), the vulnerability of such learners is increasing within the ESOL provision (Young-Scholten, 2021). Sometimes, unexperienced tutors are being assigned to teach pre-A1 level based on the assumption that teaching the lower levels does not require expertise. Yet, as LESLLA learners have complex needs, teachers need to be well-trained and experienced to teach them basic literacy (Education and Training Foundation, 2021).

1.5.2 Assessment and Test

A test and an assessment are two terms that are used interchangeably, but they have different meanings. A test is a device that is used to examine the learners' knowledge of something to evaluate what learners already know at a certain point in time and what they have learnt over a period of time. A test measures which level of knowledge learners have gained, and it also evaluates the learners' behaviour throughout the exam process, to establish the knowledge obtained, evaluate it and score it according to a standardised process. To ensure its validity, the test should examine the topic that it is supposed to test. The commonly known type of tests is the one written on a paper in the form of questions, which is the method known for the majority of people (Kortez, 2008; Lambert & Lines, 2000). Douglas (2014: 90) defines language test as a tool that is used to analyse and identify "target language use situation" by allowing interactions between test tasks and test takers to infer their knowledge ability and language capacity to use in certain contexts (Mezzadri, 2017: 18).

Assessment, on the other hand, is a continuous process that documents the skills and knowledge that learners are gaining to help teachers to work on improving learners' skills (Gronlund, 1993; Hedge, 2000). It is the "process of monitoring or keeping track of the learners' progress. … it is part of the whole educational process of teaching and

learning" (Hedge, 2000, p. 376). According to Norris and Ortega (2014: 573), an assessment is "a systematic and replicable technique that allows researchers to elicit, observe, and interpret indicators of L2 knowledge … with underlying standards of practice that govern its development and use". It becomes clear that the aim of assessment is not merely judging learners' performance, but to make improvements because collected information will be interpreted in the learning/teaching process (Hedge, 2000). The Council of Europe agrees with Hedge's definition of assessment. The term assessment refers to evaluating the language user's proficiency. While all assessments involve some form of evaluation, a language program evaluates more than just learner proficiency. This can encompass the effectiveness of specific methods or materials, the nature and quality of discourse generated within the program, levels of satisfaction among learners and teachers, as well as the effectiveness of teaching, among other factors (Council of Europe, 2001).

The difference between the test and assessment is that the test is a device that measures something in specific, while the assessment is a procedure, not a device and it is used during and after providing instructions. The assessment results can be interpreted, and the instructions can be amended accordingly whereas the tests are usually done after receiving instructions and the test results do not necessarily need ~~not be~~ interpretation (Gronlund, 1993).

1.5.3 Translanguaging and Metrolingualism
Translanguaging, according to Gracia and Li (2014: 2):

is an approach to the use of language, bilingualism and the education of bilinguals that considers the language practices of bilinguals not as two autonomous language systems as has been traditionally the case, but as one linguistic repertoire with features that have been societally constructed as belonging to two separate languages.

Metrolingualism according to (Otsuiji & Pennycook, 2010: 244) is

the contemporary practice of creative uses, or mixing, of different linguistic codes in predominantly urban contexts, transcending established social, cultural, political and historical boundaries, identities and ideologies.

1.5.4 ESOL vs ESL/EFL

The ESOL qualification includes three modes, which are writing, reading and speaking & listening (Foster & Bolton, 2018). Each mode can be studied separately or holistically. The courses in Skills for Life are divided into five levels; entry 1, 2 and 3, which are the basic courses and level 1 and 2 which are equivalent to GCSEs and are roughly equivalent to the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR) levels A1, A2, B1, B2 to C1 respectively (Simpson, Sunderland, & Cooke, 2008; LIAM, 2018). A pre-A1 level has been added to the ESOL course due to the increase of the number of LESLLA learners who possess no English knowledge, test literacy or learning skills (Robinson, 2017). Pre-A1 or pre-entry term has been established by the Learning & Work Institute (L&W) to refer to learners who are not ready yet to join Entry level 1 ESOL class. Most learners, though not necessarily all, in pre-A1 classes are relatively new to learning literacy skills or ESOL and have often recently arrived in the UK. The provision aims to meet their literacy and learning needs and provide learners with more time to overcome any challenges faced to access Entry level 1 curriculum, such as gaining essential literacy skills or providing more time to consolidate their previous knowledge (Educational Training Foundation, 2021a).

Tutors who teach and support LESLLA learners recognise several unique challenges these individuals encounter, including insufficient print and language awareness, as well as a lack of study and learning skills. These learners are typically enrolled in beginner language classes, such as pre-entry ESOL programs in the United Kingdom (Young-Scholten & Kreeft Peyton, 2020; Robinson, 2017). ESOL classes at this level are more varied than those at higher levels in terms of students' educational backgrounds, schooling experiences, and literacy proficiency in their first language (Simpson, 2016). This diversity is attributed to the different backgrounds of the learners; some may have gained basic functional literacy skills during their journeys, while others may arrive without any literacy skills.

It is worth stating that in the UK, education is decentralized, and the governments of Wales and Scotland have created specific ESOL strategies to guide their approaches. These strategies aim to unite ESOL providers across the sector and focus on funding and qualifications at the home-nation level, rather than at the UK level. In contrast, England's situation differs from that of Wales and Scotland (Simpson, 2021). As the educational language policies differ between countries concerning provisions and formal language qualifications and requirements, this paper focuses on the situation

in England, particularly in the Northeast, while also briefly referencing other regions or countries.

1.5.5 Functional Literacy

Functional literacy is an expression that reflects the need to meet demands of reading and writing in a new language to survive in a new country (Simpson, Sunderland, & Cooke, 2008). Functional literacy includes three main approaches, which are the acquisition of verbal, computational and cognitive skills to meet the practical ends needed in a new cultural setting. Although the term functional literacy has been labelled as the survival literacy because it involves learners in the minimal competency level of language to enable them to find a job, defenders believe that the definition should not be restricted to this concept. It should cover the ability of learners to negotiate successfully and contribute economically to the host society (ibid).

1.5.6 Definitions in phonology

In the literature and discussion chapters, various terms from phonology will be discussed, as they are closely related to how reading is learned by second or additional language emerging and low-literate readers.

Phonetics examines the physical characteristics of a language's sound system (August, Calderon & Carlo, 2000), whereas morphology studies the structure and formation of words, including morpheme formation (Young-Scholten and Strom, 2006). A phoneme is the smallest sound unit in a language that can convey meaning, and phonemic awareness is a key component of phonological awareness that emerging readers must develop. It refers to the "ability to focus on and manipulate phonemes in spoken words" (McShane, 2005: 2). Increased phonemic awareness is associated with improved literacy outcomes (Perfetti & Marron, 1995).

A grapheme is the smallest functional element of a writing system that represents a phoneme in a language (Morais et al., 1988). In contrast, a syllable is a pronunciation unit that includes a vowel sound, potentially accompanied by surrounding consonants, forming a single beat in a word (ibid; Kurvers, 2015). Orthography refers to the standardised spelling system of a language, which primarily reflects its distinct structural features, including aspects of morphology and phonology (Chikamatsu, 1996).

Phonological awareness refers to the capacity to recognize and manipulate sounds in spoken language, which encompasses phonemes, syllables, and rhymes (Chard and Dickson, 1999; Malessa, 2018). Morphological awareness involves understanding the structure and formation of words, particularly how morphemes combine to create them (Young-Scholten and Strom, 2006). Decoding is the process of converting written text (graphemes) into spoken language (phonemes) (Kurvers, 2007; Perfetti, 2003 & Young-Scholten and Strom, 2006), while word families consist of groups of words that share a common root or base and typically have related meanings (Katz & Frost, 1992).

Phonological, syntactic, and morphological competence are fundamental aspects of linguistic competence, which refers to a speaker's tacit understanding of their language (Malessa, 2018). Phonological competence is the speaker's ability to identify and produce the sound system of their language, which includes the rules for combining sounds (phonemes) and the patterns of intonation (Nagy and Hancin-Bhatt, 1993). This competence includes skills such as phonemic awareness (the ability to recognize individual sounds), knowledge of syllable structures, and the capacity to differentiate between similar sounds. Phonological competence is crucial for effective reading and writing, as it allows individuals to decode written text and comprehend spoken language (Centre for Dyslexia, 2004).

Syntactic competence refers to the understanding of the rules and principles that regulate sentence structure in a language, encompassing aspects such as sentence formation, word order, and the relationships among the various components of a sentence. This competence enables speakers to produce and comprehend an unlimited number of sentences, ranging from simple to complex constructions. It also involves recognizing grammatical categories (such as nouns, verbs, and adjectives) and knowing how to manipulate these categories to create coherent sentences (Goswami & Bryant, 1990).

Morphological competence pertains to a speaker's comprehension of word structure and the rules governing their formation, especially regarding how morphemes (the smallest units of meaning) come together to form words. This competence encompasses knowledge of inflection (modifications in form to convey tense, mood, number, etc.) and derivation (the process of creating new words by adding prefixes or suffixes). It is essential for reading and writing and plays a significant role in language

acquisition, as it aids learners in understanding how words are formed and modified (Goswami & Bryant, 1990).

Metalinguistic awareness is the ability to think about and reflect on language as a subject of analysis. It encompasses an understanding of the structure, function, and use of language, which enables individuals to analyse and manipulate linguistic forms and concepts (Kurvers, Van Hout & Vallen, 2006). This awareness includes recognizing the connections between language and its context, understanding that language can express various meanings, and distinguishing among different languages and dialects. Metalinguistic awareness is essential for language learning, literacy development, and communication skills, as it fosters greater proficiency in language use. It helps learners grasp nuances, address language-related challenges, and enhance their overall language proficiency (Young-Scholten & Naeb, 2010).

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

This chapter has provided an introduction to the study including the migration in the UK context, the rationale of the study, the scope of the study and key terms that will be used repetitively in the study. The thesis will be then divided into five other chapters, which are the literature review, methodology, findings and discussion (this chapter has been divided into two separate chapters and each one reflects the phases of data collection) and the conclusion. The literature review will include the philosophical approach on which this study will be based, background knowledge about ESOL in the UK context, the relationship between L1 literacy and L2 learning, the position of LESLLA learners in ESOL classes, how the reading skill is being taught and assessed, based on both practice and research, the challenges that LESLLA learners face in assessment and the validity and reliability of assessment in ESOL courses.

1.7 Conclusion

After identifying the key issues concerning the assessment of LESLLA learners, this study examines the assessment framework utilised by ESOL institutions in England to evaluate their LESLLA students, as well as the appropriateness of the assessment materials and criteria for the LESLLA context. There has been research on the low-literate learners who aim to be literate for the first time in a second language, but there is a lack of study on the topic of assessment system in ESOL classes for low-literate

learners. Studies have shown that low-literate learners face challenges when they are aiming to be literate for the first time, but in a second language. These learners also face challenges when doing an assessment, but less attention has been paid to this point. This PhD research contributes to the growing body of work on equitable assessment for LESLLA ESOL learners (Bagna et al., 2017; Carlsen, 2017; Gonzalves, 2017; Carlsen & Rocca, 2021 & O'Sullivan et al., 2021) by concentrating on the appropriateness of reading assessment tools for LESLLA learners at the pre-A1 ESOL level. Additionally, it evaluates the materials and criteria employed in the assessment process and investigates their effectiveness in measuring learner progress. Therefore, this topic will be further illustrated and discussed in the coming section; the literature review, by focusing on previous studies and current practices of the studied topic.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2 Introduction

Most ESOL organisations in the UK have emphasised the need to support language learning to facilitate the social integration of migrants, largely due to the lack of clarity in national policy regarding ESOL provision (NATECLA, 2016). The government's current policy mandates that all adults pursue a qualification in post-16 education in England, which includes ESOL courses. As a result, providers must offer courses aimed at achieving Skills for Life qualifications, necessitating assessments to gauge learners' progress and readiness for advancement, in line with national standards, and to secure funding based on evidence of learner success. However, assessment poses challenges for LESLLA learners (Simpson et al., 2008; Allemano, 2013).

Over the past few decades, most awarding bodies have established effective practices for assessing the English language skills of higher-level ESOL learners (see Bedford, 2003; Khalifa & Ffrench, 2009; Stoynoff, 2009). However, there remains a lack of emphasis on pre-entry assessments compared to other ESOL levels (Allemano, 2013). According to Robinson's Report (2017), LESLLA ESOL learners lack some knowledge and skills that literate learners possess. These include metalinguistic knowledge, an understanding of language, its functions, structure, and usage from a functionalist viewpoint, as well as educational and study skills acquired through participation in educational environments (Allemano, 2013). Furthermore, ESOL courses in the UK are accredited (Higton et al., 2019), making it clear that the examination process is a significant obstacle for assessing LESLLA learners, as they are unfamiliar with formal testing environments. Consequently, the accreditation policy presents challenges for these learners (Allemano, 2013; 2018).

When assessments utilise standardised tests, the definitions of what should be measured, and the methods of measurement are well defined (Faux & Watson, 2018). However, pre-A1 provisions are less formal compared to higher ESOL levels, as they are not accredited and do not have standardised tests available in England (Education and Training Foundation, 2019). Consequently, each institution creates its own assessment criteria to evaluate learners during the initial registration process to ascertain new students' English proficiency levels, as well as through ongoing

assessments that track learners' progress and facilitate promotion (Allemano, 2018). Nonetheless, the exam practices implemented may not be grounded in research, raising questions about their validity (Allemano, 2018). Additionally, the methods used to demonstrate broader learner achievements are not sufficiently developed (Education and Training Foundation, 2019).

As mentioned earlier, there is a considerate number of LESLLA immigrants who live in England and seek to become literate for the first time in a second language. As those learners are seeking to become literate for the first time, this chapter will first focus on the theoretical framework of the study, which is based on the social practice theory, cognitive processing approach and the constructionist theory. Then, the ESOL provision in the UK will be discussed in detail. The relationship between L1 literacy and L2 acquisition will be the focus of the third part of the literature. The fourth part of the literature will examine the overall position of low-literate learners around the world and specifically in the UK. Teaching and assessment of reading will be the focus of the fifth and sixth parts of literature including the current practice, the current pieces of research and the challenges that face LESLLA learners in their reading assessments. Lastly, the validity and reliability of assessment will be discussed and then the contribution of this study to literature will be presented.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Social Practice Theory and Cognitive Processing Approach

Social practice theory has recently had a significant impact on literacy teaching, as noted by Barton, Hamilton, and Ivanovic (2000) and Grieve (2007). However, its influence on test design is less pronounced, despite test designers prioritising authentic reading purposes in their assessments (Schwab 2010). For instance, a test might include a restaurant menu where learners are asked to scan it to find delivery times or skim it to locate vegetarian options. Additionally, learners may read for details to select a meal based on its ingredients or critically read to compare various meal options (Schwab 2010). Hellerman, (2006: 379) has stressed this point by indicating that "linguistic processing is embedded within and inseparable from social practices or routines in which individuals are engaged". Furthermore, Grieve (2007) contends that while assessment methods typically encompass the skills learners demonstrate in the classroom, this does not automatically indicate that they have enhanced their literacy

practices in their daily lives. There should be broader aims to be included in adult literacy, like "personal development, community participation, supporting children's education and social change" (Grieve 2007: 126). This perspective is strongly endorsed by Wallace (1992) and Cooke & Simpson (2008), who link literacy to socio-cognitive practices. Effective readers must be able to decode written content, comprehend lengthy texts, connect those texts to cultural and social contexts, and approach reading critically. To evaluate learners' abilities, test developers must grasp how second language (L2) readers process texts and how they relate written material to their own experiences (Schellekens, 2007).

The cognitive processing approach is crucial for understanding the reading process, as noted by Khalifa and Weir (2008). Cognitive psychologists and language theorists have conducted significant research to identify the factors involved in reading. According to Khalifa and Weir (2009), context plays a crucial and interconnected role in the reading process. They also addressed this issue in relation to the validity of the context for various item types present in examination papers. This is a key aspect and a vital factor in assessing reading skills, as the contextual clues that readers need are often not clearly presented in exam papers (ibid; Altherr Flores, 2021a). Regarding the CEFR, testing learners ~~who are~~ below A2 has not been discussed (Allemano, 2013). When assessing LESLLA learners at the A1 level and below, it is important to take into account their phonemic awareness and decoding skills (Young-Scholten & Strom 2006). LESLLA learners may find it difficult to comprehend the formats used in test questions, including written instructions, images, or symbols (Altherr Flores, 2021b), particularly when they lack "a significant sight word vocabulary, the ability to decode at the word level rather than relying on phonemic or even alphabetic decoding" (Allemano, 2013: 69). This can influence how LESLLA learners approach test tasks. Consequently, it significantly affects the level of interpretation, understanding, and inference that readers experience when faced with a reading text. This framework will serve as the foundation for analysing the reading test samples collected from ESOL practitioners, helping to address research questions 2 and 3 (see section 2.10). Additionally, it will facilitate an understanding of practitioners' views on the suitability of these tools for LESLLA learners, which will inform the answer to research question one.

Having established that there are difficulties that hinder the teachers from assessing learners at level A1 and below using the same way of assessment at Level A2 and above, a good practice could be to work in a one-to-one basis in the testing process, when the assessor discusses the text with learners by conducting a conversation about the text (Spiegel & Sunderland 2006). This could not be a practical practice on a national scale due to the lack of funding, time limit of such non-accredited courses and lack of experience of some tutors to assess LESLLA learners, but one awarding body has applied this practice by allowing small groups to be examined together and talk to the assessor face to face (Allemano, 2013).

2.1.2 The Constructionist Theory

This study has been founded on the constructionist concept of phenomenology as the theoretical framework. Crotty (1998: 45) has defined this concept as the evoked image "of humans engaging with their human world. It is in and out of this interplay that meaning is born". The study is investigating the reality of learners when they approach a reading test; how they relate the texts with the questions and rubric, which is the basis of this research. It is undeniable that there is no universal truth about this topic, or any other one, because each person has his/her unique conception of the world; thus, reality can be constructed and interpreted in multiple ways (Croker, 2009). Things become more complicated as the development of awareness can change learners' interpretations and construction of reality. The way that candidates interact with the test phenomenon in a specific context, at a certain time can affect the meaning that they hold for this process, which means that meaning has been socially constructed. The context of research is specified to LESLLA learners who are doing reading tests as a social practice, which means that the study is limited to a certain group of adults who are studying ESOL and facing reading examination in a classroom setting. The assumption is that candidates who are exposed to a reading examination will try to understand the process by using their prior knowledge of the world and intersect it with the new information they gain from the test process. Although LESLLA learners come to English classes with prior knowledge, they often lack testing literacy (Young-Scholten & Kreeft Peyton, 2020), which is essential for processing the reading existing materials used in Pre-A1 ESOL classes. Therefore, the constructionist theory plays a crucial role in understanding how this lack of testing literacy can impact the credibility and reliability of assessments conducted with LESLLA learners, especially

when these assessments rely on print awareness and assume a level of testing literacy among students (Gonzalves, 2017). The main objective is to investigate how far LESLLA learners in ESOL classes go through the previously mentioned process when they do the reading assessment, which will help answer research questions 4 & 5 (see section 2.10). To investigate this further, it is vital to look into mapping of the ESOL provision in the UK and funding background information, which will be the focus of the next section.

2.2 ESOL in the UK Context
2.2.1 Mapping of ESOL in the UK
ESOL is a term used to refer to courses of English Language taken by people who do not speak English as a first language, and they need to learn the English language to facilitate their everyday communication and integration in the new society. ESOL in this study will refer to adults who are aged 19 and over and live in England because ESOL systems in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales are different. ESOL has been accredited by Skills for Life and in 2014, a new suite of ESOL has been accredited by Ofqual and it becomes available for ESOL learners in 2014-15 (Ofqual, 2011; City and Guilds, 2014). This qualification includes three modes: reading, writing, and speaking & listening. Learners have the chance to take awards in one of the modes, or in the full mode including all three components (Association of Colleges, 2015). The course is divided into five levels; the three basic courses of Entry 1, 2 and 3 and two other courses that are equivalent to GCSEs, which are Level 1 and 2 (Association of Colleges, 2013). Those levels are roughly equivalent to the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR) levels A1, A2, B1, B2 to C1 respectively (Simpson, Sunderland, & Cooke, 2008; LIAM, 2018).

The number of participants in ESOL funded courses is being reduced due to the reduction in funding since the beginning of this decade. The number of participants has fell from 179,000 in 2009-10 to 114,000 in 2016-17 (NATECLLA, 2016). The main concerns that are recently raised about the ESOL provision is the long waiting lists for accessing ESOL courses (Foster and Bolton, 2018). According to NATECLA (2014) (the National Association for Teaching English and other Community Languages to Adults), a survey of ESOL providers reveal that 80% of participants emphasise that there are significant waiting lists in institutions that teach ESOL sometimes reaching

~~for~~ up to 1,000 students. Moreover, 66% of participants argue that the reduction in funding is causing serious problems.

Refugees are always inclined to learn, integrate and establish a new life in the host society, but they face various barriers in the learning process (Foster and Bolton, 2018). Studies (see Young-Scholten and Naeb, 2010) have revealed that adult learners who have little or no education in the first language take three times longer than educated people to read, even small and simple sentences. Caring responsibilities and childcare are two main barriers that some migrants face to learn the host language. Women seem to be more affected than men in this regard, because of the traditional gender roles that most migrant families have, so women get caught in home and care duties, and learning slips away from the priority list. In addition, when couples are on benefits, men are usually the main claimants, so they have free access to ESOL classes because of the mandating criterion of the Job Centre, while women are the second claimants, and they are not always entitled to free access to ESOL courses. Refugees also face other barriers to learn, such as the free hours provided per week are few and not enough, the classes focus on unsuitable information, such as grammar based or very formal information and lack of ESOL suitable for low-literate learners (Robinson, 2017). A report has been done by Louise Casey in 2016 which focused on opportunities and integration identities of migrants, especially women of a Muslim background. The report has shown that a good number of Muslim women in England are at low level in the English language, which is an issue that has an impact on those women to find jobs, volunteer or integrate in society. Power imbalance can be created in families where wives have poor English and that can cause women to be isolated in society (Foster and Bolton, 2018; Robinson, 2017). Yet, this explains why the majority of participants in this research are women. To explain the vulnerability of this group of learners, the next section will delve deeper into the structure and funding of the ESOL provision.

2.2.2 ESOL Programme

Adult migrants have been encouraged to command the host language to facilitate integration, which is also required for several other reasons, such as a proof to authorise a residency permit or to gain the right of naturalisation (Beacco, 2021). Such provisions become part of the migration policy of most Western countries, which are established based on the geopolitical as well as sociodemographic aspects of each

country (ibid). As a considerable number of the newly arrived migrants in England are either illiterate or low-literate, they need to become literate in an additional language to be able to integrate in the host society and meet their daily needs, which means that the linguistic research in the ESOL field should be involved in policy and practice to meet the needs of these learners (Simpson, Sunderland, & Cooke, 2008). However, it is worth stating that there is a plethora range of studies conducted on second language acquisition (SLA), but the focus is mainly on adults with previous schooling experience, with at least secondary education, but less attention has been paid to non- or low-literate learners, with at least primary education in their first language (Young-Scholten, 2021). The vulnerability of the latter in the ESOL provision has increased due to the inconsistency in funding and their need to start from an unaccredited level; pre-A1, with no standardised assessment.

The British government policies that have an impact on ESOL adult learners seem to be very confusing, especially when it comes to funding these classes. In many political discourses on immigration, a great emphasis has been paid to the importance of providing language classes for immigrants to help them integrate in the society, but each government has its own view about who should fund ESOL classes, either from public spending or private business holders. Since 2000, ESOL has been under centralised control in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and it has been part of Skills for Life, with literacy and numeracy, which all work together to decrease the number of adults with low level of literacy, numeracy and basic skills. The British government has also shed the light on the importance of functional literacy, which means learning the language that help learners to contribute to the country economically (Simpson, Sunderland, & Cooke, 2008). The educational policy of ESOL courses has implied that ESOL learners should be taught how to be productive either in business or seek an employment (Cooke and Simpson, 2008). Literacy in L2 is an important aspect in the employment market, and the aim of ESOL is to increase the L2 literacy level of learners to be able to seek employment and be productive. However, Cooke (2008) states that changes in the policy as well as cultural and social changes could risk the involvement of low-level ESOL learners in the employment market, which they badly need.

Skills for Life was first published by the Labour Government in 2001, which is a national strategy that focuses on improving literacy and numeracy skills for adults by

introducing national standards as well as national core curriculum for literacy and numeracy qualifications for adults (Skills for Life, 2001). ESOL provision, for the first time, has been based on a National Core Curriculum of Adult ESOL. Before this time, ESOL was an informal course (Foster and Bolton, 2018).

In 2007, the British government, via the LSC (Learning and Skills Council), which is a funding body for the education of those who are over 16 years old, announced that ESOL will be free only for the unemployed people and those receiving benefits (income-based) (LSC, 2006). Those people will remain a cost to the country if they are not supported to acquire new skills that help them find jobs. Without ESOL, those people will remain on benefits and will not be able to seek a job. Therefore, the government has supported the ESOL provision on many occasions through the Skills for Life strategy (DfES, 2001). The Skills for Life strategy is an initiative that is launched in 2001 and aims to establish huge improvements in the standards of teaching and achievements of learners, in literacy and numeracy. Consequently, the government has invested in workforce development, curricula, materials and increasing the achievement and provision. However, there is still a number of vulnerable learners who have fewer chances for education and are at low level of literacy and basic skills. Those people, especially women, become reluctant to join ESOL classes because the provision is not designed to meet their specific needs (Simpson, Sunderland, & Cooke, 2008). With the inconsistency in funding for the ESOL courses, the vulnerability of such groups of potential learners continues to prevail. This will be further unpacked in the next section.

2.2.3 Changes to ESOL Funding after 2007

The UK has specific requirements for formal language proficiency related to naturalisation, entry into the country, and obtaining the right to remain (Simpson, 2021). During the coalition government from 2010 to 2015, ESOL was a key focus of the government's social integration policy. In 2019 general elections, the Conservative manifesto referenced ESOL to emphasise the role of English language education in promoting integration and supporting migrants (Simpson, 2021). Despite a 17% increase in demand for ESOL since 2021, funding from the Adult Education Budget (AEB) has decreased by 56% in real terms during the same timeframe. Nevertheless, the need for ESOL services has never been greater (Sutton, 2024). This inconsistency

has posed challenges in funding and policy support for English language teaching for migrants in the UK.

Funding before 2007 to ESOL provision was fairly generous, yet restrictions started to apply since 2010 by the Coalition government when a number of reformations were stated and applied over the period from 2010-2015. These reformations include refocusing the funding of ESOL; funding will be given to those on Employment Support Allowance or Job Seekers Allowance. Other learners can be eligible to co-funding, such as Asylum seekers who have been waiting for a decision for more than six months. Moreover, ESOL in the workplace is no longer eligible to funding and the programme weighting funding uplift that was applied previously in ESOL provision was removed. Those who are actively seeking employment will be funded for ESOL, while others will be co-funded. In 2013-14, funding to ESOL courses has gone into changes. Funding to such courses was based on the guided learning hours, but in 2013-14 ESOL course became part in the Qualification Credit Framework (QCF), where providers receive a flat rate of funding to the course, regardless of the learning hours provided. ESOL courses are short, and the credits awarded to this course are usually small in the number. Thus, concerns are being raised that ESOL providers might lose funding for ESOL provision when it is compared to the previous funding system. Yet, transitional protection had been applied until a new qualification was developed in the QCF in 2014-15 (Skills Funding Agency, 2013).

In 2014-15, £30 million has been added to the ESOL funding under the Plus Mandation funding program through the Skills Funding Agency. Funding was raised to help providers to meet the increased needs of ESOL due to changes happened in April 2014. The change includes that claimants of Job Seekers Allowance whose English is poor will be mandated to attend ESOL, or financial restrictions will be applied on them. ESOL Plus Mandation funding was stopped in 2015-16 due to reduction in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills budget that was announced in July 2015 and consequently affected the providers' funding allocations that were provided by Skills Funding Agency. The ESOL Plus Mandation funding's removal was controversial and concerns were raised because of the impact the removal would have on both providers and learners and the learners' integration. Not only this, but also the timing of the announcement was controversial too (Foster and Bolton, 2018). The Association of colleges (2015) states that isolation of some communities will be the

result of funding withdrawal, not only this, but also colleges will struggle to work with Job Centres to prepare people to find jobs, especially with the short notice provided of these changes. It was expected that 16,000 learners will be affected by the withdrawal. NATELCA (2015) adds that the funding withdrawal would have a negative influence on ESOL provision, and the timing was wrong because most colleges finished their planning for the next academic year and the tutors were prepared too.

As mentioned earlier, England's policies regarding ESOL differ from those in Wales and Scotland. Recently, Scotland and Wales have created policy strategies to support their ESOL approaches, addressing issues related to qualifications and funding at a national level (Simpson, 2021). In contrast, England lacks clarity on which entity is responsible for ESOL. As a result, students' needs are inadequately addressed due to insufficient support and fragmentation within the field, indicating that the ESOL component of adult education remains overlooked (ibid). The situation has worsened further in the wake of the Covid pandemic and Brexit. ESOL policy in England is shaped by five published documents since 2014, all discussed in the Communities Strategy Green Paper (2018). This paper emphasises the significance of addressing segregated communities and promoting British values, a theme that is also underscored in the Casey Review (2016). It introduced a commitment to establishing best practices in ESOL to support the action plan for integrated communities (MHCLG, 2019). The action plan offers recommendations for improving ESOL provisions through collaboration among various providers (Simpson, 2021). However, both the report and the action plan present suggestions and intentions for change rather than definitive commitments to taking action. Furthermore, England's national ESOL strategy remains unimplemented, and funding to support it continues to be limited (Simpson, 2021). According to the findings of the Green Paper, the Learning & Work Institute (L&WI) highlighted the importance of local and regional partnerships, commissioned by the Department of Education. The source of funding for ESOL comes from the adult skills budget of the Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), which is associated with Further Education (FE) college programs and does not cover activities outside the FE sector (Higton et al., 2019). Funding for ESOL has dropped from £203 million in 2010 to £90 million in 2016, while the demand for free ESOL classes remains high, highlighting the need for increased availability (Martin, 2017). As a result, a significant portion of ESOL provisions cannot rely on government

education policies and their associated funding. Instead, it depends on third-sector organisations, including community and voluntary groups. This situation reflects a lack of resources, cohesion, and consistency in the support and funding for ESOL since 2012 (Simpson, 2021). This is particularly troubling for the delivery of non-accredited courses, as pre-entry courses, although not accredited, are conducted in environments like Adult Community Education or FE, which incorporate elements of formal learning, such as assessment (Education and Training, 2021a). The anomalies in the current strategy of ESOL should be challenged and handled by collaboration among local authorities, especially during this decade following the unexpected implications of Brexit and the increased social inequality during Covid (Simpson, 2021).

It is worth mentioning that with the commitment of the British Government to resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees in the UK under the VPRS the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme between 2015 & 2020, £10 million were allocated by the government to support those refugees through ESOL classes to help them boost their English language (Foster and Bolton, 2018). The increase in funding for this group means that extra 12 hours a week of ESOL for six months will be provided to them. Besides, local authorities are also providing English language support to the Syrian refugees within one month of their arrival to the UK. Those families are supported to integrate in the new society quickly to make the process of seeking jobs easier (Foster and Bolton, 2018). Yet, Robinson (2017) believes that a big number of the Syrian refugees who arrive under the VPRS are low-literate or illiterate in their first language; thus, they needed to be in a pre-A1 level because they have no schooling experience, which makes the process of learning a new language challenging for both learners and teachers. Besides, such learners are joining ESOL classes that contain people from different educational backgrounds, which makes them a disadvantageous group in ESOL classes. To investigate this point further, it is important to look into the types of learners that usually exist in ESOL classes, especially in pre-A1 level, which will be the focus of the next section.

2.2.4 ESOL Learners

Learners in the ESOL provision can be divided into four main groups: first, people from settled communities moving to live in the UK; second, EU citizens or dependents, partners & spouses; third, refugees and asylum seekers and fourth, migrant workers.

Those learners could have been in professional careers and from a highly educated background or they might have not been to school before (Education & Training Foundation, 2021a; Young-Scholten, 2021). The latter may have limited literacy skills, and limited experience in terms of being in a formal educational setting. With a little exposure to the English language in the host country, those learners could remain socially isolated (Education & Training Foundation, 2021a). Faux & Watson (2018) and Young Scholten & Naeb (2010) believe that LESLLA learners may take longer to acquire a new language, compared to literate learners as the former lack literacy skills and the pre-existing framework on which they build their new knowledge. Having both literate and low-literate learners in one class could potentially create more challenges for the low-literate who require more time to acquire the language compared to literate peers. This also make teachers' job more complicated, especially for the less experienced tutors who are usually assigned to work with the pre-A1 level as it is a non-accredited course (Educational & Training Foundation, 2021a). At this level, it can be particularly difficult for learners who aim to gain literacy skills in the target language, especially if their first language uses a different script than English (non-Roman alphabetical script) and is written in a different direction, such as Arabic, which is written from right to left. This adds an extra layer of complexity for LESLLA learners who are becoming literate for the first time in a new language, as they require more time to master literacy skills compared to their literate peers. The shape & sound of letters might not be connected to the spoken words that such learners know and images, scripts & symbols might not be recognisable or meaningful to them. In addition, recognising the shape and sound of letters is an essential step to read and write in a new language, but for many learners in pre-A1 level, the main reason for being in class is to improve their verbal communication skills using everyday language (Educational & Training Foundation, 2021a).

Allemano (2013) believes that at A1 ESOL classes and below, which are part of the post compulsory educations in the UK, there is a wide variety of learners who have different levels of literacy and prior language knowledge. Therefore, learners can be divided into three major categories in A1 level and below classes as Allemano (2013) indicates. The first category is the well-educated group who received secondary education or beyond. Learners from this group are highly literate and they possess a background knowledge of a language that uses a Roman alphabet. Those learners

have complex literacy and educational skills, but they need to learn English as a new language at a beginner level as have not studied or used the language before. The second category includes learners who are highly educated and literate, but they use a language that does not include Roman alphabet script. This group needs to learn a new written script and some of them write or read in an opposite direction on the page, but they have literacy skills that they can use when learning a new language. Many of the learners in this group are aware of the Roman script when they arrive to the UK. Both types have, however, complex literacy skills. The third category, on which this study is concentrating, includes learners with little & interrupted schooling background or no schooling at all (Allemano, 2013), which means that they have little literacy skills in the L1 and any other acquired languages. This group might struggle when they want to read in L2 as for them prints might not carry meaning (DfES, 2001). Students from all three categories might exist in an Entry level 1 and pre-A1 ESOL classes and they might be combined in one class, which leaves LESLLA Learners disadvantageous in such situations. The differences between both levels will be interpreted in the next section alongside an explanation of how the cuts in fundings affect pre-A1 ESOL courses.

2.2.5 Low-Literate Learners in ESOL

Adults who have previous formal learning experience in their mother language are usually assigned to join Entry level 1 (E1) if their reading and writing in English are at the basic level, but they struggle to speak or understand everyday spoken English at natural speed. They might be able read and provide basic personal information both written and verbally in the form of short sentences. Whereas, if such adults obtain no English skills, they might be enrolled in pre-A1 level. In E1, learners who are able to read, write, understand, and say basic personal information exist. The level is divided into three main groups; emerging, consolidating and established sub-levels. Learners at the emerging   sub-level show little or no evidence of their ability to master the consolidating sub-level. In the consolidating sub-level, learners have some of the skills in the E1 ESOL area, but their skills are not secure. As for the established sub-level, learners do not have issues with skills in the E1 area.

Another group of learners could exist in the pre-A1 level are those who have lived in the UK for a while are able to communicate in English fairly well and speak informal English at a basic level. However, they might not be able to read well or write more

than their personal information, neither in English nor their first language. These learners are often at different level in each skill, and they often have not received formal education, or their education has been interrupted. Some of them might be able to read and write in their L1, but with a script different from the Roman scripts. Therefore, they are learning the Roman script for the first time. They might not fit in the A1 ESOL classes as they lack the language ability as well as the study and literacy skills required to obtain a qualification and cope with the course (Education & Training Foundation, 2019). Even the emerging sub-level requires previous learning/literacy abilities; therefore, low-literate learners cannot join E1 as they are still at the earliest stage of the emerging sub-level of A1 ESOL. Language is usually used for communication in classroom, but low-literate learners might struggle to use the language when they are asked to interact with other learners in an unnatural way or use materials that do not resemble those found outside the classroom (Bigelow and Watson, 2014). Even though low-literate learners have little or no previous education or knowledge of English, they still have experiences and a large amount of knowledge on which they can build their learning. Thus, ESOL lessons should be planned on the experiences, lives, needs, ambitions and future plans of such learners (Education and Training Foundation, 2021a). It could be useful to also use the learners' first language for complex instructions as well as explanations to relate learners' previous experiences to learning a new language, like English. To increase learners' motivation, it is significant to recognise the multilingualism of learners as an asset in teaching them the language instead of considering the lack of English language as a weakness. Yet, this is not always practical due to the lack of staff who master the same range of languages spoken by students in the same class (Education and Training Foundation, 2021a).

Programme managers and teachers of ESOL have identified a combined group of measures that are contributing to the restrictions of vulnerable ESOL learners to join courses. These measures are first, the government has prioritised the 14 to 19-year-old provision and the standard qualification for those who are 16 years old (the level 2 qualification) according to the priorities of LSC since 2006. This has led to the fact that colleges cut down on adult education and lower-level provision (Simpson, Sunderland, & Cooke, 2008). Second, the government has set targets of Skills for Life from Entry Level 1 to Level 2, which indicates that the "residual provision" or the provision that

does not provide a qualification directly has been cut (Simpson, Sunderland, & Cooke, 2008: 27). Third, Asylum seekers (people who apply for the Home Office as refugees and waiting for a decision) and learners who are not on benefits are not entitled to free ESOL classes, and the fees vary according to different organisations, which is expected to affect the recruitment of more learners (Simpson, Sunderland, & Cooke, 2008). Fourth, providers are required to provide 80% of their courses targeting the Skills for Life qualifications, which involves a problem to learners with very limited literacy and skills because it might take them more than a year to achieve A1 Level (Entry Level 1), the lowest qualification level in all assessment modes (reading, writing, and listening & speaking) (Simpson, Sunderland, & Cooke, 2008; Allemano, 2013). Moreover, the current policy in the UK government states that all adults are required to work for a qualification in the plus 16 education in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, including ESOL courses. ESOL providers receive 10% of the course funding, only when learners' achievement of qualification has been provided (Higton et al., 2019). This policy has urged many awarding bodies to do a rapid development of external certification for all the levels of the taught curriculum, with little attention being paid to the quality of the stages of redrafting and piloting (Allemano, 2013). The majority of the awarding bodies have developed very good practices of assessment to the English language skills of ESOL learners in the last few decades, which is sometimes based on thorough pieces of research. Yet, there is still less experience and research being done on the tests that are carried out in the pre-A1 level, which includes low literate learners (ibid). Some providers utilise portfolio-based assessment, while others favour examining all language skills. The examination method is the most commonly used technique for assessing low-literate learners as it allows for more in-class learning time and minimises record-keeping, along with providing evidence of learners' achievements during lessons. Although, the examination process might be the best way to assess low-literate learners in regard to the teaching time provided, it is problematic for them when it comes to the tests themselves, especially the reading test because the rates of low-literate learners' achievements are low compared to literate learners, despite that both groups of learners exposed to the examination process can comprehend meaning in real-life situations (Allemano, 2013).

Having established that a considerable number of ESOL learners are low-literate who lack test literacy and the ESOL courses in the UK are all accredited, it is no wonder that LESLLA learners lack the skills that literate learners have when doing their assessment. Thus, the examination process can be a significant barrier to assessing the level of LESLLA learners, as they are not accustomed to formal testing environments, making it unsurprising that the accreditation policy poses challenges for these learners (Allemano, 2013; 2018). That could also be explained by the fact that there are no standardised tests for the pre-entry level (pre-A1) in England, in which low-literate learners are enrolled. Consequently, each institution establishes its own assessment standards to evaluate learners during the initial registration process, aimed at determining the English proficiency level of new students, as well as conducting periodic assessments to monitor progress and advancement (ibid). However, the examination practices employed are not grounded in research, leading to potential concerns regarding their validity. In addition, some ESOL providers assign unexperienced teachers to teach pre-A1 level based on the assumption that teaching the lower level requires teachers with less expertise. However, due to the complex needs of low-literate learners, tutors are required to be experienced, well-trained to teach basic literacy and are deeply aware of the subject knowledge. It is worth stating that learning a language could be affected by mental health problems or previous traumas. Thus, teachers should be trained to detect any signs and refer students to receive support (Education and Training Foundation, 2021a).

Before going into details about the challenges LESLLA learners face when being literate for the first time (in section 2.4.4), it is important to discuss the relationship between L1 literacy and L2 learning to understand the challenges that the low-literate learners face while learning an L2 and doing an assessment in the pre-A1 ESOL course. Allemano (2013) believes that there is a close relationship between L1 literacy and L2 acquisition, which will be discussed in detail in the next section.

2.3 The Relationship between L1 Literacy and L2 Acquisition

2.3.1 Theory/ Key Issues

It is argued that formal education and literacy are two main factors that affect the intellectual process of understanding the surrounding world, and of learning a second language accordingly (Watson, 2010). According to Artieda (2017), high literacy skills

are significant in all aspects of life. It is estimated that 20% of adults in Europe display low-literacy in their L1 (European Commission, 2015). During the last decade, researchers in SLA have called for focusing on ESL learners with low-literacy in L1 (Bigelow & Tarone, 2004; Artieda, 2017), as this group was neglected in SLA studies compared to adult learners who are literate and highly educated (Park, 2015). A highly developed L1 literacy is seen as an essential pre-requisite to different types of learning, such as foreign language learning (European Commission, 2015); besides it has a great influence on L2 achievements as indicated by Ardasheva (2016). Yet, adult learners are adding a new variation to the foreign L2 learning, which is their L1 literacy level as the level of literacy in L1 can act as an obstacle to learning a new language during their life (Tarone, 2010; Artieda & Munoz, 2013).

Previous studies (Kurvers, 2007; Tarone et al, 2009) have stated that there is a relationship between L1 literacy and L2 learning. However, the reasons why there is a close relation are still not widely investigated. Studies in SLA on how adult learners learn the L2 language, as well as theories that are extracted from those studies, might not be suitable for illiterate learners. The number of illiterate people is increasing, not only in the third world, but also in the first world countries because of the increased numbers of refugees and immigrants who settle in such countries. Therefore, it is important to specifically understand the abilities of this group of learners, how they process the language and what are the limitations to acquire the language. With the increase of immigrants with low-literacy skills in Europe and the USA, studies have recently focused on this group of population to get a better understanding of the way they learn and process English as a L2 or additional language (Tarone, 2010).

2.3.2 L1 Literacy and L2 Learning of the Reading Skill

A study done by Artieda (2017) has provided evidence of the continuing impact of early literacy skills in L1 on achievements in L2 for adult learners. Literacy includes different component skills and even though the oral skill is one of the earlier skills acquired in L2, reading, as a receptive skill is also important for L2 learners and it is believed that L1 reading skills can be transferable when learning L2 (Lightbown and Spada, 2006). Reading as a receptive skill (including phonology, comprehension and orthography) is an important skill that is usually learnt by L2 learners in an early stage. In order to understand the influence that L1 has on L2 acquisition of the reading skill, the reading skill need to be carefully assessed (August, Calderon & Carlo, 2000). In

addition, the depiction of language transfer strategies will help clarify how knowledge of L1 affects the reading process in L2 (Gass and Mackey, 2014).

Learners who acquire a second language use various strategies to make the process of acquisition smoother, in both comprehension (reading) and production (writing). The transfer of the L1 knowledge is one of the vital strategies. As comprehension precedes production, it is normal that the transfer in the production skills comes after the L1 knowledge transfers to L2 and influences learning (ibid). Therefore, there will be more focus on the reading skill because transfer happens first, and it gives better chances to understanding the influence of L1 on L2 learning. To better understand the influence of L1 literacy on L2 learning in the reading skill, three stages need to be considered: the nature of reading processes in L1 and L2, the influence of the first language on reading in a second language, and the transfer from L1 to L2 (ibid).

To understand the influence that literacy in L1 has on L2 learning of the reading skill, the nature of the reading process needs to be understood in both the first and second language reading. The reading skill can be described as an active process in a psycholinguistic point of view, because learners observe linguistic cues and establish hypothesis about what the writer is intending to express, based on those cues (Clarke, 1979). According to Goodman (1970), reading is a game of a psycholinguistic guessing nature because an interaction between language and thought is involved. An efficient reading is not the product of precisely perceiving and identifying of all the elements, it happens from observing more productive cues to making guesses that are usually right from the first time (Goodman, 1970). Reading texts in either L1 or L2 involves three main elements, which are the reader, the text and the interaction between both the reader and the text. On one hand, reading texts in the first language shares many elements with reading texts in the second language, such as obtaining knowledge in the content, linguistic schema and form. On the other hand, the process of reading is different between texts in L1 & L2 due to using different languages with different semantics, syntax, rhetoric and phonetics (Singhal, 1998).

Mental activities are used by readers to derive meanings from the reading text, such activities are called reading skills or reading strategies. Readers engage with certain behaviours consciously or unconsciously while reading in either L1 or L2 to promote their text comprehension; and reading comprehension includes many cognitive

processes that are connected with each other (Horiba, 1996). Those processes involve the recognition of letters, words and characters, analysing the structure of the semantics and syntax in clauses and sentences, and then generating inferences (Clarke, 1979). Previous studies have discussed the reading process of English as a second language (ESL) from the first glimpse (Clarke, 1979). Those studies reveal that ESL readers produce errors that demonstrate their efforts to utilise semantic, graphophonic and syntactic cues to receive the message of the writers. In addition, linguistically there is a difference between the first and second language in terms of semantics, syntax, rhetoric and phonetics (Singhal, 1998). Learners who do not have the same linguistic base in L1 will face difficulties when trying to read in L2 and the bigger the difference between L1 and L2, the more difficult it will be to read in L2 (Segalowitz, 1986). In other words, if the syntactic structure is totally different in the native and target language of second language learners, cognitive restructuring is then greatly needed (Segalowitz,1986).

The first language, alongside with other strategies are used by learners to facilitate the process of acquiring a second language in all skills (speaking, reading and writing), and this phenomenon is called the language transfer. Transfer is a conscious process, and it happens deliberately as a communication strategy when there is a gap in the learners' knowledge, while it happens unconsciously either because of the unfamiliarity of learners with the correct form or it has not been fully automatized as indicated by Benson (2002). Chomsky (cited by Lakshmanan, 1994), in his Universal Grammar (UG) theory, states that human beings use their language deep structure to produce a new language because they use their L1 grammar and transfer it to the other languages. Yet, White (2020) argues that the principles of UG do not apply for SLA and it only applies for L1 acquisition. L1 is not always the basis of an L2, but learners develop their unique linguistic system based on both the L1 knowledge and the target language. Interlanguage competence serves as the bridge to link L1 knowledge with L2 competence because their language is developed in a systematic, dynamic and transitional way (White, 2020). Humans develop specific skills when they acquire their first language, and they transfer these skills from their L1 to the L2. Transfer can be defined as "the use of previous linguistic or prior skills to assist comprehension or production" (O'Malley and Chamot,1990: 120), which means that learners use their skills and knowledge in L1 and transfer them into L2 when they are

learning to read and write and the more identical both languages are the transfer becomes more facilitative to acquire the language.

Various studies have focused on the importance of the role of transfer in the L1 and L2 reading relationship. Transfer can occur in areas like comprehension skills, phonological awareness, phonological processing skill, orthographic skills and vocabulary skills. Phonological processing skill is connected with the reading performance of English speakers in monolingual texts. Besides, in English language, word reading skill is attributed to orthographic processing skill. Phonological awareness has a main influence on the reading ability in learners who are learning to read in their L1 (Gottardo, et al., 2001). Studies (see for example ibid) also have shown that the word-reading skill, orthographic and phonological processing are connected together in learners of L2. Dorgunoglu, Nagy and Hancin-Bhatt (1993) have established that the phonological awareness of L1 has an essential effect in learning L2 and to read new words in L2. However, the oral proficiency in L1 does not have an effect on learners' abilities to read in L2. Gottardo, et al. (2001) found in their study that phonological awareness can be transferred from L1 to L2. There is a relationship between the phonological processing in L1 and decoding skills in the alphabetical orthography in L2. Chikamatsu (1996) examined the possibility of transferring the word recognition and orthographic skills in L1 to word recognition in L2 and the study finds that the word recognition in L1 is transferrable to L2, which reveals that learners apply what they learn in L1 and their skills into L2 while reading. Fewer studies have focused on the learners' vocabulary knowledge and its influence on reading in L2 (Fitzgerald, 1995). The findings of this study reveal that the more vocabulary recognition the learners master, the easier it becomes to read in a L2. Learners whose first language have cognates with the English language have better recognition to English vocabulary (August, Calderon & Carlo, 2000). Cummins et al. (1984) also indicated in his hypothesis the fact that comprehension skills can be transferable into L2 when learning to read as the cognitive academic proficiency in L1 & 2 are interdependent. August, Calderon and Carlo's (2000) study has focused on the transferability from Spanish to English languages in terms of the phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, letter identification, word recognition and word identification. All these factors prove to be good predictors of the learners' performance in L2 reading. Jiang and Kuehn (2001) have supported Cummins' hypothesis, and they also indicate that

linguistic and cognitive skills can be transferrable from L1 when learning to read in L2 in a study based on immigrants in the US. However, it is undeniable that both Spanish and English share the same Roman script, making the transferability of L1 to L2 easier compared to learners whose L1 does not use Roman scripts. The higher their educational and cognitive skills in L1 while learning L2 with a similarity script, the better the learners perform in L2 in both reading and writing. Other studies have studied the relationship between comprehension strategies in L1 on L2 learning, such as Escamilla (1987) and Jimenez, Garcia and Pearson's (1996). Escamilla's study (1987) reveals that comprehension skills of L1 is a good predictor to the learner's performance in vocabulary and comprehension test in L2. Learners, who are poor readers in L1, have benefitted from explicit instructions, such as summarising, questioning and predicting, and those instructions can be useful to all L2 readers (August, Calderon & Carlo, 2000). Readers who struggle to comprehend the text they read struggle to read in L2 because comprehension strategies are important to facilitate reading in L2 (Jimenez et al., 1996). Those strategies include focusing on new words, monitoring comprehension, using cognates as the only source of information, making inferences and using prior knowledge actively. Those strategies prove to be effective for L2 reading skill (August, Calderon & Carlo, 2000). As literacy skills in L1 have influence on L2, it is no wonder that low-literate learners struggle to read in L2. Besides, low-literate learners resembled children when learning a L2. Therefore, the early stages of learning to read are quite similar (Van de Craats, et al., 2006).

2.3.3 Phonemic Awareness in Relation to Early stage of Reading

Learners who are low-literate in their L1 and aim to become literate for the first time, but in English, have to learn the principles of alphabetics (Perfetti & Marron, 1995) because the reading skill is built on the phonemes that are represented by various letters. By learning the principles of alphabetic, learners are activating their phonological and orthographic processing. Therefore, learners are developing their phonological awareness, which is "the ability to attend to the phonological or sound structure of language as distinct from its meaning" (Centre for Dyslexia, 2004: 1). Various studies that focus on L1 acquisition have revealed the deep relationship between phonological awareness and learning how to read (Grabe, 2009). Phonemic awareness is one of the main aspects of phonological awareness the emerging

readers would need. Phonemic awareness refers to the "ability to focus on and manipulate phonemes in spoken words" (McShane, 2005: 2). The more the phonemic awareness, the better the literacy is (Perfetti & Marron, 1995).

Phonemic awareness (PA), a particular sub-skill of phonological awareness, refers to the advanced ability to break words down into their individual sounds and combine these sounds to create new words (Yeong & Rickard Liow, 2012). According to Stewart (2004), this form of awareness is considered the more "advanced" type of PA skill, as it involves identifying the phoneme as the smallest unit of language that can change meaning. Early word reading could be challenging if learners are unable to phonologically process the language. Studies have revealed that the phonological awareness weakness is an obstacle facing low-literate learners to read in a L2 (Chard and Dickson, 1999; Malessa, 2018). Phonemic awareness is important to master the alphabetic principle that underlies the written language system. Specifically, emerging readers need to be sensitive to the words' internal structure by benefitting from the reading instructions provided formally (Chard and Dickson, 1999). When learners grasp the concept of word division into phonemes and phonemes can be blended to form word, they can use letter-sound correspondence to build words and start reading. Therefore, phonemic awareness is a main predictor of successful reading (Perfetti, Beck, Bell, & Hughes, 1987). Early reading depends mainly on phonological awareness, which is understanding the words' internal syllable structures, and on the explicit instruction, especially phonemic awareness, which is the letter-sound correspondence (Chard and Dickson, 1999).

In SLA, the errors that adult learners do in the acquisition of morpho-syntax (Bailey et al., 1974) and phonology (Eckman, 1981) are similar to those made by children, which shows that the adults use the same linguo-cognitive mechanism that children use when acquiring L2. Most of the phonological, syntax and morphological competence are acquired by children at the age of 4-5, even before learning how to read. They also develop linguistic competence before learning how to read. The phonemic awareness' development is responsible for the children's ability to read independently, and it only happens when children are involved in an alphabetical script learning process (Goswami & Bryant 1990). It is believed that adults' learning process to read in their L2 goes through the same process as children, yet there seems to be a difference between those who are literate in their native language and those who are not. In a

study on adults' learning process to read, it is seen that adults, who are not introduced to alphabetic literacy like children, have developed natural awareness of syllables and sub-syllable units. The low-literate adults have mastered the syllable, rhyme and onset awareness well and they perform well on tasks related, but they have not performed very well in tasks related to phonemic awareness. Non-literate students will struggle when they want to learn how to read because they do not have linguistic awareness of the target language, which means that they are trying to pronounce words, which have constant clusters that are not familiar in their interlanguage phonology. In addition, the non-literate learners will encounter sentences that have syntactic patterns and inflectional morphology that are not acquired yet (Young-Scholten & Naeb, 2010).

Teaching phonemic awareness to adult learners could be one of the challenging tasks to tutors because the literature and materials available are designed for primary school children. Therefore, phonemic awareness materials are highly demanded at pre-A1 level (Learning and Work Institute, 2019). Low-literate learners who have limited print literacy find it difficult to manipulate phonemes in L2 (Bigelow and Watson, 2014). A study done by Young-Scholten and Strom (2006), focused on the English language proficiency and the reading skill of 17 adult refugees and immigrants; the study reveals that there is a link between the level of L1 schooling and the ability to read in English. Those who are less proficient in reading have lower phonological awareness in English than those who read better in English. Adults who are less proficient in reading show close results to children because they have onset or syllable awareness more than phonological awareness as indicated by Young-Scholten and Strom (2004). The study shows that there is no critical period to learn how to segment speech in the L1 (Morais, et al., 1988); thus, adults can learn this at any time (Young-Scholten and Strom, 2006). By providing instructions, adults can improve their phonemic awareness (Kruidenier, 2002). In addition to the importance of phonemic awareness for low-literate learners to learn a new language, the decoding skills need to be developed. Decoding skill is the knowledge of the relationship between the sound and letter (phonology and orthography). To be able to read, learners need to recognise the letters, identify the sounds, produce the right sound of the represented letter, blend the sounds together in sequence and then recognise the word (Young-Scholten and Strom, 2006). Although there are only a few studies that focus on the instructions that works with low-literate ESL learners, there is more research on general instructions that are

suitable for them. For example, materials from daily life are suitable for such learners (Condelli, 2002). According to Hood (1990: 59), low-literate learners who are learning to be literate in English need to develop the "context-embedded, cognitively undemanding language", which is a language of things that are very familiar and closely related to events and actions. This can be developed in both written and spoken modes. Therefore, words about unfamiliar objects and words that are nonsense are not useful to low-literate learners to learn how to read.

2.3.4 Reading Literacy

Even though language learning is a natural and innate aspect for almost all humans (Wagner, 2004), literacy is not. Without teaching and special efforts, it might not happen (Bialystok, 2001). A written text reflects the spoken language in a symbolic system and an understanding of this representation needs to be established by emergent readers (Kurvers, 2015). It could be challenging for L2 learners to acquire the sound system of a new language as they need to acquire 'a new system of sound contrasts, new restrictions on where sounds may occur, and a new prosodic system' (Broselow & Kang, 2013, p. 529).

It is only when learners see the language written, it becomes an object to be reflected on (Kurvers, 2015). Yet, it is insufficient to provide learners with only input to develop literacy. Several skills need to be acquired to learn how to read a language, such as encoding the language alongside "its different phonological, syntactic, morphological, lexical components, as well as train word recognition skills." (Malessa, 2018, p. 27). Learners are required to establish a relationship between the spoken language and its morphemic and morphological level to encode written texts (Perfetti, 2003).

For developing reading literacy, two main aspects should be considered, which are the cognitive as well as language specific aspects.

2.4 Cognitive Aspect: Reading Acquisition

2.4.1 Metalinguistic Awareness

Emergent readers, according to Kurvers (2007), start the process of learning by using a visual recognition strategy in a non-systematic way, in which they work on creating a correspondence between the context clues and meaning, which means that those learners are gradually learning to use the sequential decoding strategy. This finding matches the study of Barmao et al. (2007), which shows that organisational skills that

learners need in language learning can be promoted when low-literate learners learn to read because adults who lack print literacy are less systematic than learners with print literacy, which helps in scanning the visual codes in a text. To learn reading, it is essential to identify, analyse and manipulate the language units. Emergent readers need to establish a connection between spoken language and the written system (Koda, 2008). For this to be done, metalinguistic awareness of the spoken language's structural units needs to be employed, allowing the reader to divide words into phonemes, syllables, as well as morphemes (Malessa, 2018). Metalinguistic awareness is an important aspect of reading acquisition because it allows beginner readers to analyse and control different features of language, such as morphosyntax and phonology (Karmiloff-Smith, et al., 1996). It is found that metalinguistic awareness is normally developed by the age of three (Young-Scholten & Strom, 2006) and studies indicate that adults develop their metalinguistic awareness in the same way children do (Kurvers, Van Hout & Vallen, 2006; Young-Scholten & Naeb, 2010). Before they start to read, L2 learners need to develop phonological, syntactic as well as morphological competence. Then, linguistic awareness needs to be developed by gaining pre-literacy skills such as phonological awareness of onset, rhyme, syllable and sub-syllabic units (Goswami, 2001). Yet, without phonemic awareness, which is essential for the grapheme-morpheme correspondence, learners will not be able to read new words or even read independently. It is worth stating that phonemic awareness is developed only when learners are reading an alphabetic script, like English (Goswami & Bryant 1990). Low-literate learners might find it challenging to master the phonological awareness because it requires them to identify words within a context, while the language, according to low-literate, is concrete as they lack print literacy, and they are unable to conceptualise the language (Barmao, et al., 2007).

Learners' ability to manipulate phonemic units of speech cannot be acquired naturally (Morais et al., 1988), which affects their ability to read because there is a close connection between the development of phonemic awareness and their ability to read. Metalinguistic training to illiterate and low-literate adult learners is essential because it was concluded that lexical, phonological and phonemic awareness are by-product of learning to read. Thus, learners need to be able "to separate language forms from their meaning and to segment sentences along word boundaries" (Kurvers et al., 2006, p. 70) to learn how to read. LESLLA learners as well as children perform poorly when

asked to segment words into phonemes because "phonemic awareness develops only through reading instruction in an alphabetic script" (Young-Scholten & Strom, 2006, p. 62). Phonemic print literacy, in turn, facilitates the development of phonemic awareness for both children (Goswami & Bryant, 1990) and adults (Pettitt & Tarone, 2015). Yet, Kurvers (2015) highlights the fact that there are differences between readers and non-readers which emphasises that literacy rather than cognitive development contributes to the development of metalinguistic awareness. There is no clear finding to indicate whether LESLLA learners go through the same cognitive process as children when developing reading literacy, especially as, literacy acquisition for adults can be affected by different aspects, such as socio-cultural facts. Thus, it is important to look at the word recognition process and language aspect of developing reading literacy to gain more understanding of how LESLLA learners learn to read in L2.

2.4.2 Word Recognition

Metalinguistic awareness is crucial for reading acquisition, but it should be accompanied by the ability to recognise the words fast and accurately (Kurvers, 2015). Word recognition is an early sign of the learner's ability to make meaning from the written text as it proves that learners reach the orthographic stage of reading (ibid). Even though word recognition is an essential stage for reading development, there are opposing views regarding the process of learning to read (Kurvers, 2007). The main models of reading development are based on children initial reading stages, which are the stage and non-stage models (Van de Craats et al., 2006, p.14). The dispute between researchers comes from their visions of whether or not the sub-stages of reading comes in specific order. Regardless of the dispute, there is an agreement that reading develops through learners' abilities to identify the alphabetic code, recognise the grapheme-morpheme correspondence and blend the phonemes together (Kurvers, 2015). According to the stage model, the first stage of reading is called 'logographic', which means recognising a shape of a written character that represents a morpheme. At this stage, emergent readers still cannot read or write, but they can identify a simple word from its shape or word lengths based on previous exposure. This is then followed by the 'alphabetic stage', which means that learners are able to convert letters to syllables and syllables to words. This stage is the 'indirect word recognition' because learners start to establish a link between newly introduced words

and the ones they previously know. As learners start to write at this stage, they compare the way a word is written and pronounced to memorise it and recognise it faster the next time they encounter it. The last stage is the 'orthographic stage', which is the 'automized direct word recognition' as learners forget the old process of deciphering syllables, assembling them to read a word, they can identify, recognise and understand words faster. The efficiency of reading is usually improved the more learners read as the can instantly recognise words when reading them because the mental dictionary is developed (Van de Craats et al., 2006, p. 14). It is essential to "develop lower-level rapid automatic decoding" to progress acquiring advanced reading skills, such as comprehension and interpretations (Grabe, 1991, p. 383). There is a significant difference between L1 children and L2 adult readers in terms of their process of reading endeavour. Children have a wide range of vocabulary before the beginning of reading acquisition. In contrast, LESLLA learners obtain minimal amount of L2 vocabulary, which can hinder their ability to become competent readers because acquiring basic reading skills, like decoding and blending are not enough to make meaning from written texts, this should be accompanied by vocabulary repertoire in L2 as functional reading requires between 2000 to 7000 words (Grabe, 1991).

2.4.3 Language Specific Aspect: Reading Acquisition

Orthography is mainly a reflection of the unique structural characteristics of a language, including the morphology and phonologic information (Katz & Frost, 1992) and regarding literacy reading, it is important for learners to be familiar with the alphabetic scripts and the rules of using this script (Cook & Bassetti, 2005). In sound-based writing systems, such as the Roman alphabetic system, graphemes represent phonemes. In contrast, in other writing systems, graphemes may correspond to morphemes, consonants, or syllables (Cook & Bassetti, 2005). It is crucial to note that LESLLA learners who might be familiar with their L1 alphabetic writing system, might still not be able to benefit from their L1 literacy skills because different metalinguistic awareness might be required for different writing systems, such as the difference between the English & Arabic written systems (Cook & Bassetti, 2005). It has been argued that language systems do not only reflect "their representation of language units, but also placed on a continuum of orthographic depth, also known as phonological/orthographic transparency or orthographic regularity" (Cook & Bassetti,

2005, p.13). The writing system transparency is defined by "the consistency of links between sounds or phonemes in speech and the graphemes (letters, letter clusters) that represent them in the text" (Lyytinen, et al., 2015, p. 331). Learning to read an inconsistent orthographic language, like English, takes twice the time required to read an orthographically consistent language as reading acquisition in the former requires the formation of a dual foundation: alphabetic and logographic (Seymour et al., 2003). Therefore, the difficulty of literacy acquisition is mainly connected with the orthographic depth of the language because orthographic transparency is the key factor that contribute to the decoding proficiency development (Malessa, 2018). It is also worth stating that L2 beginner readers, in contrast to L1 children, face a significant challenge when starting to read as they learn to read a language that they have not mastered yet (Droop & Verhoeven, 2003), especially LESLLA learners as they are acquiring the written and spoken skills of L2 at the same time (Malessa, 2018). Also, the knowledge of letters and grapheme-morpheme correspondence by themselves are not enough for acquiring the reading skill as learners had to master the skill of blending the sounds together to be able to read. Such a complex skill could be another challenge to LESLLA learners (Tammelin-Laine and Martin, 2015), which explains the reasons why they take longer time than literate learners to acquire a language.

Even though the previous section highlights the aspects that affect learners' abilities to master the L2 reading skill, it is still unclear how LESLLA learners master the reading skill in L2 at different ages (Young-Scholten and Naeb, 2010), especially as there are other factors that can negatively affect the literacy progress, such as well-being issues, traumas and family responsibilities. Moreover, the decoding and phonological awareness skills of LESLLA learners could be affected by the weak linguistic competence in L2. Not only this, but also insufficient exposure to L2 should be considered as one of the main aspects of slowing down the literacy progress of such learners (Tammelin-Laine and Martin, 2015). Insufficient exposure to L2 might lead to slower and inaccurate reading practices, as well as weaker representations at words level (Droop and Verhoeven, 2003). It is still debateable whether L2 learners' reading skill acquisition mainly depends on the orthographic transparency of the acquired language or it is interdependent on it but still affected by cognitive aspects like metalinguistic awareness abilities (Geva and Siegel, 2000). Yet, it is worth stating that as literacy is considered an essential aspect of successful integration in host

societies, it is crucial that academics and tutors be aware of the challenges involved when learning how to read in a language that learners do not know and being unable to even use study skills to facilitate the process, such as taking notes, observing words and reading texts (Tammelin-Laine et al., 2013, p. 3). Therefore, teachers are urged to avoid using traditional approaches for teaching LESLLA learners the reading skill because the cognitive, literacy and academic skills of such learners are underdeveloped, and more attention has to be paid to the developmental areas in those learners. As LESLLA learners are pre-emergent readers, conventional teaching methods will not be successful without preparing students with pre-reading skills as well as identifying and addressing the developmental areas (Marrapodi, 2013). Those learners need to be engaged in activities that promote their phonological awareness to accelerate the phonological acquisition as well as boost their vocabulary repertoire to acquire the reading skill (Tammelin-Laine and Martin, 2015). It is also significant to document the small steps of progress that LESLLA learners do as a proof of their achievement during the learning course (Young-Scholten & Naeb, 2010).

The challenges increase for LESLLA learners due to the fact that L1 transfer is a key factor in L2 acquisition (Broselow & Kang, 2013), especially when the morphological transparencies in L1 and L2 are different. It is believed that the English language is opaque due the high level of constraints in its morphological system (Chomsky & Halle, 1968), whereas the Arabic language, the mother language of the LESLLA learners' participants in this study, have both opaque and transparent orthographies based on the absence and presence of diacritics accordingly (Katz & Frost, 1992; Grosvald, et al., 2019). In addition, there is a difference between the way the written system is visually analysed as well as the orthographic representation of vowels between the English and Arabic language (Bassetti, 2008). For example, the Arabic is written from right to left, in contrast to English that is written from left to right (Grosvald, et al., 2019).

In terms of the language phonemic inventory, it is totally different in Arabic and English; the former has 5 vowel phonemes, while the latter has around 20 inventory vowel phonemes (Carr, 2019; Davenport & Hannahs, 2020). Moreover, the vowel system in English is deep as it includes short and long vowels in the written system, with discrepancies in the way some of the sounds are written and pronounced, while it is shallow in Arabic (Saiegh-Haddad & Geva, 2008) because Arabic has a consonantal

writing system (Bassetti, 2008), where only the long vowels are written while short vowels are represented by a diacritics system, which is usually omitted (Grosvald, et al., 2019). The differences in the vowel system between both languages makes it harder for Arabic speakers to read words with short vowels correctly in the English language. This shows that both languages do not only differ in their phonological features, but also the morphological features when it comes to the process of reading (Saiegh-Haddad & Geva, 2008). Thus, not only lack of literacy in L1 can act as an obstacle to learning a new language during their life (Tarone, 2009; Artieda & Munoz, 2013), but also differences in phonological and orthographic systems between L1 and L2 have a significant impact on the development of the reading skill (Broselow & Kang, 2013; Malessa, 2018). The phonological transparency could vary between languages with different written systems as some languages show regular and high correspondence between the sounds of letters and their written symbol, while others have less correspondence between phonology and orthography. English, for instance, has irregular correspondence between sounds and letters (Bassetti, 2008), which adds a layer of challenge to LESLLA learners when learning to read the language. According to the linguistic coding differences hypothesis (LCDH), learners' skills in their L1 can affect their abilities to learn a foreign language (Sparks & Ganschow, 1995). Other studies have supported the LCDH by showing that learners who display high L1 skills master better oral and written proficiency in a foreign language. Evidence from those studies have included word decoding (Meschyan & Hernandez, 2002); grammar, spelling and listening; (Teemant, et al., 2000); spelling (Kahn-Horwitz, et al., 2005) and spelling, reading comprehension and word decoding (Sparks, et al., 2008). The strong correlation between L1 and L2 skills, in both adults and children, suggests that low-literacy in L1 can cause challenges when learning a second language (Artieda, 2017). Artieda (2017) emphasises that L1 literacy is a threshold for low-literate learners to acquire a L2 reading skills. Therefore, some might struggle to learn a second language until they achieve a certain level in L1 literacy.

Those who lack L1 literacy can find it difficult to acquire a L2 because the reading skill, for example, develops based on the characteristics of the writing system in L1 (Frost, 2012). When it comes to low-literate learners who have no background literacy in L1, learning to read for the first time, but in a second language could be challenging. Studies on the topic of cognitive processing in a native-language scale have revealed

that illiterate learners face difficulties in oral tasks when they are asked to concentrate on language segments (Tarone & Bigelow 2005). Those tasks require an awareness of language segments including phonemes, syllables or words, and the ability to manipulate them. An example of such a task is the deletion of a phoneme or a syllable, e.g. such as deleting the part of the onset 's' from the word 'stan' and the cluster "st". Another example are segment/ unit manipulation tasks such as reversing the word orders of orally presented materials. Adults who have no alphabetical literacy can find these tasks particularly difficult. The same results can be seen in tasks of phonological fluency, which require learners to list as many words as they remember in one minute that begin with the letter 'p', for instance. It is found that the illiterate struggle with such an activity more than the literate. In contrast, it is found that there is no difference between the performances of literate and illiterate learners in tasks of semantic fluency, such as asking learners to list in one minute all the food or animals they can remember. In other words, alphabetical literacy has an influence on oral language processing when it comes to language segments, but not when it comes to meaning, which means that both literate and illiterate can repeat words that hold meaning, but the illiterate finds it very hard to repeat pseudo words, which reveals that literacy has a noticeable impact on the oral language cognitive processing of linguistic segments, but not on meaning (Tarone & Bigelow, 2005). Moreover, studies have shown that the oral skill is usually acquired first and form the basis for literacy of the forthcoming skills (Croydon, 2005; Spiegel & Sunderland, 2006). Specialized pedagogical approach is required to teach this group basic literacy using contextualised content that reflects students' lives as well as their age and language level, incorporating phonemic awareness tasks, phonics and word recognition to facilitate L2 literacy acquisition (Bigelow & Vinogradov, 2011; Landgraf et al., 2012; Nielsen & Vinner, 2023).

Even though there is ample research that focuses on low-literate learners and how they acquire literacy and reading skills, there is a lack of research on the way how those learners should be fairly assessed. Thus, this study aims to provide an insight into integrating phonemic awareness tasks in the pre-A1 reading assessment to ensure fair assessment to LESLLA learners. While it is important to investigate the challenges that LESLLA learners face when being assessed in L2, recognising the challenges they face while learning the language should be first investigated.

2.4.4 Challenges that Low-literate Learners Face in becoming literate in a new language

2.4.4.1 Challenge 1: Metalinguistic Knowledge

Low-literate learners resemble children when learning an L2 (Artieda, 2017). Yet, Marrapodi (2013) suggests that literacy teachers who work with LESLLA learners noticed that the natural process of development that occur in young children who learn an L2, but in a literate culture, does not exist for learners who have limited schooling or literacy experience or, in other words, lack the literature culture. Metalinguistic knowledge is an essential part in learning an L2 as suggested by Marrapodi (2013). The metalinguistic awareness is a "cognitive dynamo" in the language acquisition process because it embraces every language atom (Nagy, 2007: 52). It is an essential element in learning a language in general and in learning to spell, understand and read in particular (Donaldson, 1978). In addition, Nagy (2007) argues that the metalinguistic awareness is important because it provides an understanding to the unexplained disparity in comprehension scores, when controlling other significant variables. Lack of metalinguistic knowledge affect the way low-literate learners process an L2, which makes such learners struggle in activities such as language awareness tasks as they use and process the language in a different way than literate learners (Kurvers, Vallen, & Hout, 2006).

Although the lack of metalinguistic awareness in low-literate learners affect the learning process of all the four skills, the reading skill is the most affected skill because it is one of the receptive skills that are learnt at an early stage of the L2 learning process and it helps learners to scan visual codes in written texts (Barmao et al., 2007) and allow them to analyse and control different features of language, such as morphosyntax and phonology (Karmiloff-Smith, et al., 1996). The lack of metalinguistic knowledge creates an obstacle for LESLLA learners when learning to read. Savage (1993) believes that it is problematic to use traditional approaches of teaching reading to low-literate learners because the cognitive and foundational areas are underdeveloped in these learners. Marrapodi's study (2013) has explored three main methods for reading, which are the phonics, sight words and whole language methods in light of the low-literate learners. A task analysis has been done to activities applied in these three methods to show that there are subsequent gaps that prevent teachers to use such activities with low-literate learners because they are problematic to pre-emergent readers who have developmental areas that need to be identified, instructed

and addressed. The conventional methods of reading instructions without significant preparation to pre-reading skills will not work with pre-emergent readers like LESLLA learners (Marrapodi, 2013). Ellery (2009) states that all low-literate learners are pre-emergent readers, and they need different instructions for reading than those provided to learners with basic skills. Reading development goes through four main stages, which are the emergent, early, transitional and fluent stages. Learners start by linking oral, written and then printed stimuli in the emergent stage, then they solve problems in reading new words by collecting clues (Malessa, 2018). After that, more complex and longer texts become comprehensive to learners who use strategies to support meaning. Last, learners can read independently for long periods, and this depend on texts more than on illustrations (ibid; Ellery, 2009). LESLLA learners are in a pre-emergent stage, prior to the stage of making correlations with prints. Therefore, teachers need to work with such learners on pre-reading activities to develop their learning skills. Six main pre-reading skills have been set by the Public Library Association (2011) in partnership with the Association for Library Services to Children in the US for the program of Every Child Ready to Read. The skills are the narrative skills, which is the ability to describe stories and events; print motivation, which is the interest in books; vocabulary, which is knowing the names of objects; print awareness, which is the knowledge of handling books and following words; letter knowledge, which is the knowledge of the names and sounds of the letters, the difference between letters and the recognition of letters everywhere; and phonological awareness skills, which is the ability to handle smaller sounds in a word by hearing and playing with these sounds (ibid).

New language low-literate learners find learning to read in English complex because the language includes wide variations of the grapheme-morpheme relationships. Many of the English letters are single sound letters, such as the letters <b> /b/ and <l> /l/, as in many transparent languages. When letters are put together, the phonemes of both letters blend together, and the sounds of both letters can be heard, like in <b-r> /br/ or <b-l> /bl/. However, combined letters quite often make different sound, such as with the consonant digraphs like <sh> /ʃ/. Some combinations can have multiple pronunciations, like the diagraph <th> that can be pronounced as /θ/ as in *think* [θɪŋk] or /ð/ as in *this* [ðɪs]. Another example is the vowel diphthongs, like <oo>, which can be read as /ʊ/ like in *look* [lʊk] or /uː/ like in *moon* [muːn]. Generally speaking, sounds

can change when followed by certain letters and in many other cases the sound of letters can change for various reasons. Memorising these rules and applying them is confusing for LESLLA learners, in addition to the various irregular words that need to be memorised because they cannot be decoded, like *tough* [tʌf]. Besides, regional accents can affect the sound of some phonemes, which makes learning to read for LESLLA learners difficult using the phonics method. LESLLA learners struggle to produce sounds that are new to them or do phonemic segmentation as they do not understand the language's structure and they find it problematic to comprehend that words include sounds (Marrapodi, 2013). Kurvers, Vallen, & Hout (2006: 70) state that "illiterate learners are like children; they perform poorly in segmenting words into phonemes. In all studies, illiterates differed significantly from readers in every phoneme manipulation task, such as phoneme segmentation, and phoneme deletion or addition", which shows how puzzling it is for LESLLA learners to get the concept that words consist of sounds (Marrapodi, 2013).

Zipke (2011) argues that boosting metalinguistic awareness is very vital for improving reading comprehension. Learners of the English language generally benefit from the metalinguistic awareness in their learning process, including the metamorphological awareness as stated by Ginsberg, Honda, and O'Neil (2011). Phonological awareness has been long proclaimed to play a critical role in supporting children to blend sounds and segment them in words. As discussed in this section, it has been noticed that in the last two decades, two more elements of metalinguistic insight have been mentioned significantly in research journals about reading, which are the orthographic awareness and the morphological awareness as they both help learners develop their reading skill (Nagy, 2007). However, the lack of metalinguistic knowledge is not the only challenge faced by LESLLA learners when becoming literate in an L2; the lack of educational skills also poses another challenge to their learning journey, which is the focus of the next section.

2.4.4.2 Challenge 2 Educational Skills

It is significant to realise that many low-literate learners have limited experience with school, and they have not developed their learning skills in a literate culture. Brod (1999: 5) indicates that "learner who knows how to learn comes to class with tools for tackling the different process of mastering learning to read in a new language. The learner who does not have some educational experience usually has less information

upon which to draw in coping with concepts as well as fewer techniques with which to tackle the job".

LESLLA learners might find the learning environment bizarre as they have not been in formal schooling before. Teachers are usually sensitive to such an issue, and they deal with this proportion of learners with care, trying to build steps that help low-literate learners to build their interests as well as strengths in language. Low-literate learners who lack schooling experiences require certain skills and behaviour to make the transition into schooling smooth. For example, low-literate learners interpret visual-aid materials in a different way than they are interpreted by educated learners (Bramao et al., 2007; Altherr Flores 2021b). Such learners need to do extra efforts to succeed in the transition into a schooling environment, which is a process that educated people cannot describe or understand (Watson, 2010).

Various studies (see Hellerman, 2006) indicate that LESLLA learners encounter difficulties in language classes as they are not used to being in a school like context, engage in classroom settings, comprehend the language used for instruction and interact according to these instructions. LESLLA learners have not been engaged in literacy in an educational scale. Therefore, such learners encounter challenges when attempting to learn a second language in a literacy classroom. The difficulties emerge because of learners' lack of experience in being in an educational setting, being exposed to literacy practices, participate in an educational setting and their lack of social meanings experience (Hellerman & Harris, 2015; Ramirez-Esparza, *et al.*, 2012). For example, low-literate second language learners usually assume that they play a minor role when it comes to interaction in classroom setting. They expect the literate learners to initiate pair tasks and they are reluctant to seek help from others when they struggle (Ramirez-Esparza, *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, low-literate learners struggle in second-language classes not only because they are acquiring a new language and the new literacy abilities required in such a program, but they are doing this in an unfamiliar institutional setting, where learners encounter implicit assumptions regarding the relationship between educational experiences and literacy. (Reder, 2015). Most ESOL classes depend on the writing form, whether in English or translated into the learners' L1, to deliver information to learners. This could happen on the board, textbooks, worksheets and so on, which requires learners to develop three intersecting skills simultaneously; learning the new language, understanding the

print of this language and reading in the acquired target language (Kruidenier, *et al.,* 2010). Learning & Work Institute (2019) adds that practitioners at pre-A1 classes identified several challenges faced by learners, such as low self-esteem to take an active part in the learning process due to their lack of school experience, mental health problems caused by traumas, undiagnosed difficulties in learning, caring responsibilities, lacking the opportunity to practise outside classroom and unsecured jobs that affect learners' abilities to join classes on a regular basis. It is believed that women are more disadvantaged than men due to taking full childcare responsibility most of the time (Learning & Work Institute, 2019).

Despite the fact that some of the LESLLA tutors are experienced in dealing with such learners, they express the challenges they face in classroom due to restrictions in materials; besides the classroom setting is hindering the "needed pedagogical innovation, dissemination and professional development" as it is based on the assumption of literacy and familiarity with school context (Reder, 2015: 4). ESOL practitioners also state that other challenges are affecting the day-to-day learning in pre-A1 classes. First, there is no clear definition to the pre-A1 stage, the differences in skills and learning needs of learners that exist in this stage, including students with limited literacy skills, limited training and career development opportunities to practitioners to deal with differentiation and teaching phonics to adults, scarcity of attractive materials suitable for adult learners at the low level to promote the literacy skills and functional skills required for day-to-day activities (Learning & Work Institute, 2019).

It is believed that policy makers should provide funding to create models and materials suitable for pre-A1 provision to address learning barriers and support learners' progression, provide training to teachers to handle the challenges faced in class and take into consideration the lowest level of learners in pre-A1 when the ESOL national standards reviewed widely (Learning & Work Institute, 2019). Policy makers should work hand in hand with providers to facilitate career development training opportunities to ESOL practitioners and other staff working in supporting roles. Not only this, but local providers should also cooperate together to facilitate learners' access to pre-A1 level by making use of the available funding to support the ESOL provision in pre-A1 level, including the importance of providing non-accredited courses using the Adult Education Budget (Learning & Work Institute, 2019).

Having established that low-literate learners face difficulties when they learn to read for the first time, those difficulties can be addressed when the teaching practices of reading are based on the social practice theory (Barton et al. 2000), by which the texts are related to the readers' daily lives. According to this theory, even though reading as an activity is carried out by individual readers, it is rarely done in isolation. Adult readers can read aloud, summarise what they have read, discuss it with others and then take an action (Allemano, 2013). Not only this but also reading is considered a part of an activity that leads readers to examine social issues and strive for making social changes (Paulo Freire, 1972). In any case, readers are encouraged to read a text for a certain goal or reason, be it to follow instructions, learn new information or for pleasure. The reason of reading is associated with expectations that readers bring to mind because the content of any text is based on prior experiences and knowledge, which the text will challenge, extend or approve. It is impossible to replicate this approach to reading texts on the level of a national exam where learners are required to deal with decontextualized texts. Therefore, low-literate learners face challenges when learning to read for the first time in a second language (Allemano, 2013).

All that has an impact on the assessment process for low-literate learners, which is the focus of the next section**.**

2.5 ESOL Assessment

2.5.1 Importance of Assessment

Assessment plays a crucial role for language educators and second language acquisition (SLA) researchers. Teachers utilise assessments to evaluate students' starting levels, track their progress, and measure their achievements, highlighting the vital role assessment plays in the teaching and learning process (Spiegel and Sunderland, 2006). Learners are required to complete tasks designed for assessment, and instructors then evaluate these responses to summarize student performance. The resulting scores are used to ascertain whether students are proficient in using the language for real-world communication (Fulcher, 2015). SLA researchers find assessment valuable because it reveals the language features that learners have developed over time, helps deduce their grammatical understanding, indicates what they have or have not learned, and showcases the progress made during their studies (Norris and Ortega, 2014). In England, the Skills for Life strategy outlines a

comprehensive ESOL provision that includes various phases and purposes of assessment. The assessment process in ESOL is categorized into five phases: screening, initial/placement, diagnostic, formative/on-going, and summative/final assessments (Spiegel and Sunderland, 2006).

Screening assessment is usually done to learners at the beginning of the course to see if they have numeracy, literacy or language needs and it also identifies learners who require further assessment. Initial assessment is done to identify learners' certain skill against a level within the national standards and place them in an appropriate program. Initial assessment is often followed by diagnostic assessment, which is a detailed assessment to the skills and abilities of learners against the requirements of the national standards requirements. Formative assessment helps teachers to monitor learners' progress against certain goals and objectives that have been set after the diagnostic assessment. The summative assessment measures the achievements of learners against defined targets and objectives and this type of assessment could be in the form of exam or portfolio of work (Spiegel and Sunderland, 2006).

2.5.2 Research on Assessment

A good deal of research has been done on teaching reading to all levels, and on the assessment of the reading skill from A2 Level upwards, but less research has been done on summative assessment at A1 Level and below mainly because in this level there was no requirement for official assessment in England (Allemano, 2013). Khalifa and Weir (2008) state that dividing the reading skill into subskills has been of a great importance to the teaching pedagogy and assessment, and this concept has been called by Khalifa and Weir (2008: 3) the "informed intuition". The subskills of reading include skimming, scanning, deducing and inferring meaning, which have been used in teaching reading since 1980 as Grellet (1981) indicates. Writers of items are asked to identify the subskills that apply for each item, which is arguably a way to test the information-based knowledge rather than the cognitive processes that are involved when learners are reading (Allemano, 2013). However, the "informed intuition" has not reflected the engagement of language learners who live in multilingual communities in the various literacy practices (ibid). This can be seen in the case of a Punjabi family that lives in London and has multilingual literacies (Saxena, 1994). Saxena's description to this family has highlighted the close relationship between literacy and

various aspects of life, which shows that reading as a skill is needed in an imbedded way and used in everyday life in a wider range.

Brown (1998) describes the holistic assessment tool in a qualitative study, and he states that the morpho-syntax has been prioritised in written assessments. Moreover, learners' levels are evaluated relatively according to their accuracy and the intelligibility of the sample text. Errors are used to assess learners' production and when errors become the main focus, assessment is then situated "at the discrete-item-testing end of the spectrum", yet relative terms that are used in assessment belies this notion (Brown, 1998: 364).

Some of the older assessment tools include the language disability assessment tool (Crystal, Fletcher and Garman, 1976) and the Index of Productive Syntax (IPS) (Scarborough, 1990). The IPS, for example, is based on emergence not on the mastery of morphology and syntax and emergence can be identified by two productive uses of construction and form. The IPS has been applied on oral tests for children between 2 to 4 years old; thus, Scarborough was able to consider the reading progress of children at a later stage (ibid). Rapid Profile is also a kind of assessment tool that has been suggested by Pienemann et al. (1988) and Pienemann (2001). Kozloski and Donahue (2005) have indicated that this assessment tool can be divided into six levels and each level contains large number of constructions. The Rapid Profile assessment tool originated in research of German L2 acquisition by low-literate adults. It is assumed that all learners who are involved in L2 acquisition develop their skills through a similar path and progress through clear stages. Development of learners is achieved by the emergence and procession of complexity, not by stopping the production of unwanted structure. Moreover, the stages, in this approach, are implicational, which means that learners cannot move to level Y before passing through level X (Anderson, 1978). The Rapid Profiling tool requires learners to be trained in the same samples needed for the assessment because spontaneous language production is an accurate reflection of the linguistic competence of learners. However, it has been noticed in a language class in America that some learners show capability at class, but they do not get the required score to move to the next level, while others do not have the ability, but they pass the test and get promoted to the next level. The fact reveals that tests and assessments are not able to accurately capture what learners are capable of (Vainikka et al. 2005). Vainikka and Young-

Scholten (2011) have established the Organic Grammar tool, which goes beyond the Rapid Profiling, and it contains the inflectional morphology. It means that the assessment is finer-grained and is based on research on L2 acquisition for immigrants. L2 teachers can apply the Organic Grammar criteria when they combine their knowledge about language and their experience of learners' data.

In many of the post-compulsory education classes in the UK, the three groups of learners may be enrolled in the same class and striving for the same qualification. As a result, this has inadvertently increased the average scores since those who are literate perceive the tests as clear and uncomplicated as they have literacy skills, which caused the raise of the scores. The average score is affected by the "cumulative frequency graphs showing the proportion of candidates at certain scores" (Lambert & Lines, 2000: 53). As the number of educated and literate European migrants, who utilise the Roman alphabet, rises in the UK, the thresholds for success and failure in ESOL assessments have also shifted for all learner groups (Allemano, 2013). In other words, educated and literate learners starting to learn the host language tend to score better in assessments than LESLLA learners when they are placed in the same classes. As a result, when an average score is employed to establish the passing or failing criteria, it typically exceeds the level that LESLLA learners can achieve (Allemano, 2013). Therefore, Bagna et al. (2017) emphasise the importance of creating an assessment framework for pre-A1 level to promote homogeneous classrooms. O'Sullivan et al. (2021) highlight that certain factors must be considered in the test development process. Specifically, the context and the learners themselves should be taken into account during test design, as these elements can influence test performance. The development process should first consider the target population from a "physical, psychological, and experiential" perspective (ibid: 262). Furthermore, test developers should focus not only on the learners' language abilities but also on the cognitive processes they engage in while completing the test (ibid).

2.5.3 Current Practices

Institutions that teach ESOL for adult learners adhere to the Skills for Life qualifications in order to receive funding for the courses provided. Several awarding bodies have developed these qualifications in the UK, such Ascentis ESOL QCF, City and Guilds ESOL QCF, Edexcel ESOL QCF, Gateway Qualifications ESOL and Trinity ESOL QCF (NATECLA, n.d., web). Each one will be discussed in detail. First, the

qualifications of Ascentis ESOL Skill for Life use the National Standards for Adult Literacy, and they are closely linked with the Core Curriculum of ESOL. Ascentis provides a full set of ESOL Skills for Life Qualifications in all levels from Entry 1 to Level 2. Those qualifications are specified for people who specifically live in the UK and concentrate on preparing learners for work or further education. The main aim is to make learners independent from others, like interpreters, family or professionals, and prepare learners to interact with native speakers in work atmosphere or in different places. When learners improve their fluency as well as communication in English, they improve their chances in employment. Moreover, learners will be more confident to access different service providers, to travel, socialise and work beyond the limits of their local community. In 2018, the Ascentis has developed a Pre-Entry Level assessment for ESOL learners, but it has not been regulated yet (Ascentis, 2018).

Second, City and Guilds aims for more flexibility and responsiveness in the Qualifications of ESOL Skills for Life without drifting away from its standards of Adult Literacy or ESOL Core Curriculum. This awarding body provides standalone Awards for each one of the three skills; reading, writing, and listening & speaking, as well as a certification that includes the full mode of all three skills. Assessments could be centred-assessed or with a short notice as little as one hour. The qualification's units are structured in a different way than those offered by different awarding bodies. For the reading skill, 9 credits are given to Entry 1-3 and 11 credits for Level 1-2. For the writing skill, 9 credits are given to Entry 1-2 and 11 credits for Entry 3, Level 1-2. For listening and speaking, 11 credits are given to Entry 1-2 and 12 credits for Entry 3 and Level 1-2. For a certificate-sized qualification, 29 credits are given to Entry 1-2, 32 credits for Entry 3 and 34 credits for Level 1-2 (City & Guilds, 2018).

Third, the Pearson Edexcel QCF qualifications in ESOL are designed to help learners develop their language skills for three main purposes, which are to facilitate access to employment, to learning for supporting individuals throughout the curriculum and to skills for everyday life (Edexcel, n.d., web). Fourth, the ESB qualifications provide a holistic ESOL assessment that includes the three modes. These qualifications include certain aspects, which are: the writing and reading assessments that are marked externally by ESB, while the speaking and listening tests are assessed by ESB assessors at the learners' centres. Previous assessment videos and papers of speaking and listening are available at the website of ESB. For listening and speaking

assessments, candidates receive a report for their achievements stating their good achievements and areas of improvements. The reports are personalised and provide useful comments and guidance on their achievements. Awards can be given for individual skills or for an overarching certificate for the three modes. A Pre-Entry Assessment is provided for the listening and speaking assessments for learners with little literacy in the English language, but it is not ready for the Entry 1 Level Ofqual regulated qualification (ESB, n.d., web).

Fifth, the Gateway ESOL Qualifications depends on Adult Literacy Standards and designed to adhere with the ESOL Core Curriculum. Standalone certificates for each mode are available and an overarching certificate for each level is also available. Assessments at all levels from Entry 1 to Level 2 are contextualised to meet each learner's needs (Gateway Qualifications, 2018). Sixth, the SQA National Qualifications in ESOL focuses on developing the three skills in English language of learners who do not speak English as a first language. These qualifications aim to improve the learners' language skills to benefit from the language knowledge in practical life and in relevant contexts (SQA, n.d., web). Finally, the Trinity ESOL Skills for Life Qualifications are based on the National Literacy standards and are referenced relatively close to the ESOL Core Curriculum; thus, there will be almost no changes in the focus of teaching. The qualifications cover all ESOL levels from Entry 1 to Level 2 (Trinity College, n.d., web.).

In a recent report conducted by Ofqual to understand the effectiveness of the ESOL skills for life (SfL) assessment for the accredited levels, it has been found that practitioners regard the SfL qualifications as extremely beneficial for learners and for society at large (Curcin, et al., 2022). Although the report has identified areas of improvement in the SfL qualifications and standardised assessment for Entry levels and Levels 1 & 2 ESOL courses, content of courses and assessment designs are based on research and continuous improvements (Curcin, et al., 2022), unlike the case in pre-A1 level, which shows that little attention has been paid for assessing at this level.

A Reading test that is designed for adults at the lowest accredited level (A1) usually contains out-of-context texts, from which some design and layout aspects are taken away for the sake of cost-reduction. The texts are followed by different format

questions, such as binary choice, multiple choice and open-ended questions. Those tests are designed to assess the subskills, general understanding of the text meaning, recognition of the texts purpose and other details, deduce meaning of vocabulary that are unknown and decipher the text's syntax in general. In order to make tasks understandable, introductory explanations precedes the task. Even though the rubric of the test and the questions are required to be below students' reading ability that is being tested in order to have a good practice in reading test development, in literacy tests the reading load is being doubled and that can hinder test-takers from understanding the concept of the tasks (Allemano, 2013). In Kortez' study (2008), the texts provided in the reading tests are framed in real-life social contexts that represent the texts' layout, which can, on some occasions, be easier than the others. For example, a letter can be easily reproduced in a reading test, whereas a magazine article is less likely to be replicated. However, some problems might arise for beginner readers because the taken texts can be in black and white with few images and they can be part of a document, rather than a whole document, which creates confusion for this proportion. Moreover, the texts might not be situated in the environments of learners, which increases complication and confusion to them.

Allemano (2013) argues that skilled reading tests' writers aim to assess real-life skills in reading, and they relatively succeed. This can be made by asking test-takers to comprehend referencing in a text, do skimming and scanning for certain information and deduce meaning. All these subskills can be manageable for those who can do them in their first language. However, those who lack these skills in their L1 will be disadvantaged in such reading tests. The validity of the test can be affected because the reading burden increased on specific group of candidates because such tests need to assess the candidates understanding by doing tasks such as excluding wrong answers in a multiple-choice question, answering a question with yes or no and answering open-ended questions. Besides, the rubric can be also a challenge, let alone the test itself, such as the "construct irrelevant variance" that Kortez (2008: 221) proposed.

It is believed that ESOL learners in an early stage who are beginning to form letters and recognise simple words (in the pre-A1 level), are usually assessed by checking the left-right orientation, reading simple words and extracting meaning from a small text, recognising some common basic genres, differentiating between words and

numbers, recognising words, differentiating between the upper and lower case and assessing basic knowledge of learners in the letter-sound association (Spiegel and Sunderland, 2006), which is called a phonemic awareness assessment. Phonemic awareness assessment is important for two main reasons; first, it helps teachers to initially screen learners' abilities and find out who is literate and who is not, and who is able to read and who is not. In addition, regular monitoring help teachers track learners' progress after receiving phonemic awareness explicit instructions. Screening assessment needs to be sensitive to identify the learners' future of reading ability and need to separate low from high performers. Such assessment includes a variety of tools, such as assessing the phonemic awareness segmenting and sensitivity and another one that measures automatized rapid naming. Such measures can also identify learners' progress. Progress monitoring assessment, unlike screening assessment, need to be sensitive to students' knowledge growth and employ multiple forms of assessment. The Dynamic Indicator of Early Literacy can achieve this requirement, and it is suitable for LESLLA learners (Chard and Dickson, 1999).

Based on what has been discussed above, pre-A1 is non-accredited course, but still carried on in formal setting and learners are expected to do assessments to monitor their progress to receive funding this is because pre-A1 ESOL provision is funded through the Adult Education Budget in a non-accredited, but formal environments. Thus, quality frameworks like Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement (RARPA) will be utilised to serve as a quality assurance method for tracking the progress and outcomes of students participating in non-accredited learning courses (Education and Training Foundation a, 2021)

2.5.4 Link between Research and Practice in Relation to Assessment

It is believed that learners who possess L1 literacy have better chances while doing a test than learners who are illiterate (Allemano, 2013). The culture and L1 can be obstacles to reading; for instance, the alphabet letters might be pronounced differently, or learners might be struggling to recognise the sentence components (ibid). However, the general agreement is that even though there are various aspects that affect L2 acquisition, away from the differences between the languages and/or the coding system between L1 and L2, one of the main aspects is that literate learners who are experienced readers have better chances than illiterate. This indicates that the stronger the literacy is in L1, the easier the literacy is acquired in L2 (Cummins, 1984).

Learners who are literate in their L1 are aware of the process of reading, the relation between prints and speech, the segmentation of speech into sounds and the difference between the written words and speech. Those learners have developed the ability to recognise the word components that exist in prints, and they developed the metalinguistic awareness, which is the recognition of the language's general properties, containing the morphological awareness. In addition, those learners are able to connect what they read with their prior knowledge, which help them understand what they are reading and reinforce their existing knowledge as they have previous experience in interpreting the written prints (Allemano, 2013), which is called "top-down assistance" as Koda (2008: 80) indicates. Learners who are ready to go through a summative assessment at A1 level, which is based on funding purposes, need to go through three learning stages. The first stage is called logographic, which is the process of recognising the general visual appearance of written texts. The second stage is alphabetic, which is the process of phoneme awareness. The third stage is orthographic, which is the process of recognising words and retrieving them immediately to enable the process of reading to occur without sound (Firth, 1985; Spiegel & Sunderland, 2006). Stockmann (2006: 154) also identified three main stages that learners go through in the "Literacy Framework" in the Netherlands, which are Alpha A, Alpha B and Alpha C. Alpha A is the stage when the phonemic awareness of learners is still basic; Alpha B is the stage when "consonant clusters and morphemes are read as a unit"; while Alpha C is the stage when reading becomes automated, unless the words are long or unknown for learners (ibid). Both Alpha C and the orthographic stages are equal to the lowest level of CEFR; A1, where learners can understand short and uncomplicated phrases or texts, they can identify familiar words and phrases and reread them again when required (Council of Europe, 2001), which is the target level required from ESOL learners in the lowest level of certification in the UK. A top-down approach in reading will be used by readers at this level (Khalifa & Weir 2008; Spiegel & Sunderland 2006). Spiegel & Sunderland (2006: 58) indicate that context is of great importance to readers as they will be able to engage with the text and its context as a whole, and they predict and engage actively in "thought processes to make sense of text". To be able to do this, learners need to bring their background knowledge to interpret the reading text as learners will comprehend the meaning of the text when it is interpreted by the background knowledge that readers activate (Grabe, 2009). As a result, learners with limited literacy face difficulties when

they are learning to read for the first time in the L2 with limited prior background knowledge (Allemano, 2013). This challenge can be automatically transferred to the process of assessment that low-literate learners have to go through.

2.5.5 Challenges of Low-Literate Learners in Assessment

As has been defined earlier, an exam is a device to measure certain knowledge or skills (Koretz, 2008). In the ESOL provision, the exam is being taken by low-literate people who are introduced to the English language for the first time in their lives and they have no experience in the test structure. Therefore, low-literate learners find the exam process itself challenging because of their limited literacy (Allemano, 2013). To comprehend the difficulties encountered by low-literate learners in acquiring a second language and undergoing assessments in the Pre-A1 ESOL course, it is crucial to have a clear understanding of the assessment process. According to the existing ESOL policy, the provision of ESOL in England encompasses various stages and objectives of assessment (Higton et al., 2019). Assessment in ESOL can be categorized into five stages: screening, initial/placement, diagnostic/tracking progress, formative/ongoing, and summative/level promotion/final assessments (Spiegel and Sunderland, 2006). The difficulty can be justified by many aspects. Studies that focus on second language acquisition and child language acquisition reveal that comprehension comes before production. Babies, for example, start uttering real words between the ages of 10-12 months, but they comprehend these words months before being able to utter them. The case of babies also can apply on adults in their L2 acquisition. Most exposure studies reveal that the way adults comprehend from the speech stream is similar to the way children do, which shows that the listening skill, as a receptive skill, is easier than and precedes the productive skills. Therefore, it is assumed that the same thing applied for low-literate learners (Young-Scholten and Naeb, 2010). Low-literate learners might be able to read, but when it comes to a reading test that involves written scripts, those learners might struggle (Allemano, 2013).

Many ESOL providers in the UK have emphasised the significance of assisting language learning to improve the social integration of migrants, due to the lack of consistency in national policy concerning ESOL services (NATECLA, 2016). As stated earlier, the UK government current policy mandates that learners in post-16 education, including ESOL, in England are obliged to work toward a qualification. Thus, providers

must offer courses focused on the Skills for Life qualifications, which include assessments to evaluate learners' progress and their preparedness to advance to the next level. This ensures compliance with national standards and allows them to receive funding based on proof of learners' accomplishments. This policy has urged many awarding bodies to do a rapid development of external certification for all the levels of the taught curriculum, with little attention being paid to the quality of the stages of redrafting and piloting. The majority of the awarding bodies have developed very good practices of assessment to the English language skills of ESOL learners in the last few decades, which is sometimes based on thorough pieces of research (Bedford, 2003; Khalifa & Ffrench, 2009; Stoynoff, 2009; Curcin et al., 2022). However, there is still less experience and research being done on the tests for pre-A1 level and specifically for low literate learners. It is undeniable that failing or passing an assessment can significantly impact LESLLA learners regarding their access to employment, education, benefits, family reunification, and their right to remain in the UK (Carlsen & Rocca, 2021). Thus, the assessment process has crucial impact on LESLLA learners' lives.

There is a shortage of research focused on this learner group (Andringa & Godfroid, 2019), resulting in the learning needs of LESLLA learners being less explored compared to those of educated learners (Tarone, 2010; Allemano, 2018). Some providers utilise portfolio-based assessment, while others prefer to assess all language skills through examinations. The examination method is the most commonly used approach for evaluating low-literate learners, as it allows for more in-class learning time and reduces the need for extensive record-keeping and documentation of students' in-class achievements. However, Allemano (2013) points out that this can pose challenges for learners, particularly concerning the reading test. This occurs despite the fact that both types of learners exposed to the examination process can comprehend reading material in real-life contexts. Allemano (2013) and Flores (2021c) assert that low-literate learners require assessments that focus on what they know, rather than what they are unable to demonstrate.

Simpson et al. (2008) & Allemano (2013) have stated that the assessment process seems to be problematic for LESLLA learners, given the fact that such learners usually exist in the non-accredited pre-A1 level. According to Robinson's Report (2017), LESLLA ESOL learners lack certain knowledge and skills that literate learners

possess. These deficiencies include metalinguistic knowledge, an understanding of language, its function, structure, and usage from a functionalist viewpoint, as well as educational and study skills, which are gained through participation in an educational environment (Allemano, 2013). While most awarding bodies have established effective practices for assessing the English language skills from Entry level to advanced ESOL learners (see Bedford, 2003; Khalifa & Ffrench, 2009; Stoynoff, 2009), there is still comparatively less emphasis on pre-A1 assessments than on other levels of ESOL (Allemano, 2013). It unsurprising that the examination process poses a significant challenge for assessing the level of LESLLA learners. These learners are often unaccustomed to formal testing settings, rendering the accreditation policy problematic for them (Allemano, 2013; 2018; Higton et al., 2019). According to Kurvers et al. (2015), LESLLA learners encounter unique challenges in second language acquisition, progressing at a slower pace and achieving lower outcomes compared to more educated learners. They derive fewer benefits from language courses, and their performance on tests is often inferior (Carlsen, 2017). This lack of success can be attributed not only to insufficient skills being assessed but also to a lack of testing experience and familiarity with the formats used in language assessments (Allemano, 2013). A critical factor contributing to their difficulties is their lack of understanding of the conceptual framework underlying the tests they take (Allemano, 2013).

When standardised tests are employed in assessments, it becomes clear what should be evaluated and how to evaluate it (Faux & Watson, 2018). However, pre-A1 provisions are less formal compared to higher ESOL levels, as they lack accreditation and do not have standardised tests available in England (Education and Training Foundation, 2019). As a result, each institution establishes its own assessment criteria to evaluate learners during the initial registration process and to assess their progress and qualifications periodically (Allemano, 2018). Nevertheless, the examination practices adopted are not grounded in research, which raises questions about their validity (Allemano, 2018). Additionally, the methods used to showcase the broader outcomes of learners' achievements are underdeveloped (Education and Training Foundation, 2019). Therefore, when it comes to testing low-literate learners, it is argued that they need an assessment that can assess what they understand, not what they are unable to produce (Allemano, 2013; Flores, 2021c).

In a study conducted in the USA, Flores (2021a) explored the meaning-making process in language and literacy standardised assessments from the perspective of LESLLA test-takers. The findings indicated a disconnect between the intended and expected meanings of the visual and textual prompts used in assessments and the responses provided by the test-takers. The assessment practices and textual compositions have inadvertently demonstrated bias against learners with low literacy. Consequently, Flores (2021a) recommends that test design and the development of evaluative frameworks take into account the literacy levels of test-takers and their socialization to testing formats. Without familiarity with test literacy, even straightforward multimodal questions, such as multiple-choice items, can become difficult for LESLLA learners due to their lack of understanding of test genres and the multimodal aspects necessary for reading and responding to questions appropriately (Flores, 2021b). Therefore, it is crucial to examine the test materials and criteria used to assess learners' language proficiency, as the textual and visual designs for adult L2 and literacy learners are not extensively researched, particularly in relation to reading assessments. The absence of suitable test designs for this group impacts not only the meaning-making process for test-takers but also how their responses are evaluated (Flores, 2021b).

It has been determined that there is no standardised assessment at the pre-A1 level in England, and in-house assessments are created by tutors who may lack experience in test design. As a result, LESLLA learners encounter difficulties when being assessed in a second language (L2). Consequently, this paper aims to examine the types of materials employed in reading assessments at the pre-A1 level in England and analyse them concerning the test genre, the semiotic resources used in their design, and the criteria applied to evaluate the test-takers' proficiency levels.

The language of tests does not seem to be the main problem because learners do not find it difficult to understand them. The difficulties emerged in Allemano's (2013) experiment was on the word level rather than on the sentence level. This indicates that the level of language is suitable for learners. Yet, two key problems emerge when learners attempted to read the texts. The first problem emerged because candidates were not considering the information they read as a meaningful chunk, rather they read the text word by word. Moreover, they might stop reading when they find the answer, without looking at the whole sentence fully (ibid). This shows that some of the

candidates are beyond the stage of alphabets but have not reached the orthographic stage as Firth (1985) indicates, where they are pronouncing some words as individual phonemes rather than recognising full word and read them connectively and at speed. The second problem emerged is the way candidates interact with the texts manifested through their understanding of the questions' concepts. Although the candidates were aware of their need to draw on their real-life knowledge and experiences to answer the questions, yet they were engaged with the questions rather than understanding the text fully (Allemano, 2013). The low-literate learners were approaching the reading test as the following diagram show (Allemano, 2013: 79).

Reader ⟹ the text and exam questions ⟹ life experience ⟹ action; i.e., answering the questions
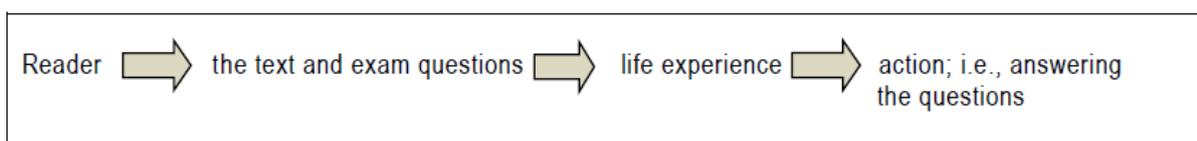
The process in which test-takers approach a reading test need to be different and open-minded. Previous experiences and knowledge need to be brought into the test when appropriate to help learners answer the test questions. It is noticed that experienced candidates approach the reading test in a different approach as they depend on life experiences to handle exam questions based on the text provided and answer them. Such learners have preconceived concepts and in the exam they either prove or challenge them according to the text. A normal procedure could be seen in the normal world, where the social practice theory is being followed by readers to engage with the reading test. This procedure is as follow (ibid: 79):

Real world experience and social practice ⟹ the reader ⟹ the text ⟹ action
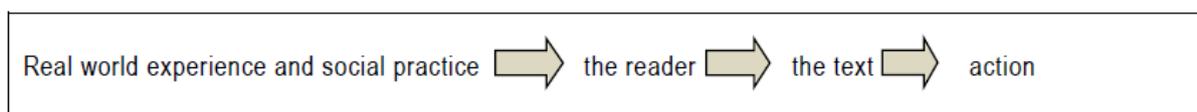
The failure of low-literate learners to answer correctly in the reading test can be attributed to various reasons. Although the ineffectiveness of the course can be a factor that affect the low-literate learners' results, it is one of various possible factors that affect their results. Learners might be attending language courses and benefitting from them, but the assessments might not be aligned with what learners are taught in classrooms. In addition, it is argued that the short intervals between tests might not be enough to capture the progress that low-literate learners make because such learners make small progress over a long period of time, which cannot be noticed in the test

and retest that is done in most language providers to ensure the accountability of their assessment (Reder, 2015). In addition, Allemano (2013) believes that low-literate learners' lack of test literacy and test construct knowledge are the main reasons behind their failure in their inability to handle the reading tests. Moreover, most of the assessment tools used depend on literacy skills and they include multi-modal resources that are supposed to facilitate the task requirements to test takers. As LELLSA learners lack both the testing and multi-modal literacies, it is believed that the reading assessment is biased to those who are literate (Flores, 2021a) as indicated in section 2.5.6 the Multi-Modal Critical Discourse Analysis in this chapter.

2.5.6 Multi-Modal Critical Discourse Analysis

The appropriateness of the assessment materials and criteria used to design them will be assessed through Multi-Modal Critical Discourse Analysis (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020; Pennycook, 2001). This approach offers a systematic and multi-dimensional method for examining language and semiotic modes, such as visual media.

Social semiotics examines the importance of social and cultural contexts in understanding meaning making as a social practice. While semiotics pertains to the signs and codes present in social life, social semiotics also addresses the social processes that create communication and language codes. A key takeaway is that meaning making is linked to power dynamics, and as power dynamic changes, the construction of meaning in languages can also evolve (Halliday, 1978; Hodge et al., 1988). From a multimodal perspective of social semiotics, meaning making involves various modes that are shaped by cultural and social contexts (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020). These modes encompass texts, images, symbols, sounds, gestures, and music. Although each mode can express the same meaning, the ways in which this meaning is interpreted can vary from one mode to another. For instance, written texts use words to convey messages, while images communicate meaning through their layout, colour, prominence, and composition (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020). These modes are considered multimodal because texts are inherently linked to the materials they are created for, and images cannot be separated from the colours from which they are composed (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020).

The critical multimodal theory of social semiotics emphasises how semiotics conveys meaning through underlying assumptions, intentions, and ideologies (Caldas-Coulthard & van Leeuwen, 2003). Additionally, language is analysed in terms of its

semantic, contextual, functional, and semiotic dimensions (Pennycook, 2001). The reading tests have been evaluated through the framework of systemic functional linguistics discussed in Pennycook (2001) to examine the genre elements of the assessments, the semiotic resources, and the multimodal composition and components, in order to determine their fairness and validity for LESLLA learners. This study has utilised a multimodal critical discourse approach to analyse the assessment tools and criteria of the in-house developed reading assessments for pre-A1 ESOL courses in England. The analysis employs the grammar of visual design as a framework to examine the images included in the reading tests, as visual designs often reflect aspects of interaction, composition, and representation. The images used in reading assessments facilitate interaction between the test-takers and the designer, while the arrangement of these visuals impacts the relationship between the semiotics and the test questions.

Composition is akin to grammar in that it facilitates the representation of people, places, and objects in the meaning-making process. Visuals, as semiotic tools for conveying meaning, differ from texts and speeches; however, they are socially constructed and play a role in shaping meaning (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020). Grammar and syntax can be viewed as interrelated components of meaning-making. Just as linguistic grammar illustrates how words are organized into phrases and sentences to convey meaning, visual grammar demonstrates how elements such as objects, people, and locations are arranged to form statements of varying complexity. The grammar of visual design refers to a set of principles and guidelines that govern the effective use of visual elements in design. It encompasses how various components work together to create meaning, convey messages, and evoke emotions. The capacity to analyse information from various sources, particularly visual ones, is an essential skill for learners in today's society. Developing the ability to interpret visual texts and effectively communicate that understanding necessitates a degree of critical thinking and reflection. These skills can be cultivated over time through consistent practice and engaging in dialogue (Roberts & Philip, 2006). Images, for example, are now increasingly integrated into most types of texts (Kress, 1997). Interpreting these messages and texts necessitates both verbal and visual literacy, as well as the capacity to understand the interplay between verbal and visual elements (Roberts & Philip, 2006).

Visual literacy is considered a crucial element in test design, and the concepts of 'Real' and 'Ideal can help clarify the effectiveness and appropriateness of visual elements used in assessments. The "Real" aspects of visual design refer to the tangible elements present in an actual language assessment. This includes the existing layout, format, visual symbols, font size, and colour scheme (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020). Moreover, it encompasses the logical organisation of questions, clarity of instructions, and consistency in the test format. In contrast, the "Ideal" reflects how test takers are expected to respond to the test questions, such as writing their answers on a specific line, matching items, or entering answers into designated boxes or in a table (ibid). The lack of these visual literacy skills makes it challenging for LESLLA learners to navigate test questions and respond in the expected manner as suggested by Roberts & Philip (2006).

While assessment is a vital part of the learning journey and LESLLA learners are facing challenges when taking the reading assessment in the Pre-A1 ESOL provision, other equitable assessment method could be taken into consideration by teachers when assessing this population. Thus, the next section will explore the performance-based assessment as a method that could potentially be more equitable when used to assess LESLLA learners.

2.5.7 Performance-Based Assessment (PBA)

Performance-based assessment is a vital part of the learning journey, enabling learners to understand their performance while allowing educators to provide necessary support. This evaluation approach emphasises the application of knowledge in real-world contexts rather than simply testing what students have learned (Hibbard et al., 1996). Through activities such as presentations, experiments, and simulations, students demonstrate their understanding by applying their knowledge in practice (Griffith & Lim, 2012). The benefits of performance-based assessment include increased relevance and real-world application, as they allow students to apply what they know to realistic situations, bridging the gap between theory and practice (Blaz, 2001; Griffith & Lim, 2012). Additionally, these assessments enhance critical thinking skills by encouraging learners to analyse information and make decisions, which fosters problem-solving and creativity. They also support personalised learning, catering to diverse learning preferences and enabling students

to showcase their understanding in ways that align with their unique strengths and interests (Griffith & Lim, 2012). Furthermore, performance-based assessments promote collaboration and communication skills, as students often work together to solve problems, sharing diverse perspectives. Unlike traditional assessments that can induce stress, performance-based assessments engage students in meaningful tasks, promoting active participation in the learning process (Blaz, 2001).

There are several types of performance-based assessments, including project-based assessments, in which students complete projects demonstrating their understanding of complex concepts; portfolio assessments, where students compile work over time to show progress and understanding; simulation assessments that involve role-play or immersive scenarios reflecting real-world situations; and authentic assessments, in which students actively engage in the subject matter to prepare for future careers (McTighe & Ferrara, 1998).

Having noted that educational testing has been criticised for its unfair impact on LESLLA learners, many believe that new assessment methods will result in more equitable outcomes. While performance-based assessments have not been explicitly suggested as an alternative for this group, its focus on assessment for learning could be useful with this population, as it focuses on the process of learning instead of the final results (Earl, 2012). Darling-Hammond (1994) contends that alternative assessment methods, including performance-based assessments, are not automatically equitable. She emphasises that educators need to be mindful of how these assessments are utilised. Darling-Hammond (ibid, p. 5) advocates for policies that promote "top-down support for bottom-up reform," wherein assessments provide teachers with practical insights into student learning and create opportunities for school communities to engage in a continuous process of self-reflection, critique, correction, and renewal. Ultimately, the equitable application of performance assessments relies not only on their design but also on how effectively these assessment practices align with the objectives of genuine school reform and high-quality teaching (ibid). This perspective is supported by Earl (2012), who emphasizes the concept of assessment for learning, instead of assessment of learning. In this framework, she underscores the importance of using classroom assessments to enhance student learning. Specifically, focusing on formative assessment can

significantly improve learning outcomes by allowing students to engage actively in their own learning processes (ibid).

2.6 Linking Current Practice to Reading Assessment

Having mentioned earlier that low-literate learners face many challenges while doing a reading test, one of the primary reasons for their failure is their insufficient understanding of the conceptual framework related to the tests they are taking. Such learners are proficient enough to extract meaning from the exam test, yet they did not succeed to demonstrate their ability because of the test itself. Reflecting on Kortez's (2008) three key factors that influence validity, the issue in the case of low-literate learners is not the inability of test to examine what it is supposed to examine, but rather the test is "measuring something that should not be measured" (Koretz 2008: 220). It appears that the texts in the reading assessments are connected to the learners' prior knowledge; however, certain tasks may impede learners from effectively demonstrating their ability to extract meaning and comprehend the text (Allemano, 2013). She adds (ibid: 79-80) that while a fundamental principle of teaching literacy to adults is that literacy levels do not necessarily reflect intelligence, it appears that learners with limited reading experience and a lack of supportive social practices struggle to connect tasks with the knowledge they've gained from reading. This makes it challenging for them to show their understanding through reading and writing as more literate learners do. In other words, although the tasks might align with their real-life skills, their complexity hampers their performance in an examination context. Thus, there is a need to reconsider testing methods for learners at this level to create assessments that allow them to truly showcase their abilities. Not only this, but also the use of a clear rubric that reflects that actual progress made by learners is crucial to ensure credibility in assessment.

2.7 Use of Rubric

In recent educational settings, it becomes more popular to use rubrics to assess students' achievements and performance from following the test instructions to writing correct answers to the posed questions (Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010). A student's writing

is not only a measure of their English proficiency but also serves to assess their comprehension of social language represented in reading texts. Furthermore, writing is regarded as a crucial component of nearly all assessments as test takers need to respond to the posed questions by writing. The adoption of rubrics for assessing students' writing stemmed from a widespread frustration among teachers and administrators with conventional grading methods. In the current educational landscape of high-stakes assessments, many educators consistently and confidently utilise rubrics to evaluate student work. This reflects the recognition of rubrics as valuable tools that enhance the reliability and validity of assessments (ibid). However, it is important to highlight that merely implementing rubrics does not ensure effective assessment outcomes (Ross-Fisher, 2005).

Numerous researchers have found that teachers' assessments are more reliable when a rubric is employed (Jonsson and Svingby, 2007). There is no evidence to suggest that using rubrics negatively impacts reliability. As a result, many teachers operate under the assumption that rubrics enhance grading objectivity, especially concerning student writing submissions. Consequently, there is a prevailing belief that assessments conducted without rubrics are more subjective, relying solely on the subjective judgment of the grader and their overall impressions of the writer's style. With this understanding, teachers frequently conclude that utilizing a rubric is preferable to not using one (Spandel, 2006). However, researchers have questioned whether this assumption about rubrics is founded on misguided claims of objectivity or if they merely make subjectivity more apparent (Turley & Gallagher, 2008). It is also worth stating that the use of rubrics might not enhance the reliability or validity of assessments if the raters lack adequate training in designing and applying them effectively (Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010). This shows that those who design the reading assessment in pre-A1 level should be trained to design test tools and use rubric criteria that can ensure fair and reliable assessment to all test-takers, including LESLLA learners. Currently these are no standardised assessment or rubric used in pre-A1 ESOL provision in England. Yet, going forward, the "can do" statements in (LASLLIAM) reference guide, funded by the Council of Europe, can be used at the pre-A1 level as learning goals and benchmarks against which learners can be assessed. LASLLIAM serves as a reference guide aimed at supporting literacy and second language learning for adult migrants. It assists language educators,

curriculum developers, and policymakers in creating, implementing, and enhancing curricula for non-literate and low-literate migrants. LASLLIAM is grounded in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and provides can-do descriptors along with recommendations for learner progression. It also offers a descriptive framework outlining potential learning and teaching objectives. The guide is designed for adults who cannot read or write in any language or who struggle to use literacy for basic daily tasks (Minuz, et al., 2022). This study has utilised two of the technical literacy descriptors in LASLLAIM, namely the print awareness and reading descriptors as the focus of this study is on the reading assessment (see appendices 7 & 8). Both descriptors will be unpacked in chapter 5 when used to evaluate the participants' reading skill in the reading pre- and post-tests.

To investigate the suitability of the reading assessment to LESLLA learners, it is important to consider the views in literature regarding the validity and reliability of assessment.

2.8 Validity and reliability of assessment /Justice and fairness

2.8.1 Validity in General Assessment

Validity according to Carmines and Zeller (1979) is the extent that tests measure what it aims to measure. The validity of tests can be undermined by three key factors as Kortez (2008: 220) state; the validity of test can be affected if it fails to measure what is meant to measure, if it measures something different "that should not be measured" and if the test is used in a way that compromise its validity. This research is focusing on the second factor because low-literate learners' performance is influenced by their need to "skills unrelated to the intended construct" (Allemano, 2013: 72). The validity and reliability of assessment is crucial, especially when assessing low-literate adult learners because such learners lack the testing literacy, and, in most cases, they lack the basic knowledge in their L1, let alone the L2. This means that in the examination process, where the "intended construct" is the comprehension of the written texts, the results will be distorted by the candidates' lack of prior knowledge, lack of test literacy or inability to comprehend the rubric's language (ibid).

The theoretical foundation of language testing depends on validity theories that have been developed in the literature's general measurement. Such theories are mainly

based on the concept that assessment's aim is to determine the level of abilities and knowledge of learners through small evidence of their performance, especially the evidence that can be collected through formal tests. The assumption of the validity theory is that the gathered evidence from tests might provide misleading information about the learners' actual level in the tested subject. In other words, there is a doubt that test scores are meaningful because tests are not accurately testing what they are supposed to do, or the test scores might be misinterpreted. Therefore, test developers and researchers of language testing need to dispel those doubts and reveal the likelihood of the occurrence of errors in the test scores' interpretations (McNamara, 2010).

Various complex issues in the test's validity have been highlighted when recent discussions have dealt with the topic of using language tests in politically and socially controversial contexts. Recent studies on the validity of language testing were motivated by social concerns about ensuring fairness in assessment procedures, which took two distinctive forms (McNamara, 2010; Carlsen, 2017; Bruzos et al., 2018; Rocco et al., 2020). First, individuals might not be able to show their knowledge and abilities by construct-irrelevant elements like the characteristics of people who are rating the test-takers' performances, the tasks set and the test items that are badly worded (Bruzos et al., 2018; Rocco et al., 2020). Second, certain groups of test-takers who are exposed to the same test can face systematic bias, such as when the test formats favour a certain gender over the other or groups with certain cultural background over the other (Carlsen, 2017). Some test takers can be vulnerable to certain factors when being assessed, such as the types of tasks used in the assessment, the rubric used, and the training of those who are responsible for rating have as well as the quality of their evaluation (Rocco et al., 2020). These factors raise the concerns for the fairness of these assessments and this topic becomes a fundamental concern for the test validity theorists (McNamara, 2010). Fairness, as a term, can be used narrowly to refer to the test scores only. Yet, fairness can also include the concept of ensuring that the success of candidates in tests is not affected by irrelevant aspects or inadequate representation of the test construct (Flores, 2020). Candidates' right of fairness should be considered when being assessed; test fairness does not only mean treating candidates equally without psychometric bias, but it also means ensuring the empirical validity of score inferences of tests in order to build a

defensible and reasonable evaluation of the level of test takers (ibid). Test fairness also includes considering the usage of the test scores, the consequences of the test results' interpretations and the political and social values that are implicit in the construct of the test (Kunnan, 2004). Kunnan has defined the concept of justice in tests when the test takers are being treated equally in respect, the test "have comparable construct validity in terms of its test-score interpretation for all test-takers", is not "biased against any test-taker groups, in particular by assessing construct-irrelevant matters" and it has a positive impact on society without being harmful or detrimental to society" (ibid: 3). Kunnan (2014) adds four sub principles that explain the main principle of treating all test takers equally. The first sub principle states that learners should be given the opportunity to learn the skills and knowledge on which they will be assessed. The second sub principle states that the interpretations of test scores ought to be meaningful and consistent. The third sub principle indicates that no bias should be made against any test taker group, especially by assessing matters that are construct irrelevant. The last sub principle states that assessments need to use appropriate standard setting, access and administration in order to make equitable decisions to all test taker groups. In addition, two sub principles explain the principle of providing justice in society by public reasoning. The first sub principle indicates that assessment institutions should have positive social impact to bring benefits to society. The second sub principle states that assessment institutions need to establish justice through the assessment public reasoning (Kunnan, 2014).

Having discussed the concept of validity in assessments in general, it is vital to shed the light on how validity can be maintained in language testing, especially in the ESOL context, with focus on clear distinction between test fairness and test validity.

2.8.2 Validity in the ESOL Assessment

The distinction between test fairness and test validity is crucial in assessing the effectiveness of assessment tools for LESLLA learners.

Test fairness refers to the extent to which assessments provide equal and just opportunities for all test takers (Kunnan, 2004), particularly those from diverse backgrounds like LESLLA learners. This fairness can be compromised by irrelevant factors such as rater bias, poorly designed tasks, and ambiguous test items (Bruzos et al., 2018; Rocco et al., 2020), which hinder these learners from accurately demonstrating their knowledge and skills. Additionally, test formats that favour literate

individuals create systematic bias (Carlsen, 2017), potentially leading to negative consequences for LESLLA learners, such as exclusion from mainstream education and challenges in securing residence permits (Rocco et al., 2020).

In contrast, test validity pertains to the degree to which an assessment accurately measures what it is intended to evaluate. The validity of the assessment tools in question is questionable because they are often designed by inexperienced test creators without adequate training to address the specific needs of LESLLA learners (Allemano, 2018). Moreover, the tools often lack clear contextual clues necessary for comprehension, which impacts the reading process and increases the cognitive burden on learners (Khalifa and Weir 2009; Altherr Flores, 2021a). As a result, tasks that align with real-life skills may still present complexities that hinder performance, further questioning the validity of how reading abilities are assessed (Altherr Flores, 2021b). In summary, while fairness emphasizes equitable access and representation in assessments, validity focuses on the accurate measurement of intended constructs. Both concepts are vital in ensuring that assessments for LESLLA learners are effective and just.

Language testers have social concerns about the fairness of tests in the validity theories in language testing. This professional responsibility that language testers has been found in the codes of ethics (Davies, 1997b, 2004a; International Language Testing Association, 2000). However, Cronbach (1988) and Messick (1995) have expanded the validity concept to include the tests' social dimensions. Language testing researchers have found this social responsibility problematic because tests are essential in implementing policy, over which testers have no control. This matter becomes more complex because the social values of tests are usually implicit, and they are not explicitly acknowledged to everybody; and they are not debateable as well (McNamara & Ryan, 2011). Cronbach (1988) and Messick (1995) have both raised concerns about fairness in validity theories in language testing. Their work has focused on the importance of investigating reasonability of the judgment drawn about test takers in the assessment, stating that such judgments can be inaccurate and can cause unfair decisions. The concerns were raised due to the fact that policy initiatives are responsible for the wording of standards, which becomes increasingly central in language tests. The fact that the test standards are set by policy acts have changed the nature of language tests. In the past, test developers used up-to-date theories of

communicative interaction, language proficiency and of the way language knowledge and other educational and professional competence intersect and interact with each other to define the test construct when working on a procedure that provides proof relevant to it. This phase of test development has been ignored recently and been replaced by policy procedures that determine the standard wording and the test construct. It becomes less likely to use relevant evolving theories within applied linguistics that discuss the communicative interaction and language proficiency topics to shape test constructs. This is happening for two main reasons. First, language testers and applied linguists are no longer responsible for test constructs recently; test constructs are policy authorised. Second, in some cases, persuasive case can be done for a change, but this change is political rather than academic, and language testers and applied linguists are not experienced in policy work that is required. That causes the lack of adaptability and rigidity (McNamara, 2010; Bocco, et. al., 2020).

The CEFR for Languages is a clear example of this point. The framework wording reflects clearly the values and policies of its sponsors. The CEFR has been developed by the Council of Europe in the 1970s, when the Council was developing their practices of language study and its achievements, which was independent on certain languages' structural particularities and based on labour mobility and interpretable and transportable credentials' interests. The Council depended on critical policies to develop functional syllabus and define the syllabus's level in a functionalist way, which had a profound impact on communicative language teaching (CLT) in its European version (McNamara, 2010). In this way, the functionalist orientation of the CLT and the assessment framework that is connected with it reflect the globalisation values. In other words, policy, rather than education, is determining the outcome specification of language education and language test construct (ibid). Moreover, the framework formulation, that can be sometimes reduced to certain numbers, like A1, A2, are specified to meet the needs of those responsible for the education system and its accountability for the assessment institution of educational achievement, including language assessment. In other words, the goals of each institution become central to the framework formulation (ibid).

Another example can be seen with the increased requirements to demonstrate national language proficiency that is required from immigrants who seek to integrate in a new society, gain the right to settle permanently and subsequently become

citizens in the host country who enjoy the right to vote and access certain social benefits (McNamara & Shohamy 2008). In Europe, the legislations frame the requirements of proficiency based on the level of the CEFR (Extra, Spotti, & Van Avermaet, 2009). Yet, political discourse studies (such as Blackledge 2009) have emphasised the importance of introducing such requirements and strengthening them. Those studies make it clear that assessments are no longer based on communicative skills but on conforming a national ideology that requires deeper assessment for language proficiency measurements. Therefore, it is not surprising that the validity of tests is affected as the assessment has a political character and they are not determined by language testers. Extra, Spotti, & Van Avermaet (2009) noticed that the CEFR requirements are different from one country to the other as each country concerned has its different political settings.

The previously mentioned factors could make a difference between the performance of literate and low-literate ESOL learners; thus, the validity of the test is endangered. Khalifa and Weir (2008) suggest that the nature of the activities that are included in a reading test need to be examined and compared to reading activities in which learners are engaged in non-test periods. The texts that exist in traditional reading tests for adults are usually removed from their context; besides, to reduce production costs, certain aspects that are related to the design and layout of texts are removed. Different types of questions follow these texts, such as open-ended questions, multiple choice as well as binary choice questions. The aim of reading tests is to assess, including other subskills, learners' understanding of the purpose of the text, its overall meaning, recognising its details, deducing the meaning of unknown vocabularies and deciphering sentence structures. The questions usually start with a view of the task and an explanation to make the task attainable. To develop reading assessment, it is a good practice to keep the questions and rubric language below the reading level that is being tested. However, in a literacy test, they can increase the load of reading and prevent the candidates from understanding the main concept behind the test (Allemano, 2013).

Even though in recent reading tests there is a hard attempt to resemble real life and social situations, some genres can be simulated/emulated easier than others. For example, letters can easily resemble real life letters, while magazine articles are more difficult. However, candidates might face problems because current reading tests

include texts with fewer illustrations and are in black and white; they could be part of a document or a full document, which is confusing for readers in A1 level or below. Furthermore, the exam texts are usually not related to the readers' immediate environment, which increases the complication the learners might face when doing a reading test. The reading test's skilled writers focus on assessing reading skills that learners need in real life. And they somehow succeed to do so. As pre-A1 does not include a standardised assessment (NATECLA, n.d., web), ESOL teachers either design their own materials or adapt the existing A1 level assessment materials developed by present ESOL awarding bodies in the UK, such as Ascentis, City and Guilds, and Edexcel. At the A1 level, which is the lowest standardised ESOL test, candidates in the reading assessment may be required to scan a text to locate specific information, infer meanings of unfamiliar vocabulary, or "follow referencing within a text" (Allemano, 2013: 73). Such skills may be present in the skill set of readers of different languages, but individuals who do not possess these skills in other languages are at a disadvantage when taking a reading test. Learners who take receptive skills tests are expected to complete tasks that involve selecting the correct answer from a set of distracting options, requiring them to eliminate the incorrect choices. Additionally, candidates may need to differentiate between true and false statements or respond to open-ended questions in writing. These tasks can place a burden on candidates in terms of reading and comprehending the instructions, which impacts the validity of the tests. Furthermore, the rubric used in reading assessments can pose a greater challenge for learners than the test itself, exemplifying what Kortez (2008: 221) referred to as the construction of "irrelevant variance", which is regarded as a major threat to validity, particularly for assessments that involve constructed responses and contextualized situations (Geisinger et al., 2013). Referring to Kortez (2008), one of the three key factors that impact validity relevant to LESLLA learners is that the test may be "measuring something that should not be measured" (Koretz 2008: 220). While the texts used in reading assessments may connect to learners' prior knowledge, certain tasks can obstruct them from extracting meaning and comprehending the text (Allemano, 2013). According to Allemano (2013, 2018) and Carlsen & Rocco (2021), the lack of reading experience and social practice support among LESLLA learners prevents them from connecting assessment tasks to the knowledge they have acquired from texts and expressing this knowledge through written answers, as more educated learners might do. In other words, the difficulty of the tasks can prevent low-literate

learners from successfully completing exam questions, even if those questions correspond to their real-life abilities. Therefore, the testing methods used for low-literate learners should be reassessed and enhanced to accurately reflect their true abilities (Allemano, 2013, 2018; Carlsen & Rocco, 2021).

Spiegel and Sunderland (2006) point out that literacy is evaluated in pre-A1 classes through assessments that typically measure skills such as left-right orientation, letter matching, sound-symbol correspondence, distinguishing between words and numbers, word recognition, differentiating between uppercase and lowercase letters, and assessing basic comprehension of letter-sound relationships (Spiegel and Sunderland, 2006). This type of evaluation is referred to as phonological awareness assessment and is mainly aimed at learners with the lowest literacy levels to ensure they can understand meanings derived from sounds in words and sentences. The tasks involved include identifying sounds on a poster, recognizing images based on initial sounds, matching similar sounds, reading simple words, extracting meaning from short texts, and identifying a few common basic genres (Faux & Watson, 2018). While these methods appear suitable for learners who are accustomed to testing procedures, they pose significant challenges for LESLLA learners. The pre-A1 assessments are created internally, and it's important to note that ESOL tutors do not have the expertise of professional test designers, particularly when it comes to LESLLA learners. Because there is no standardised assessment for pre-A1, these internally developed assessments are used to evaluate students' literacy and proficiency levels. Flores (2021b: 157) describes these as "less-than-perfect in-house assessments." These assessments serve as preliminary evaluations to establish learners' levels based on how many questions candidates answer correctly. However, the students' responses are not thoroughly assessed or analysed during this evaluation process (Flores, 2021a). Typically, these assessments incorporate various multimodal elements such as photos, clipart images, lines, numbers, words, boxes, and spaces, in different formats. Scoring usually relies on numerical values, while the format of responses varies according to the distinct layouts and elements of the questions (Flores, 2021b).

Moreover, Deygers (2019) states that assessment cannot be valid if it is not reliable. Thus, the reliability of both general and language assessment will be the focus of the next two sections.

2.8.3 Reliability in General Assessment

It is widely recognized that a quality assessment must be valid, which means that the scores derived from it should allow for appropriate conclusions and that the assessment fulfils its intended purpose equitably. Additionally, assessments need to be reliable; they should minimize errors and produce consistent results across different administrations. In contrast to validity, reliability is a more specific concept.

Reliability pertains to the degree to which an assessment is devoid of random errors (Li, 2003). In other words, it assesses the proportion of score variation that is associated with the construct being measured (Jones, 2012). Reliability can also be understood as the consistency and dependability of the assessment, and it is typically assessed through statistical methods. One common statistic used to evaluate reliability is coefficient alpha, which is defined as "the proportion of test variance attributable to common factors among the items" (Cronbach, 1951, p. 331). Essentially, as the correlations increase between test items and between a specific item and a respondent's overall score, the alpha value also rises. Coefficient alpha is particularly useful in situations where repeated measures aren't possible, but it is mainly applicable to unidimensional assessments, which are becoming less common due to the rise of multidimensional, interactive assessments, and assessments that combine teaching and learning (Mislevy, 2004). Nonetheless, a high alpha value and general reliability continue to be essential criteria for evaluating the quality of an assessment (Sinclair & Lau, 2018).

Reliability of an assessment can be determined by the consistency of results on repeated tests, which measure the same knowledge and skills in the same way each time it is used (Carmines and Zeller, 1979). In other words, the consistency and dependency of the measurement of certain characteristic is what reliability refers to. A test can be considered reliable, when the same person repeats the same test that measures a specific aspect and gets similar scores. Measurement errors might randomly affect the score of a learner in the process of assessment. The reliability of an assessment can be determined when the scores are not affected by such measurement errors. The reliability of assessment tools is a significant aspect because it would produce consistent, dependable and repeatable information about individuals, which provides useful information for employment related decisions. It is

also worth mentioning that the reliability of an assessment does not necessarily mean that it is valid, yet then assessment cannot be valid if it is not reliable (Deygers, 2019).

Even careful planning to exam questions might still cause an exclusion to some test takers due to inconsiderate designs. This can incur unreliable tests due to the high error rate in test scores. If that happens, then different accommodation should be provided to disadvantageous test takers to compensate them for the unfair opportunity that the test might cause (ILTA, 2007). This usually include some compensatory tools to be provided to candidates with visual impairment or dyslexia, for example (Abedi 2014). There is relatively little research has been done on the fairness of assessment of low-literate or low-educated learners, who constitute of a fundamental proportion of the test-takers in language and citizenship tests (Carlsen 2017). Moreover, the procedure considered for rating can have an undue impact on the scores of test takers. An early study done by Latham (1877) about the fairness in language assessment, including the relationship between rater's experience and reliability, shows that this topic has been the focus of studies a long time ago. The rater severity, behaviour and consistency play significant roles in language assessment because raters' evaluation might affect the reliability of test one way or another, even if training has been provided to raters (Elder, Knoch, Barkhuizen & Randow, 2005). Neither the rating scale, nor the intuition can guarantee reliable scoring (ibid). Moreover, the reliability of rater is usually not fixed; yet the outcomes from the interaction between the rater's experience, the form of rating scales, the differences among people and the criteria's quality are (Weigle 2002; Barkaoui 2010; Galaczi, Ffrench, Hubbard, & Green, 2011; Fulcher, Davidson, & Kemp, 2011; Isaacs and Thomson 2013).

2.8.4 Reliability in ESOL Assessment

Reliability, in its broad concept, has been a significant topic in the history of research in language assessment and it has been the core of statistical and technological innovations in the study field. Yet even though such methodological innovations are vital, and despite the research that has been going on for the last 150 years on this topic, there is no agreed method to eradicate bias (Deygers, 2019).

In language tests, constructs usually pertain to various facets of language proficiency. Nevertheless, they can also be associated with elements of content or subject matter knowledge (Bachman & Palmer, 2010). It's important to highlight that constructs usually originate from a source or "frame of reference," like a course syllabus, which

aids assessment designers in putting the constructs into practice (Bachman & Palmer, 2010, p. 211). Within the literature on language assessment and testing, the term "criterion" is often encountered concerning what should be evaluated (e.g., Council of Europe, 2001; Stoynoff, 2009). End-of-instruction assessments are primarily represented as overall achievement grades, assigned by each subject teacher at the conclusion of the academic year, based on different types of classroom evaluations. In language assessment, this include assessing the reading skill, which is the focus of this study. In language assessment in the ESOL provision, reading assessments for A1 level and above are based on standardised assessment as well as common tasks and rating scales (see Bedford, 2003; Khalifa & Ffrench, 2009; Stoynoff, 2009). However, for pre-A1 level, the subject curriculum serves as the foundation for testing. Due to lack of a national curriculum at this level, neither the assessment is standardised, nor the tasks and scoring rates used to assess across the country are common (Allemano, 2013). In contrast, each ESOL provider use their in-house designed tests and success criteria to determine if learners are ready to move to the next level (Day & Naeb, 2022). As testing in pre-A1 level is not standardised, it is left to the ESOL tutors/managers to determine the test tasks and rating scales. While those might be experienced ESOL tutors, they are usually not trained or prepared to design test tasks that ensure fair assessment for all test takers. This could include LESLLA learners as they make meaning from test instructions in a different way compared to literate test takers (Flores, 2021). The lack of teachers' experience and knowledge to design test tools can affect the reliability of the assessment and would result into unfair assessments being run in this level to some test takers, like LESLLA (Carlsen, 2017).

McNamara and Roever (2006) believe that fairness is one of the biggest issues that cannot be easily handled in assessment because there is no specific formula that can be used for fair testing. Yet, Deygers (2019) argues that although fairness cannot be eradicated, it still can be contained. The difficulty of the tasks prevents low-literate learners from successfully completing them during exams, despite the fact that these tasks may align with their real-life skills. Therefore, the assessment methods for low-literate learners should be reevaluated and improved to accurately reflect their actual abilities (Allemano, 2013, 2018; Carlsen & Rocco, 2021). To be able to reflect on the

validity and reliability of the reading assessment in pre-A1 ESOL level, this study focused on examining the topic from key stakeholders' points of view.

2.9 Summary of Literature & Contribution of this study

Most ESOL organisations in the UK have highlighted the importance of supporting language learning to promote the social integration of migrants, primarily due to the ambiguity in national policy regarding ESOL provision (NATECLA, 2016). The current UK government policy requires that all adults pursue a qualification in post-16 education in England, including ESOL courses. Consequently, providers are obligated to offer courses that lead to Skills for Life qualifications, which entails assessments to measure learners' progress and readiness for advancement according to national standards, as well as to secure funding based on evidence of learner success. However, assessment presents challenges for LESLLA learners (Simpson et al., 2008; Allemano, 2013).

Over the past few decades, many awarding bodies have developed effective practices for assessing the English language skills of higher-level ESOL learners (see Bedford, 2003; Khalifa & Ffrench, 2009; Stoynoff, 2009). Nevertheless, there is less focus on pre-entry assessments compared to higher ESOL levels (Allemano, 2013). It is undeniable that there is a considerable number of refugees who are illiterate or low literate and according to a report done by Robinson (2017) it is found that such learners need to start from a pre-entry level or pre-A1 level according to the CEFR to develop their literacy as they possess no English knowledge, or literate skills in their own language; most do not know how to use sophisticated learning skills and are not used to being in a formal learning setting. Therefore, ESOL classes now include a variety and a big number of learners with a big diversity that can be noticed in their educational background, schooling experiences and their command of literacy to their first language (Simpson, 2016). According to Robinson's Report (2017), LESLLA ESOL learners often lack certain knowledge and skills that literate learners possess, such as metalinguistic knowledge, an understanding of language functions, structure, and usage from a functional perspective, as well as educational and study skills gained from participation in academic settings (Allemano, 2013). Additionally, ESOL courses in the UK are accredited (Higton et al., 2019), highlighting that the examination process is a significant barrier for assessing LESLLA learners, who are often unfamiliar with

formal testing environments. Thus, the accreditation policy creates further challenges for these learners (Allemano, 2013; 2018).

When standardised tests are used for assessments, the definitions of what should be measured, and the methods of measurement are well established (Faux & Watson, 2018). However, pre-A1 provisions are less formal than higher ESOL levels, as they lack accreditation and do not have standardised tests available in England (Education and Training Foundation, 2019). As a result, each institution develops its own assessment criteria during the initial registration process to evaluate new students' English proficiency levels, along with ongoing assessments that monitor learners' progress and facilitate promotion (Allemano, 2018). However, the assessment practices used may not be based on research, raising questions about their validity (Allemano, 2018). Furthermore, the methods for demonstrating broader learner achievements are not adequately developed (Education and Training Foundation, 2019).

Even though recent studies have studied the topic of fair assessment to low-literate ESOL learners (Bagna, et al., 2017; Carlsen, 2017; Carlsen & Rocca, 2021; Altherr Flores, 2021; Gonzalves, 2017; O'Sullivan et al., 2021), this research has added to the increasing research on fair assessment for low-literate ESOL learners by focusing on the opinions of all stakeholders involved in the assessment process, namely learners, teachers and managers. The study has also analysed the materials used in assessing learners and study how effective they are in assessing the progress of learners. By doing so, the study has investigated how valid and reliable are the assessment criteria used in pre-A1 ESOL classes with low-literate learners and then generate agreed assessment criteria for pre-A1 level that will help ESOL teachers to assess their low-literate learners prior and post the course.

In order to examine the fairness and effectiveness of assessment tools in the pre-A1 level to low-literate learners, three methods have been used to collect the data in a participatory action research design. The materials that are used to assess this group of learners have been analysed using a multifunctional semiotic analyses method. Furthermore, the perceptions of the ESOL stakeholders have been investigated through open-ended questionnaires and the effectiveness of assessment has been

studied by applying a pre-test post-test method. Those tools have been fully discussed in the next chapter. This research aims to answer the following questions:

2.10 Research Question

1. What are the views of stakeholders (ESOL Managers, teachers, etc.) on the following assessments?
   a. Initial assessment
   b. Tracking progress/ learning gain (summative, formative)
   c. Level promotion
2. What are the existing materials that are currently used to assess low-literate learners?
   a. Initial assessment
   b. Tracking progress/ learning gain (summative, formative)
   c. Level promotion
3. What are the criteria used to design the assessments?
   a. Initial assessment
   b. Tracking progress/ learning gain (summative, formative)
   c. Level promotion
4. How effective are these assessments in relation to assessment tasks based on phonological awareness (the phonemic awareness and the grapheme morpheme correspondence GMC)? To what extent are those materials suitable for the low-literate students' level?
5. How effective is using rubric specifically designed to assess the progress of learners in capturing their progress?

3 Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, various studies have discussed the topic of assessment and low literacy such as Altherr Flores (2021); Carlsen & Rocca (2021); Gonzalves (2017) & O'Sullivan et al. (2021) and this research has added to the increasing research on fair assessment for LESLLA ESOL learners. Based on a phenomenological theory and Participatory Action Research (PAR), this study has focused on the involvement of all stakeholders involved in the assessment process, namely ESOL LESLLA learners, teachers and managers in order to ensure fair assessment for such learners.

This study aimed to, first, explore ESOL teachers and managers' points of view regarding the assessment process at this level to understand practitioners' views and needs for change in the assessment system. Second, it aimed to investigate the suitability of the reading assessment tools to LESLLA learners in pre-A1 ESOL classes in England through analysing the reading assessment materials and criteria used by ESOL providers and investigating how effective they are in assessing the progress of learners. Third, this study measured LESLLA learners' progress in phonemic awareness after a course of a 3-month intervention and compared this to their pre-test results. Last, the rubric used by colleges has been compared to the newly established reference guide by Council of Europe LASLLIAM to compare the suitability of the former. Therefore, as stakeholders involved with LESLLA learners were participants in this research, the participatory action research was the best that can serve the aim of this study. By doing so, the study has investigated how valid and reliable are the assessment criteria used in pre-A1 ESOL classes with LESLLA learners and then generated agreed assessment criteria for pre-A1 level that will help ESOL teachers to assess their low-literate learners prior and post the courses.

To achieve these aims and answer the research questions, it is essential to utilise a research design and data collection tools that are suitable for answering the research questions, which is an overall plan to solve a specific problem and relate it to relevant empirical research (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2002; Bryman, 2016). The design of the research needs to be aligned with the paradigm that is being used in the research and

the research methods need to be chosen based on strategic choices to be able to investigate the problem in the best way. Although there is no right or wrong method for a research, researchers need to consider the best method that provides the best answer to the research questions (Gerson & Horowitz 2002; Phakiti & Paltridge, 2015). This chapter will discuss the epistemological and methodological stances of the research, illustrate the research methods and justify the data collection methods used in this study. Subsequently, this chapter presents the data analysis process, ethical considerations and limitation of the methodology, and it will be concluded with the chapter summary.

3.1 Philosophy of Research

A philosophy is "a basic belief system or world view that guides the investigation" (Guba & Lincoln 1994: 105). A piece of research is a source of knowledge development, and it is divided into a process in which data about a specific phenomenon is collected, analysed and then presented. The main essence of research philosophy is the awareness of the formulations of assumptions and beliefs because in each stage of a study, assumptions about the nature and source of knowledge are essential. The research philosophy attributed to the research, the research strategy applied, and the instruments employed can all determine the way research is conducted in pursuit of the objectives of research to find an answer to the research question.

The practical implications of each research are the main determiners of the choice of research philosophy. As it is becoming more popular and advisable to integrate both qualitative and quantitative research methods (Walliman, 2017), both interpretivist and positivist research philosophies have been involved in this research. Therefore, the pragmatic philosophy approach has been the basis of this study. As this study has utilised mixed method tools to collect data and gain a holistic view of the reading assessment system in pre-A1 level, a pragmatic research philosophy has been used because it is the most suitable philosophy that align with the research aims and objectives. As this study focused on what works best in terms of reading assessment to LESLLA learners to ensure fairness and inclusion to this proportion of learners, pragmatism allowed the incorporation of several data collection tools to answer the research questions (Creswell, 2021). This allowed dynamic as well as innovative ways

to find solutions to the main issues investigated in this study; mainly the suitability of assessment tools to LESLLA learners. This pragmatic research had involved various stakeholders to study a real-life situation, aiming to find the best practice that allows fair assessment to the studied participants. Pragmatism as a philosophical approach allows the integration of both positivist and interpretivist because it has been suggested that the world can be interpreted by different ways. Thus, the combination of more than one approach can provide a broader view to the studied phenomenon (Creswell, 2021).

Pragmatism is a flexible approach because the values of the quantitative and qualitative data are acknowledged in this philosophy (Brierley, 2017). Pragmatism acknowledges the importance of constructivism and positivism epistemologies (Riazi and Candlin, 2014) as it supports the use of quantitative data to measure the progress made by LESLLA learners, while adopting qualitative data that explores subjective teachers' experiences and attitudes toward the currently used assessment tools, in addition to exploring the complexity of assessment tool materials that are suitable for LESLLA learners. This balanced merge of methods enabled the researcher to answer the multilayered research questions and positively contribute to the studied educational context.

3.2 Research Paradigm

3.2.1 The Phenomenological Interpretative Approach Theory (Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis)

This is phenomenological research that aimed to seek a clear understanding to the phenomenon of reading assessment based on the lived experiences of ESOL managers and tutors as well as LESLLA learners to get a deep insight on how this phenomenon has been experienced by those participants. Therefore, this research is based on a Participatory Action Research (PAR) (more justification will be provided in the next section). Even though the researcher is an ESOL tutor to the pre-A1 level including LESLLA learners for few years, the pre-assumptions of the researcher that are related to the phenomenon were suspended when data was collected, analysed and then discussed as suggested by Kvale & Brinkmann (2009).

There are different range of methodologies that can be used to investigate this topic, such as grounded theory, phenomenology, ethnography as well as phenomenography. To justify the choice of the phenomenological theory, it is

important to identify the differences between methodologies. This research is not focusing on the culture of ESOL learners and teachers who are involved in reading assessment; thus, the ethnographic theory was not considered, even though culture could be an aspect that interpret how the phenomenon is experienced. Moreover, no theory was generated to explore the cause of participants' interactions toward the social process; therefore, the grounded theory has not been utilised in this research. Even though phenomenology and phenomenography methodologies both focus on human experience, it is the essence of experience that is aimed to be studied rather than the variations of experiences of assessment in pre-A1 level ESOL classes (Cibangu & Hepworth, 2016). Thus, the phenomenological theory has been used to interpret the interactions and lived experiences of participants involved in reading assessments.

The ebb and flow of the participants' experiences were examined in terms of the suitability of the reading assessment tools used in pre-A1 ESOL classes in England to LESLLA learners and the practice changes required to ensure fair assessment. The use of phenomenological theory has allowed the inquiry about this particular phenomenon and has challenged the unfairness that LESLLA learners experience during the assessment process, by investigating the lived experiences of all stakeholders involved in this process as suggested by Cibangu & Hepworth (2016). This has allowed the sense of consciousness to be examined by seizing any emerging themes that practically take place during the assessment process. This was achieved by examining the assessment tools used at this level, teachers' perceptions about the assessment and how learners approach the assessment tools and respond to them.

Based on the research questions and the process used to collect data and answer these questions; the unique role of this theory has been highlighted as it allowed the researcher to fully engage in an 'intuitional realization' of the phenomenon' (Husserl, 1965, p. 96). As phenomenological research, the findings (please check chapters 4 & 5) have been written based on the 'self-expressive ontology' (DeHart, 2020, p.597) because according to Heidegger (1958), the researcher's bias should be avoided and instead the views and lived experiences of participants should create a trustworthy version of their experience. However, it is worth stating that with the phenomenological approach, the findings are not generalised as they represent the participants' lived

experiences, but this approach allows the development of theoretical understandings to the participants' experiences (McCance and Mcilfatrick, 2008).

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the larger context, different pedagogies have been investigated in this research. Teachers' experiences of designing assessment tools and assessing LESLLA learners have been investigated. Then, samples of the assessment tools used in assessments have been analysed. Later, how LESLLA learners approach exam questions and respond to them have been measured.

The topic of assessing LESLLA learners is an educational aspect that could be a complex and unpredictable procedure because it is a social action that change over time. Thus, this research aimed to clarify the phenomenon by consistently returning to the research questions because the variables cannot be detected until the phenomenology is fully clarified (Merriam, 1995). Moreover, this research is interpretive (hermeneutical) in its nature, rather than descriptive (Slaon & Bowe, 2014) as the research has not transcended the investigated phenomenon, it rather focused on investigating the essences and "searching for their common sense" by suspending the researcher's pre-conception about whether the content of the experience exist or does not exist, which is a process called "bracketing" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 27). In other words, common sense and pre-conceptions about the phenomenon have been suspended to enable an unprejudiced interpretation to "the essence of the phenomena" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 27). In this term, this research has bracketed the researchers' assumptions and has carefully managed the intentional bias before interpreting the voices of ESOL managers, teachers and learners who actively took part in this research. This has been achieved by considering teachers and managers words in the thematic analysis and analysing the assessment tools the teachers use rather than the researcher's tools. By this, the focus has been paid on the object (the assessment tools) and the experiences of participants and their interaction with the object. Therefore, this research has been designed as a participatory action research PAR. This study is exploratory in nature, and there may be a limited number of existing studies investigating this topic using this approach. Therefore, highlighting this gap in the literature, this study aimed to emphasise the significance of this research and its contribution to understanding the subject matter.

3.2.2 Participatory Action Research (PAR) Design

The research design is conceived as the strategy used to collect information wanted to answer the research question, by explaining how the data are collected and what data are needed (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2002).

Sanders (2003) believes that the experiences of individuals can be accessed through three main ways. First, by listening to individuals and deduce explicit information; second, by watching them and deduce tacit knowledge; and third, by looking at their dreams to understand their latent needs. There are several ways to deduce all this information, but with the Participatory Design, the tacit as well as the latent needs can be elicited easily (Sanders, 2003), which is the aim of this study.

This research has been based on Participatory Action Research (PAR) (for example, see Abou-Khalil, et al., 2019; Cooke, et al., 2018; Iversen, et al., 2012; Van Mechelen et al. 2017; Winstanley and Cooke, 2016), which is an approach of enquiry that was first used in the forties of the last century (Cooke, et al., 2015). Paulo Freire (1972), a Brazilian Marxist educator, has developed it and then it was adapted by other educators, such as Elsa Auerbach, an American tutor. The participatory approach has been used in ESOL classrooms to deal with issues related to their classes. Freire used the bottom-up approach in his career as an educator as a replacement of the banking approach, in which teachers are the centre in the learning process and the main source of knowledge in learners' minds. The dialogue method has been advocated to draw the learners' experiences out and build on them to develop a critical understanding of certain linguistic issues. This approach has critically studied the concerns that learners bring into classes, as well as the resources used in ESOL classes (Cooke, Winstanley and Bryers, 2015). The experiences and lives of learners play an integral part in literacy, language and assessment development. Therefore, the participatory approach involves them in action to create change to the designed assessment tools used by ESOL tutors in pre-A1 level. Also, this study calls for an action by policy makers to create standardised assessment for this level with specific measures to allow fair assessment to LESLLA learners and use of the descriptors established by the Council of Europe LASLLIAM to detect the small steps made by LESLLA learners (see section 6.8 for more details).

The use of PAR as a collaborative approach (Cornish, et al., 2023) has involved the key stakeholders in the assessment process, enabling the collection of a holistic view

of the assessment framework that benefits not only the ESOL educators and the researcher but also the LESLLA learners specifically. The rationale for using PAR with LESLLA learners lies in its ability to empower underrepresented group in the research domain, address context-specific challenges, promote collaboration, and develop critical awareness while focusing on practical and culturally relevant solutions to enhance learning outcomes (Pain, et al., 2019; Winstanley and Cooke, 2016). This design has actively involved LESLLA learners in the research process, giving them a voice and empowering them to contribute to discussions about their learning experiences. This participatory approach encourages ownership and agency, fostering a sense of responsibility and investment in their education (Cooke, et al., 2015). PAR has also enabled the researcher to engage with learners in their real-life contexts, allowing for a deeper understanding of the challenges they face, and the progress made during the three-month intervention. This contextual focus has ensured that the research addresses the specific needs and circumstances of LESLLA learners, leading to more relevant and applicable findings (Koshy, 2009). Through the collaborative nature of PAR (Cornish, et al., 2023), LESLLA learners work alongside ESOL educators and the researcher to identify issues, explore solutions, and implement changes to the assessment framework in Pre-A1 course. Engaging LESLLA learners in PAR has allowed for the consideration of their cultural backgrounds and prior knowledge. This approach helped to bridge the gap between existing educational practices and the unique needs of these individuals (Winstanley and Cooke, 2016). Moreover, PAR has encouraged learners to critically examine their real progress in reading and the factors affecting their literacy development. It has emphasized action and practical solutions (ibid). This is particularly important for low-literate learners who benefit from immediate, actionable strategies that improve their literacy skills and overall assessment experience (see section 6.8 for actionable recommendations).

This study has utilised mixed methods, both qualitative & quantitative; thus, it is not merely qualitative research, like Allemano (2013) and Gonsalves' (2017) studies, because Allemano focused on understanding the influence of the exams' format and structure on the performance of learners, while Gonsalves studied the ESOL teachers' perceptions about the ESOL assessment. However, this study has added to this field by investigating the effectiveness of the assessment tools & rubric used by colleges

and ESOL providers in pre-A1 level using different data collection tools. First, the study has focused on the opinions of the key stakeholders involved in the assessment process, namely LESLLA learners, ESOL teachers and managers. Second, the materials used in assessing pre-A1 learners have been analysed to investigate their suitability to LESLLA learners. Third, the progress made by LESLLA learners during three months of intervention has been measured using phonemic awareness pre- and post-tests. Last, the rubric used by colleges has been compared to the newly established reference guide by Council of Europe LASLLIAM to compare the suitability of the former. Therefore, as key stakeholders involved with LESLLA learners were participants in this research, the PAR was the best that can serve the aim of this study. Although some studies (Carlsen, 2017) used action research rather than a participatory one, but this study involves the learners themselves that share the same literacy background. This approach involves the work of both participants and researcher to comprehend a certain problem, analyse it and create a change. Creating change is the main element on which the PAR approach is based (Mackey & Gass, 2016). Such research is usually context-specific; it focuses on a certain group's needs; it is a single-cycle action research, which allowed for the identification of a problem, implementation of a targeted intervention, and evaluation of its effectiveness while emphasizing the collaborative nature of the process with the involvement of learners. It aims to liberate participants in order to increase their awareness about their case and then take action (ibid). In communities that require participation and then action, the PAR is used to understand the case in the community and seek to cooperatively change it and then reflect on it.

The approach is also experimentally grounded and emphasises on collective inquiry; within this process, communities of action and inquiry focus on questions that are important to participants and researcher (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Carlsen (2017) has investigated the topic of fair assessment to low-literate learners by doing an intervention. Similarly, this study has included an intervention because it has allowed the researcher to understand the impact that the rubric of assessment as well as the assessment structure have on the learners' outcomes. Assessment in low literacy has been studied in a form of case studies, yet this is not the most suitable method to answer the research questions for this study. This study was not a quantitative only study like Carlsen's (2017) study because although the performance of learners in

reading assessment was one of the main aspects measured in this study, it was not the only objective as the study has focused also on the perceptions and attitudes of the key stakeholders in ESOL provision, as well as on analysing the assessment tools used in the reading tests. This study is exploratory in nature, and there may be a limited number of existing studies investigating this topic using this approach. Therefore, highlighting this gap in the literature, this study aimed to emphasise the significance of this research and its contribution to understanding the subject matter.

Adult migrants with low literacy skills often remains unheard, both in the context of language learning research and in their everyday lives. Moreover, when involved as participants in research they are viewed simply as subjects to be analysed, overlooking their individual differences. Research involving such vulnerable populations that seeks to empower them without critically examining existing power dynamics often ends up perpetuating this status quo (Sidaway, 2024). In this study, a group of eight LESLLA learners who were frustrated due to low self-esteem stemming from their inability to answer even a single question in the initial assessment required to join the pre-A1 ESOL course in the Northeast of England actively participated in the research. This involvement empowered them as they took ownership of their contributions to the study. This research has been based on PAR because it allowed the researcher to understand certain behaviour and activities of LESLLA learners in their ESOL tests. Moreover, it has allowed participants to take an active part in different aspects of the study to make changes needed (MacDonald, 2012) in the assessment procedures in ESOL classes for LESLLA learners and take further action to establish a standardised assessment for the pre-entry level in ESOL.

The research's implications allow decisions to be made for an action, which is a crucial stage in PAR. The implications might occasionally indicate that changes and actions are not needed, such as deciding that the assessment that is taking place in colleges in England in the pre-A1 level is adequate, which is an aspect that need to be taken into consideration in this research as stated by Kindon, et al. (2007).

To construct and operationalise participatory action research, more than one method has been used, which involves using quantitative and qualitative data collection tools to triangulate the findings, increase validity and reliability of results and get a comprehensive view of the reading assessment process in pre-A1 ESOL classes for

low-literate learners. In this approach, various methods can be used; qualitative and/or quantitative, which can be distinguished by its contrast with methods that involves reproducibility of results (Cohen, et al., 2012). Therefore, mixed method data collection tools have been used in order to answer all the research questions of this study.

This PAR has followed Lewin's action research model, which involves six main stages that has involved a cycle of planning, action, reflection and then evaluation (Kindon, et al., 2007). This cycle has involved various methods of data collection or new activities, followed by a reflection to assess the effectiveness of each method in meeting the research aims (Stringer & Dwyer, 2005). This includes identifying the problem, gathering data, planning an action, implementing the action, evaluating the results and finally reflecting & analysing (Kindon, et al., 2007).

In stage 1, the researcher identifies the problem by observing that LESLLA learners are having difficulty understanding assessment tasks and often express frustration during reading assessments due to inability to answer or pass a test.

In stage 2, the researcher employs mixed methods to collect data. The process begins with conducting open-ended questionnaire with ESOL practitioners (refer to section 3.3.1.1). Additionally, the researcher collects and analyses samples of the reading assessment tools in use (see section 3.3.1.2). To evaluate current abilities, a short phonemic awareness pre-test is administered, along with a short reading pre-test (both detailed in section 3.3.1.3).

Stage 3 presents that plan action. Based on the gathered data, the researcher decides to implement a three-month intervention aimed at enhancing literacy skills. This involves introduction to new vocabularies the learners require for their day-to-day life, functional use of the language, such as greetings, borrowing books from the library, shopping, healthcare and education topics and there is weekly focus on grapheme phoneme correspondences while learners practice reading to allow them to blend sounds and then words both in writing and orally

The action is implemented in stage 4 by the researcher. Over a three-month period, the researcher implemented the guided reading support in the classroom. Each week, a different reading topic/new phonemic sounds were introduced, and students practiced it with selected tasks suited to their proficiency level.

In stage 5, the researcher evaluates the results. At the end of the implementation period, the researcher collects follow-up data to evaluate the progress made by

LESLLA learners during the period of the intervention. This includes administering a PAT post-test with similar materials to the pre-test to measure progress in grapheme phoneme correspondence as well as a reading post-test with similar materials to the pre-test to measure progress in their reading ability.

Stage 6 is for reflection and analysis. The researcher analysed the comments and responses from ESOL practitioners to identify the challenges faced while assessing LESLLA learners. This includes reviewing samples of the tools currently used for reading assessments at the Pre-A1 level to evaluate their suitability for these learners. Additionally, the researcher examines pre- and post-assessment results to measure the progress of the learners and assess the effectiveness of the rubric used for evaluating student progress in colleges, comparing it to the LASLLIAM reference guide. Reflections on what worked well and what could be improved for future cycles were also included.

Outcome:

The initial cycle of action research yielded measurable improvements in both the reading test materials and the rubric employed with LESLLA learners. The researcher thoroughly documented these findings and outlined next steps for future cycles aimed at refining the approach and addressing any remaining challenges. Key actions from the PAR include providing training and resources for ESOL tutors to enhance their teaching practices and improve the assessment framework. Additionally, it is recommended that policymakers, educators, and researchers collaborate to enhance the assessment frameworks used at the Pre-A1 level, particularly by incorporating performance-based assessments. The research findings also warrant further discussion regarding their potential impact on national and regional ESOL policies, especially for LESLLA migrants. For actionable recommendations, see section 6.8.

In summary, this single-cycle action research project facilitates the identification of a problem, the collection of data from key stakeholders involved in the assessment process, the implementation of an intervention, and the evaluation of learners' progress—insights that are often overlooked by traditional assessments. It also emphasizes the collaborative nature of the process, involving a marginalised group of ESOL learners.

Sequential cycles built on preceding tasks, or new activities can be adopted, with an evaluation by the researcher for each (Wagner, et al., 2012). According to O'Leary (2004) & Cornish, et al. (2023), in the cyclical procedure, participants work together to identify the main social issue, design an action, gather data, analyse it and then reflect on the action and its possible impact, to obtain knowledge, amend based on their understanding and decide on the next iteration of the action cycle in the future. This study has included one cycle only with the possibility of running sequential cycles implementing the outcomes of this research in ESOL classroom. This cycle appears in the diagram below (adapted from Cornish et. al., 2023).
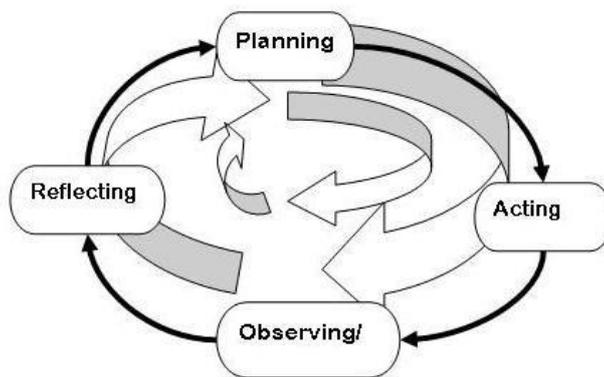
Figure 1 Participatory Action Research Cycle

The methodology of this research has followed the evaluative cyclical process, moving from an action intervention to the reflection. It is an experiential process, in which the methods, collected data as well as the interpretations are refined through reflecting on the outcomes of the cycle. Lewin's modal of action research has been used for this research due to its benefits for this research. This model encouraged ongoing development and flexibility, making it possible to investigate the subject more extensively by layering stages and recognising that initial strategies might become less important due to experiential learning. Consequently, it improved comprehension of a particular educational topic and used this deeper understanding to make informed choices (Koshy, 2009).

This research has included one cycle, which consists of six stages. Planning, action, observing and reflecting took place, preceded by identifying the problem and collecting data as suggested by Kemmis & Mc Taggart (1988). The main issue that this research has aimed to investigate and create change for is the issue of unfair assessment for

LESLLA learners in the unaccredited pre-A1 ESOL courses in England, with focus on the reading skill. These learners often fail their assessment not due to lack of ability to extract information from texts, but because the assessment tools are biased toward literate learners. To address this educational problem, a plan has been designed to identify the problem from ESOL practitioners' views and look into the materials used by practitioners and criteria used to design these material tools to acknowledge the challenges that LESLLA learners face when taking the reading assessment. Successively, a strategic method has been used to support students during their assessment to ensure they can show their level. The following stage includes plan implementation. During the analysis stage, a combination of qualitative and quantitative data was gathered to thoroughly evaluate the effectiveness of the reading assessment tools for LESLLA learners. Open-ended questions in the questionnaires with ESOL practitioners, the analysis to the reading assessment materials currently used in Pre-A1 ESOL classes in England have been implemented. Both data collection tools offered qualitative data, which offers an interpretation to the challenges faced by LESLLA learners when their reading skill is being assessed. Building upon the insights gained in the initial cycle, actionable recommendations were made, which could be used for planning for a future cycle, establishing a process of ongoing refinement and continuous improvement (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988). Findings from this cycle reveals that the reading assessment tools are biased to literate learners and thus inappropriate for LESLLA learners. Based on one of the participant's comments, one-to-one phonemic awareness tasks could be a better way to assess the reading skill of LESLLA learners. Also, another participant has stated the importance of using a framework to assess learners against. Thus, LESLLA learners were involved in a process of measuring their progress, using oral PAT tasks on one-to-one basis. Also, LASLLIAM descriptors have been used to identify that the progress made by this proportion is measurable. An innovative way of assessing and evaluating LESLLA learners' reading ability, phonemic awareness Tasks (PATs) & LASLLIAM Framework, were employed to investigate their effectiveness in capturing the learners' real level in reading. PAT allowed learners to show that they are making progress, but that progress is small and normally not measured with the traditional assessment tools and LASLLIAM, as a reference guide, has provided an insight into how these learners have moved from one level to the other, and that progress is usually overlooked by ESOL practitioners due to the unreadiness of such learners to move to a higher level. After

completing the action phase, it was crucial for the researcher to carefully observe and reflect, remaining receptive to change, and adjusting plans as necessary while implementing ideas (Putman and Rock, 2018). During the analysis stage in this cycle, PATs were used in post-tests and the scores of both pre- and post- tests were compared to measure the progress made by participants. This provided quantitative data has elaborated on the progress made by LESLLA learners during the three-month course. This, then, was followed by a comparison between the traditionally used rubrics in colleges and the technical literacy descriptors from LASLLIAM, including reading as well as literacy & print awareness descriptors, which have provided qualitative data in this research.

To overcome any power inequalities or centralised power, the researcher has the opportunity to establish supportive networks and systems conducive to participatory action research, foster a critical community for accountability, engage in reflective practices, empower others by redistributing authority, and develop confidence in the collaborative process (Pain, et al., 2019). This will further be unpacked in the next section, in which the positionality of the researcher has been analysed .

3.2.3 Positionality

The positionality of the researcher in this participatory action research comes from her being an ESOL practitioner, early career researcher and a person with lived experience in learning the English language to facilitate her integration as an immigrant in England. The aim of emphasising on the researcher's positionality is to acknowledge the researcher as a complete individual, linked to others in a nuanced research connection. It involves analysing how researchers, both as individuals and as a group, influence the research process and its results. By incorporating the researcher and the collaborators' positionalities in research efforts, the research journey can be enhanced, the quality of work can be improved, and the positive impact on those whom the research aims to assist, and benefit would also be enhanced (Bucholtz, 2023).

It is undeniable that the researcher positionality could be an issue of conflict for being personally, professionally as well as scholarly committed to social justice and inclusion in education, which was the main reason why this research has been conducted. Equally significant was the researcher's background as a ESOL practitioner for pre-A1 level in England, and her position as a Syrian with lived experience in learning the

language to facilitate her integration in the host county. Both these positions were of conflict as the study is challenging the unfair assessment that is used in the ESOL provision to assess LESLLA learners. This has positioned the researcher in a conflicting space to investigate the case of unfair assessment from both tutors' and learners' experiences. This has created a mixed experience that was characterised with mixed feeling. At times, the researcher can relate to LESLLA learners' exclusion from the assessment process as she is aware of the consequences of failed assessment in England. Yet, for other times, the researcher understands the struggle of tutors due to lack of training, guidance and support on how to deal with LESLLA learners. This conflict has emerged from disparities in professional norms and way of life, which is a situation that is experienced by Savski (2021). However, it is undeniable that being a researcher from marginalised background is empowering to the community and this research would play a vital role in revealing the potential bias against underrepresented group in the research domain (Bucholtz, 2023). This issue is especially critical in linguistics, where data often originates from racially marginalized communities, yet there is a lack of representation from these communities among faculty researchers (ibid). In this research, it can be argued that the researcher positionality can enhance linguistic research by collaborating with all stakeholders involved in the pre-A1 reading assessment, involving the researcher as a vital partner in this PAR who enrich the research process by leveraging their personal experiences, interdisciplinary education, and language proficiency.

3.3 Data Collection Design

3.3.1 Mixed Methods Data Collection Tools

Qualitative and quantitative data collection tools have been used in this study because both qualitative and quantitative data was required to answer the research questions. The integration of both quantitative and qualitative methods in this study has allowed better understanding and provided a comprehensive image of the assessment process that is used with LESLLA learners in pre-A1 ESOL classes. The qualitative methods include open-ended questionnaires investigating the experiences and opinions of ESOL teachers and managers in England, as well as semiotic analysis to the reading assessment tools used by some colleges in England in the pre-A1 level. The

quantitative method included the use of a pre-test post-test intervention to measure the progress made by LESLLA learners. Please see table 1 for more details:

Table 1 Overview of Data Collection

Methods	Participants	RQs
Questionnaires	25 ESOL practitioners	RQ1
Analysis to reading Assessment tools	10 samples	RQs 2 & 3
PAT pre- & post-tests	8 LESLLA learners	RQ4
Reading pre- & post-test	2 LESLLA learners/LASLLIAM	RQ5

With the use of mixed method tools, researchers can gain a holistic and corroborative view, while avoiding the weaknesses of using each method alone (Cohen, et al., 2012). Utilising mixed method tools has many advantages. One of the most significant ones is the triangulation of all data resources and methods to understand the studied phenomenon. This phenomenon can be accurately studied from different points of view using different techniques and methods. The success of triangulation is usually based on accurate analysis of data from each method, while considering the strengths and weaknesses of each method (Kumar, 2014). The use of mixed data collection tools allowed considering multiple views, positions, perspectives and standpoints to collect comprehensive and rich data (Johnson, et al., 2007). It facilitated the triangulation of results by collecting complementary data and benefitting from the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methods. In addition, the statistical and qualitative findings have been compared and contrasted to understand any contradiction in the findings, and to expand and validate the findings (Amashy, 2016; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). The integration of findings from more than one method gives a holistic image to a complex topic (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011), such as fair assessment to students with complex needs like LESLLA learners. Moreover, it is worth stating that using mixed tools gives flexibility to other researchers who want to adapt the tools of the study to further investigate this topic in randomised or observational studies to clarify more information in future studies (Bryman, 2016). It is worth stating that by using mixed methods, the weaknesses of both the qualitative and quantitative methods can be offset. In other words, the quantitative tools provide objective statistical data by using structured methods and statistical analysis to

measure and analyse variables, but they lack the ability to explain certain educational aspects (Mackey and Gass, 2016). On the other hand, the qualitative tools can provide interpretations to certain aspects, but the data might be subjective (ibid). By using both methods, balanced answers can be provided to the studied topic with the use of certain instruments that are suitable for the context and provide valid answers to the research questions (Hashemi, 2012).

Although mixed-method tools have many advantages, it also has some limitations. This includes the complexity of the research design, the time-consuming materials that need to be designed to collect data, especially as some data collection tools have been adapted following the Covid-19 national lock down to suit distance data collection. Therefore, the study aimed to use semi-structured interviews with ESOL manager and tutor; yet this had changed into open-ended questionnaire. One of the limitations of using mixed methods can be embodied in the difficulty it has imposed on planning data collection, choosing the sample, timing to collect qualitative and quantitative data and then integrating the data together in the analysis process (Wisdom, et al, 2011). Analysing quantitative and qualitative data can be time consuming, complex and require more resources than studies with one method (ibid). This research has used two quantitative and two quantitative data collection tools to answer the research questions. An online questionnaire (quantitative & qualitative) helped to answer research question 1 about ESOL managers and teachers' views regarding reading assessment. A semiotic multifunctional analysis (qualitative) has been used to analyse the materials used in designing reading assessment, which answers research questions two & three about the suitability of reading assessment tools and criteria used to design these tools to evaluate LESLLA learners. A pre-test post-test intervention (quantitative) allowed the researcher to answer research question four to show the suitability of using phonemic awareness tasks to reveal the real progress of LESLLA learners' reading skill. A comparison between the traditional rubric used by ESOL providers and descriptors from LASLLIAM (qualitative) has been used to answer research question five, which focused on investigating the effectiveness of using a rubric specifically designed to capture the small steps of progress achieved by LESLLA learners. The first two data collection tools, the questionnaire and semiotic multifunctional analysis, were used as a set, while the pre- & post-test alongside the comparison between the rubrics were utilised in another.

Thus, the findings and analysis will be presented in two different chapters to reflect the findings and analysis from each phase separately.

3.3.1.1. Questionnaires

Quantitative methods have been used to ensure the investigation with a big sample, as well as the objectivity and the generalisation of results (Mackey & Gass, 2016). The quantitative methods used in this research were an online questionnaire and pre-test post-test intervention.

An online questionnaire has been designed and has been used to collect data from respondents around England who fit into the criterion of working with LESLLA ESOL learners (See appendix 1). The questions included both closed-ended and open-ended questions to collect both quantitative and qualitative data (see appendix one for the questionnaire questions/statements). The questionnaire has provided an answer to research question 1 by reflecting on the views of ESOL managers and tutors regarding the suitability of the reading assessment tools to LESLLA learners. This method has replaced the semi-structured interview method. It has been chosen because it allows collecting data online from a relatively big sample without having to have face-to-face conversation with respondents, which is a practical method in the light of the lock down because of the spread of Covid-19, where no face-to-face meetings were allowed. The questionnaire has been designed to address the aims of the study, and it is made short and to the point in order to be clear and easy to answer. The questionnaire has been generally piloted by one of the researchers' colleagues who is an academic tutor as recommended by Cohen et al. (2011) to ensure the clarity of questions to participants. The questionnaire has also been piloted with one of the target groups for better understanding to the questions by participants. Based on the recommendations of both the academic tutor and one of the targeted participants, the order of the questions has slightly changed, and a misspelled word 'extend' has corrected to 'extent'. The questions have been ordered from general to more specific and the answers of one question is not influenced by previous questions. In addition, the researcher has avoided the use of technical terminology to ensure the clarity and readability of questions by respondents (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

The open-ended nature of the questions allowed the collection of sufficient data from a relatively big sample as stated by Abascal & Diaz de Rada (2014)

The link to the questionnaire has been sent via online forums like ESOL, LESLLA and NATECLA Forum as well as it was sent via email and social media platforms (i.e. LinkedIn) to colleagues and local teachers/managers who are running ESOL classes in the Northeast of England. This has been accompanied by an information sheet and consent form to ensure that participants are aware of the research aims (see appendix 9).

The questionnaire mainly included closed questions that aim to collect data that are pre-decided into categories using the Likert scale. The answers range from strongly disagree into strongly agree to understand the participants' attitudes toward the assessment process to LESLLA learners in the ESOL provision. A neutral option has been added to the scale to allow participants to express a neutral attitude (neither agree nor disagree) toward one or more of the statements of the questionnaire as suggested by Cohen et al. (2012). It is also worth stating that open-ended questions have been added to the questionnaire as suggested by Bryman (2016), but they are optional questions, in which the reason for the participants' agreeing or disagreeing with any of the questionnaire statements has been asked. This allows qualitative data to be added as well. The open-ended questions remained optional in order not to discourage participants from continuing the questionnaire. Yet, this has risked the fact that the feelings and explanations of participants will not fully be investigated in this regard.

Some of the strengths of using questionnaires as a method is that it is economic, involves collecting data from a relatively large sample with less time consumed, which indicates that the results can be generalised because the sample is representative of the population (Mackey & Gass, 2016). In addition, the statements in the questionnaire are standardised because they are presented in the same order, which allows replication of this questionnaire by other researchers to ensure the consistency and reliability of the findings (ibid). Although the open-ended questions remained optional, almost all participants have provided explanations to most questions. Therefore, this method has allowed for quantitative and qualitative data to be collected. At the end of the questionnaire, participants are asked to leave their email address if they wish to be contacted by the researcher for further contribution in the research. Interestingly, a group of 5 teachers provided their phone number and were interested in having an informal conversation to further explore the point of research as they found it a main challenge in their practice with no support or establishment of community of practice

to discuss these challenges. As requested, the phone calls were not recorded, but notes were made to interesting points, and they were included in the interpretations provided in section 3.4.2. These calls allow participants to further explain their answers in the questionnaire and reflect on their need of support when it comes to assessing LESLLA learners.

The researcher has been in touch via email with the 10 participants who added their email addresses and asked them to send a sample of the reading assessment tools they use in their classes in the initial, tracking progress and level promotion assessments. More samples had also been collected from local tutors to which the researcher had access as well as through forums like LESLLA and NATECLA.

The results of quantitative data collected from closed-ended questions in questionnaires were triangulated with qualitative data that has been collected through the open-ended questions in the questionnaire (see chapter 4). Another qualitative method has been used, which is a multi-functional analysis of the assessment tools that investigated the suitability of the reading assessment tools to these learners (see Chapter Four). The qualitative data has provided an in-depth understanding to the studied topic as it gives the chance to teachers, managers and learners to reflect on the topic (Bryman, 2016). The participants' explanations were thematically analysed (see section 3.5 for more details & see appendix 6 for the analysis table) to justify participants' answers of the closed-ended questions.

Participants' answers to open-ended questions have provided comparable data that is reliable and allowed the researcher to investigate the interpretations of participants to the studied topic, which allows the researcher to be in control of the data collection process (Litosseliti, 2018).

The questionnaire was designed to align with the discussions presented in the literature review. It begins by exploring ESOL tutors' understanding of the relationship between L1 literacy and L2 learning (e.g. Artieda, 2017), as well as the challenges faced by LESLLA learners in acquiring L2 literacy (e.g. Kurvers, et al., 2015). It also considers the validity (e.g. Kortez, 2008) and reliability (e.g. Deygers, 2019) of assessments for LESLLA learners.

As the questionnaire progresses, the questions become more focused on the suitability of the reading assessment tools used in initial assessments, tracking progress, and level promotion to LESLLA learners. This focus has helped answer

Research Question 1. Additionally, the questionnaire sought to capture teachers' views on the existing reading assessment materials and the criteria used in designing these tools, which has provided a comprehensive response to Research Questions 2 and 3. Furthermore, the investigation included the use of phonemic awareness tasks (PAT) in assessments and the suitability of the rubric employed, which will provide valuable data to address Research Questions 4 and 5.

Objective comparison between the candidates was established, and filling the questionnaire online has provided a chance for a spontaneous exploration to the studied topic. Not only this, but also participants are given the freedom to express their interpretations using their own pace and words (Bryman, 2016). Even though leading questions have been avoided when designing the interview questions, they might be still biased and infer subjective results. Therefore, the findings will be triangulated with other qualitative findings to reduce subjectivity and bias (Bryman, 2016). This has been reflected in the next section and in Chapter 4.

3.3.1.2 Social Semiotic Analysis of the Reading Assessment Tools

An analysis to the assessment tools used in different institutions in England in pre-A1 ESOL courses has been done to investigate how suitable these tools are for LESLLA learners. ESOL practitioners who left their email addresses at the end of the questionnaire have been contacted to further take part in this research. Those participants are asked to provide the researcher with samples of their reading assessment materials used in pre-A1 level as well as the success and failure criteria of these assessments. Participants were all aware of the lack of standardisation of assessment as pre-A1 is not accredited (Young Scholten & Naeb, 2020). Thus, they have provided different samples of reading assessment which were analysed in this research. Some have provided the links for the assessment tools they usually use, while others emailed their samples to the researcher. It was not possible to analyse all the tools used in assessing the reading skills at pre-A1 level in England, so, examples of each type of assessment have been analysed to provide an overview of the suitability of such examples to assess LESLLA learners. The samples have been categorised as self-designed assessment, online holistic assessment and adapted E1 assessment (See chapter 4 for more details).

The critical multimodal semiotic analysis has been adapted to analyse the reading tests. This analysis method depends on the grammar of visual image (Kress & van

Leeuwen, 2020) and the systematic functional linguistics (SFL) (Halliday, 1978; Pennycook, 2001). The grammar of visual images encompasses the various elements and principles that determine how visual representations convey meaning. Key elements relevant for analysing these materials include lines, which guide the viewer's eye; colour choices; the space surrounding and between activities; and the composition, which refers to the arrangement of visual elements within the frame of each task. Additionally, symbolism plays a crucial role, as visual images often incorporate symbols that carry specific meanings or associations. Finally, hierarchy pertains to the arrangement of elements in a way that indicates their order of importance Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020). Developed by Halliday (1978), Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) emphasizes that language serves three main metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The Ideational Metafunction relates to the representation of ideas and experiences, focusing on how language conveys information about the world, including actions, events, and relationships. The Interpersonal Metafunction addresses how language is used to establish and manage relationships between speakers and listeners; it encompasses aspects such as mood, modality, and engagement, reflecting attitudes and interpersonal dynamics. Lastly, the Textual Metafunction concerns the organisation and structure of information in communication, involving coherence and cohesion within texts, and focusing on how elements are linked together to create meaningful discourse. These elements have also been utilised when analysing the reading assessment sample materials.

Different types of samples were provided by practitioners, and they include questions such as multiple-choice questions, circling the correct answer, matching pictures with letters or words, adding the missing letter to a word and simple comprehension questions that require short sentences to answer. Each genre question has been analysed based on the clarity of question or instructions, the clarity of images or symbols provided with the questions, if modelling answer is provided, the space available to answer the question has been analysed and how could all of these be perceived by LESLLA learners who are becoming literate for the first time but in a different language and they also lack testing literacy has also been considered. In other words, meaning-making for LESLLA learners was the main focus of analysis as such test-takers need to make meaning of the questions and semiotics of tests and answer in a written format. This data collection method is significant as findings would

have positive implications for ESOL practitioners who are designing their assessment tools as they need to understand how LESLLA learners make-meaning from test materials and how they respond to ensure fair assessment for this proportion of test-takers. Critically reflecting on the test materials and criteria can provide an insight on how communication between test-designers and test-takers can be improved, especially if the latter are low literature. Also, this will ensure that framework developers are aware of the LESLLA test-takers needs to ensure that such frameworks are not biased against this group of learners.

This method has enabled the researcher to answer the questions two and three of this research. Data analysis tool is significant for this study because it plays an important part in the scheme of triangulation (Bowen, 2009). It is important to use two qualitative methods when using different data collection sources in a study because it provides evidence that ensure credibility and reduce the impact of bias (ibid). According to Bowen (2009: 33), document analysis is a process of "evaluating documents in such a way that empirical knowledge is produced, and understanding is developed". It is important to state that objectivity has been maintained during the process of data analysis to have valid and credible findings.

3.3.1.3   Pre-test Post-Test Data Collection Tool

It has been established that there are no standardised assessments at pre-A1 level; therefore, each ESOL provider or teacher uses their own assessment tools. Those assessment tools are not designed by specialist test developers, and not suitable for LESLLA learners because they are based on literacy and word level awareness (Day & Naeb, 2022). Previous studies have shown that LESLLA learners may not pass the reading assessment at the pre-A1 level not due to a lack of progress in their reading skills (Allemano, 2013), but rather because they are slower learners compared to their literate peers. As a result, their limited progress may not be accurately represented in the assessments used in colleges across England (Day & Naeb, 2022). Based on this argument, this study aims to investigate the impact of using phonemic awareness tasks PAT to detect the small steps achieved by LESLLA learners to ensure fair assessment for those learners. Thus, using this method allowed the researcher to investigate the extent of which LESLLA learners make progress in reading during 3-month intervention as well as the importance of integrating phonemic awareness tasks

in the reading assessment at pre-A1 ESOL course to help detect the micro achievements made by LESLLA learners in reading.

The selected phonemic awareness tasks—replacement, deletion, phoneme isolation, categorisation, verbal memory, and retrieval—were chosen for several reasons that align with key aspects of developing literacy skills. Each task focuses on specific phonemic skills essential for reading and writing (Saiegh-Haddad & Geva, 2008); for example, phoneme isolation helps learners identify individual sounds in words, which is crucial for decoding (Koda, 2008). These tasks provide measurable outcomes that can reflect changes over time, allowing for the assessment of learners' abilities to manipulate sounds in a structured way and making it easier to gauge improvement (ibid). The variety of tasks ensures that different aspects of phonemic awareness are addressed - replacement tests the ability to substitute sounds, deletion examines the understanding of how removing a sound affects word structure, and categorisation helps in grouping sounds, thereby enhancing the recognition of phonological patterns. Furthermore, tasks like verbal memory and retrieval challenge learners to actively engage with sounds, fostering deeper cognitive processing and retention of phonemic skills. Lastly, these tasks are supported by research on effective phonemic awareness strategies that have shown positive outcomes in improving literacy, particularly for low literate learners (Saiegh-Haddad & Geva, 2008). By selecting these specific tasks, a balanced framework for assessing and enhancing phonemic awareness has been created, ultimately aiming to facilitate overall literacy development (ibid).

Task-based research has been conducted to collect data from learners involved in this Participatory Action Research (PAR). The use of this type of research allowed for a focused examination of the LESLLA learners' reading levels before and after the three-month intervention. Participants engaged in meaningful tasks, which provided insights into their cognitive development of reading skills. Furthermore, it offered a comprehensive understanding of the participants' true levels, and the progress made over the three-month period, which was not captured by the traditional assessments carried out by the ESOL provider. In addition, the task-based research revealed that the lack of consistency in evaluating learners' progress based on subjective profile reports has had an impact on the validity and reliability of the assessments.

To answer research question 4, a phonemic awareness task-based pre-test and post-test method has been used to further investigate whether the participants has improved their reading skill after a 3-month intervention and highlight the importance of integrating PATs while assessing the reading skill of LESLLA learners. This design has been used to allow a comparison between the test outcomes before and after the intervention (Mackey and Gass, 2013) to show whether or not a progress has been made and what type of progress is achieved. 8 Syrian participants took part in this experiment (please see table 1 for biographic information). Pseudonyms were used to keep participants' identities confidential (Cohen et al., 2017). Even though the ESOL class that the researcher taught included 16 learners, only low-literate learners who received 6 years or less of schooling in their hometown have been chosen to participate in this study. Thus, non-randomised sampling has been utilised when recruiting participants as this study investigates the challenges faced by low-literate learners only. Accessing and collecting data ethically from this population can be challenging due to language and cultural barriers. Therefore, the researcher has involved her students in the study because they share the same language and cultural background, which facilitates discussions about the study's purpose and the benefits of their participation. These students, who are low-literate and have firsthand experience in Pre-A1 ESOL classes, have previously failed the college's initial assessment, making them a fitting sample for this research.

The group has expressed significant frustration, believing they have made little progress in their previous courses, which was emphasized by their inability to complete the initial assessment tasks. Their participation in this study is aimed at boosting their confidence, empowering this underrepresented group, and ensuring their voices are heard.

Several steps have been taken to minimise bias in selecting participants for the research. The purpose of the study has been clearly explained using simple Arabic, along with details about the nature of their participation and how the data will be utilised. This transparency helps reduce any misunderstandings that could lead to biased responses. Additionally, students have been assured that their answers will remain confidential and that their data will be anonymised, which can alleviate pressure to take part in this research. A diverse sample population has also been

chosen, including both males and females from various age groups, to ensure a broad representation of perspectives. Students have been clearly informed of their rights regarding participation in the research (see section 3.6 for more details), including their right to withdraw at any time, and that opting out would not affect their standing in the course. Many students view this as a valuable opportunity to engage in one-on-one time with the teacher, considering it extra practice. While the students were assured that choosing not to take part would not affect their pass/fail criteria in the course or any aspect to of taking part in this course, all eight participants approached, gave consent to take part.

Table 2 Participants Biographic Information

Participants	Gender	Age	Previous schooling (in years)	Length of residency UK		Hours of intervention per week
				Years	months	
P1	F	43	6	1	6	4
P2	M	57	5	0	8	4
P3	M	60	6	1	6	4
P4	F	49	3	5	4	4
P5	F	20	5	1	4	4
P6	F	46	4	0	7	4
P7	M	40	6	3	3	4
P8	F	53	3	1	6	4

3.3.1.5 Data Collection:

One group pretest-posttest method was used with those learners using phonemic awareness tasks with an intervention in between the tests to investigate whether or not these learners have made progress. Pre-test was administered at the beginning of a Pre-A1 ESOL course taught by the researcher in the Northeast of England. The course lasted for three months following the first test. The intervention comprises 2 classes a week and each class is 2 hours, so a total of 4 hours a week. In the intervention, learners were introduced to new vocabularies they require for their day-to-day life and functional use of the language, such as greetings, borrowing books from the library, shopping, healthcare and education topics. In each session, there was some focus on grapheme morpheme correspondences while learners practice reading to allow them to blend sounds and then words both in writing and orally. A

post-test using similar materials was administered at the end of the course to measure the progress and compare the difference in performance before and after the intervention (see details below for what pre-test post-tests include). It is worth mentioning that some new tasks were added randomly into the six groups of tasks and the order of questions/tasks was slightly changed in the post-test to reduce the chance that learners answer correctly due to their familiarity with the tasks as suggested by Knapp (2016). Instead, learners needed to show if there was a clear progression in their reading ability.

In both tests, the learners were tested on their ability to break words into phonemes, syllables, sub-syllabic units, rhyme and units. As first-time readers might not be able to show their real level due to lack of some significant skills, such as understanding tasks requirements, semiotic cues and distinctive features of letters (Kurvers &Stockmann, 2009), instructions were given orally using the Arabic language (the researchers and participants' mother tongue) to allow participants to show their real level in reading as suggested by Phakiti & Paltridge (2015). The tests were audio-recorded following the consent of learners for data analysis. The tests were conducted orally rather than in written format because phonemic awareness is related to the grapheme-morpheme correspondence, without which, learners cannot read (Young-Scholten & Naeb, 2010). Both the pretest and post-tests were divided into six groups of activities, which are substitution, deletion of syllables/phonemes, phoneme isolation, categorisation, verbal memory tasks and retrieval tasks, with the total of 24 tasks/questions (see appendices 2 & 3). These tasks have been adopted from Al Otaiba et al.'s study (2012), which applied PAT to study school aged children's readiness to read in English. The task procedure and point calculations are explained below.

In the first group, learners were asked to substitute an initial, middle or last sound of a CVC word with a new sound and then tell the researcher the new word. For example, replace the first sound in the word 'mat' with the sound /s/ and then say the new word 'sat'. Participants were asked to deal with only one diagraph / ʃ / <sh> and replace it with the initial sound of 'mop'. 1 point has been given for reading the initial word correctly, 1 point for being able to replace the sound and 1 point for their ability to pronounce the new word correctly.

In the second group, learners were asked to delete an initial, middle or last sound from CVCC and CVCV words. For example, they were asked to read the word 'cold', delete the initial sound /k/ and say the new word 'old'. Also, they were asked to delete the first or last syllable from disyllabic words like 'sunshine' and say the new word 'shine'. 1 point has been given for reading the initial word correctly, 1 point for being able to delete the syllable/phoneme correctly and 1 point for their ability to pronounce the new word correctly.

Learners need to isolate an initial, middle or last sound from a word in the third group. They were asked to identify the first sound in the word 'rainy', for example. Learners who read the word correctly were awarded 1 point, then 1 point for isolating the sound and 1 point for recognising the sound correctly.

In the fourth group, learners are required to identify the odd word which either has a different first, middle or last sound. For instance, they had to choose which of these words starts with a different sound 'bag, nine, beach'. Three points were given when learners read the words, categorize the odd one and pronounce the different sound correctly.

In the 5th group of tasks, learners needed to remember if a word has been said when the researcher read a group of three words. For example, after reading the words 'boat, ride, seed', learners were asked; 'did I say ride?'. 1 point had been awarded for a correct answer.

In the last group of tasks, learners are asked to repeat a group of six sounds, then 6 words and then give a word that starts with /m/ and ends with /p/. 1 point had been awarded for each sound and word retrieved. Also, 1 point had been awarded for making a correct word, as well as 1 point had been awarded for correct pronunciation to retrieved words.

3.3.1.6 Data Analysis

Data was analysed quantitatively by giving each participant a score based on the correct answer to each question in the test. The scores of the pre- and post-tests have been compared and presented in table 2 (see the finding section) using SPSS software by presenting a comparison between the average (mean) of pretest and post-test scores. In order to check whether these differences are statistically significant and not due to chance, non-parametric related sample T-test Wilcoxon was run and this

test was chosen due to the small sample size of participants (Newby, 2014). The inferential statistics are the non-parametric paired sample t-test Wilcoxon because data is limited due to the sample size that is very small (ibid).

3.3.1.7 Qualitative Analysis to the rubric/LASLLIAM

For further evidence, two shots of analysis have been done in this study; the phonemic awareness pre-test posts-test and another reading pre-test post-test. Two students who totally failed to answer the initial assessment questions done by the college (ESOL provider) were chosen to do the extra task. Following the phonemic awareness pre-test, the two students were asked to read two sets of tasks (words/phrases); one set included 8 words, and the other one included 8 phrases (see appendices 3 & 4).

The design of the reading pre-test & post-test tools was based on the print awareness and reading descriptor on LASLLIAM (Minuz, et al., 2021). Participants had read two tasks, the first one consisted of words and in the second one they had to read phrases. Both the words and phrases have been graded from easy to difficult. Pictures have been added to the words and phrases in the pre-test as each task covered a certain theme (see chapter 5, section 5.3). The words were mainly about furniture in the kitchen while the phrases are about instructions in the library. The addition of pictures helped facilitating the test for the participants and familiarising them with the meaning of words/phrases. The topics were chosen because they were covered in the 13-week course. Words started from CVC words like 'tap' and 'rug' and moved to a more complex ones CVCC/CVCCV words like 'sink' 'lamp' and 'table'. Then more complex phonemic features were added such as words that include the sounds /tʃ/ <ch> and /ʃ/ <sh> like in 'chair' and 'dish' and then participants had to read plural words with the addition of <s> and <es> like in the words 'chairs' and 'plates'. As for the phrases, again the same criteria were applied, and they moved from a two-word phrase like 'no dogs' to more complex and longer ones like the five-word phrase 'put trash in the bin'.

The same was repeated in week 14 of the course (after the phonemic awareness post-test). For the sake of evaluation, the participants' reading was audio-recorded following their consent. The performance of learners in assessment has been evaluated using two different assessment frameworks; one that is used in colleges and the other is LASLLIAM; the Council of Europe Framework for the pre-A1 level's reading skill, in an attempt to reevaluate the outcomes of assessment tools and rubric used with the target participants. To avoid bias, a pre-A1 ESOL experienced colleague

has been asked to evaluate the reading skill of both students in the pre and post-tests, using the same approach used at college by writing a comment showing whether or not she thinks the students had made progress by listening to the recordings of the pre- and post-tests to both students. The same recordings were analysed using the language and print awareness descriptor in LASLLIAM (P.43) (see appendices 7 & 8). This method has investigated whether the assessment framework used at colleges was capturing the progress the learners were making, which also revealed whether the assessment tools and framework were valid and reliable with this proportion of learners and whether the feedback provided to learners is comprehensive & effective or not.

An initial assessment was performed in September 2020 by an ESOL provider in the Northeast of England. Then, a week after, the pre-test has followed after the researcher has built rapport with the participants, inform them about the aim of the research and took their consent. The same was done at the end of the course in December 2020 as the level promotion assessment was done in the 13th week of the course. A week after, the post-test was conducted on the 14th week of the course.

Regarding the evaluation done by the college tutor, a learner profile has been done for each learner individually including a comment about their level at the beginning of the course (see samples in chapter 5), a final comment following their level promotion assessment. While with the LASLLIAM descriptor, a more detailed evaluation to learners' level at the beginning of the course and at the end of the course had been conducted using the print literacy and reading descriptors aiming to show the real and small progress achieved by LESLLA learners (see tables 3, 4, 5 & 6 in chapter 5).

Both assessment frameworks have been used in this study, and the evaluation was repeated after three months of time in order to observe the level of students and how assessment reflects these criteria. A comparison has been done between both evaluations using the two different criteria to see which criteria is better in detecting learners' progress and actual level, offering detailed & comprehensive feedback, and whether the assessment framework used in colleges is reliable or not. These results were compared and contrasted to examine the suitability of the pass/fail criteria at colleges. This has been done after a pre-test post-test intervention to a group of LESLLA learners with comparison to test results in both tests to measure LESLLA

learners' performance in assessment using phonemic awareness tasks (see section 3.4.1.4). Before initiating this process, an information sheet and consent form have been sent to the ESOL manager to do anonymous assessment to 2 LESLLA learners and then link it with the progress of students later, which has been obtained as suggested by Bryman (2016).

There are many reasons why the reading skill evaluation as a method has been chosen in this research. First, learners' recorded performances are practical and manageable documents to be studied that can be obtained from colleges for the sake of research. Second, learners' actual level at the beginning and end of the course of intervention were misinterpreted by ESOL teachers, which makes it a valuable source of data to be investigated. Third, this data collection tool is time and cost efficient, compared to conducting an experiment (Mackey and Gass, 2016) and most importantly, it is suitable for answering the fifth research question. Fourth, data is not reactive source of information, which means that they can be reviewed many times without change by the research process or researcher's influence (Bowen, 2009). Fifth, data analysis is a complementary source of data to the questionnaire applied in this study and it can provide a background information that contextualise the study in the subject field. Last, documents can provide data that is forgotten by participants and is no longer observable. It can also provide a track of development of learners that might not be noticed by teachers, which ensures the criticality and comprehensiveness of findings (ibid).

This tool has also its limitations as stated by Cohen et al. (2012) because it is a secondary data collection tool, which might only provide small amount of information needed to this study or might provide inconsistent information on some occasions. However, the findings have been triangulated with data from other data collection tools to avoid having gaps in the findings. Moreover, it is significant to pay attention to the subjectivity of the researcher's understanding to documents, to avoid bias in analysing data to preserve the credibility of findings. To avoid bias, another experienced tutor has done the first evaluation, while the second one was based on a clear and specific descriptor. Thus, the preparation of the process of analysis has been done to benefit from the advantages of this method and avoid any issues that might rise (Bryman, 2016).

3.4 Data Analysis

Data from each tool has been analysed in a different way. Questionnaires have been analysed quantitatively, using the Google forms and data from the pre-test post-test has been analysed using SPSS software to present the data for the results and discussion chapter as suggested by Verma (2012). The results of questionnaires have been integrated in the qualitative design to compare with the questionnaire data to get an overall idea about the general practice in England. Thematic analysis has been used to analyse the qualitative data from the questionnaire. Thematic analysis, according to Bowen (2009) is a form of pattern recognition, which involves taking any emerging themes and label them into categories that are extracted from the literature review and used for analysing data. This requires focused and careful reading of data after coding it and constructing it into categories (Bryman, 2016). The codes and themes that emerge from this process have been integrated with data that emerged from different methods.

Thematic analysis involved several key steps to systematically identify and analyse patterns within qualitative data. First, the researcher familiarised themselves with the data by reading it multiple times to gain a comprehensive understanding. Next, initial codes were generated by pinpointing significant features or recurring elements that relate to the research questions (Clarke & Braun, 2017), such as teachers' views on the suitability of assessment materials, the types of materials used, and the criteria for designing these materials, as well as the inclusion of Phonemic Awareness Tasks and the rubric applied. These codes were then organised into seven themes by grouping related codes together (ibid). The themes are manually extracted and aligned with the discussions presented in the literature review, which includes topics like understanding the relationship between L1 literacy and L2 learning, challenges faced by LESLLA learners in acquiring L2 literacy, validity, reliability, suitability of the reading assessment tools used to measure LESLLA learners' progress, criteria used to design the assessment tools and suitability of the rubric employed. Once the themes were defined and named, the researcher refined them by reviewing the data to ensure they accurately represent the content. Finally, the analysis was documented, highlighting how the identified themes connect to the overarching research aims, supported by excerpts from the data to illustrate each theme (see Sections 4.2 to 4.8). Samples of the assessment tools that are used in colleges have been analysed using the critical

multimodal semiotic analysis. This analytical approach relies on the grammar of visual imagery (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020) and systemic functional linguistics (Pennycook, 2001). Practitioners provided various types of samples, including questions such as multiple-choice questions, circling the correct answer, matching pictures with letters or words, filling in missing letters, and simple comprehension questions that require brief written responses. Each type of question has been analysed for the clarity of the questions or instructions, the clarity of the accompanying images or symbols, whether a model answer is provided, the space allotted for responses, and how all of these elements might be perceived by LESLLA learners who are becoming literate for the first time in a different language and also lack testing literacy skills. In other words, the primary focus of the analysis was on meaning-making for LESLLA learners, as these test-takers need to interpret the questions and the semiotics of the tests to respond in writing.

3.5   The sample

The study has benefitted from a convenient sampling technique as it focused on low-literate ESOL learners in the Northeast, as well as their tutors and institutions' managers. Therefore, those to whom the researcher had access, have been involved in this study. This study has targeted 8 low-literate ESOL learners to take part in the pre-test post-test analysis of their performance in reading. For the questionnaires, 25 ESOL tutors and managers in England (both males and females) who have the experience of working with LESLLA learners have responded to it whose ages are mostly 36 years and above and have from 2 to 33 years of experience in teaching in the ESOL provision and from 1 to 30 years of experience in working with pre-A1 level (see tables 2, 3 & 4 for full details). The link was sent online through emails, platforms and forums; thus, snowballing technique was used and there was no control over certain criteria other than contacting teachers who are involved with low-literate learners. For the multifunctional analysis,10 teachers from the 25 participants have sent their reading assessment samples. They all have been teaching pre-A1 level in different ESOL providing settings such as colleges and community centres.

Random sampling could not be applied in this study because some of the features, characters and criteria to select participants needed to be manipulated because the focus was on low-literate learners as well as their teachers/managers. In addition, for

the convenience of speaking Arabic as the first language, the research has involved learners who speak Arabic because that has helped the researcher to explain the tasks to participants using the simplest language possible as they might not be familiar with the test tools yet (Cohen et al, 2012).

In the pre-test and post-test intervention activity, eight participants (five women and three men) took part. Their ages range from 40 to 60 years old, except for one participant who is 20 years old. All participants have received little education in their home country, and some has an interrupted education due to relocation when the war commenced. They self-educate themselves and are able to read in Arabic (their first language), but writing might be a struggle for some of them as they use the voice recordings to communicate with the researcher. This has been identified following a L1 literacy assessment conducted by the researcher who share the same mother tongue with participants (Arabic). This has been reassessed by a colleague of the researcher who is a teacher of Arabic, and both have agreed that their L1 literacy ranged between A1 to A2 according to CEFR (see appendix 5 for the assessment text).

Table 3 ESOL Practitioners Years of Experience

Years of Experience in ESOL Teaching	2 to 6 years	10 to 16 years	20 to 33 years
	7 participants	11 participants	7 participants

Table 4 ESOL Practitioners Years of Experience in Pre-A1

Years of Experience Teaching Pre-A1 Level	1 to 5 years	7 to 16 years	20 to 30 years
	7 participants	11 participants	7 participants

Table 5 ESOL Practitioners Age Group

Age Group	18-25	26-35	36-45	46-60	60+
	1 Participant	3 participants	5 participants	10 participants	6 participants

3.6 Ethical Considerations

This study has complied with ethical codes of conduct, as that has maintained the validity and reliability of the study's findings as Mauthner (2002) indicates. Ethical approval has been maintained for this study in March 2019 by the research ethics specialist at Northumbria University. Consent forms were attached in the email when the questionnaire link was distributed to all ESOL practitioners explaining the aim of the study and the way that the information collected will be handled. The forms were also translated into Arabic (see appendix 10) and explained in Arabic to the learners as they are low-literate and might need verbal explanation to the information on the form (Bryman, 2016). All participants were informed that their participation is voluntarily, and they can withdraw from the study at any time, without providing a reason for their withdrawal. The names of participants, as well as the name of educational institutions were all remained anonymous, and data collected is dealt with confidentially as recommended by Bulmer (2008) & Cohen et al. (2017). Pseudonyms have been given to participants for the purpose of data analysis. The names of participants remained confidential, the data collected was treated in confidentiality and has been used for the aim of the research only (Bryman, 2016).

All the data collected has been saved on the secure University server with a password for the protection of information. The data has been processed and analysed by the researcher and then presented in the results chapter of the research. The consent of participants as well as the line manager of the ESOL course were gained after they were briefed about the aims and objectives of this study. An email was sent to a manager of an ESOL providers in the North of England, explaining the aim of the study and seeking approval to take part in this study and seeking approval to conduct anonymous assessment to low-literate learners in pre-A1 ESOL classes as participants. Teachers and managers were given consent forms explaining the aim of the study and clarifying that their participation is voluntary. Then, explaining that once they submit their answers in the questionnaire, they give consent to use their data in this research. No data has been saved on public shared computer, such as the computers provided in the university learning hub. Learners who speak Arabic have been approached as the researcher's first language is Arabic, because participants have to be low-literate and sharing the first language makes the process of explaining the aim of the study easier. Consent forms in Arabic have been provided to those learners and further explanation has been provided to them using the Arabic language to seek their approval through signing the consent form. It is unlikely that participants

would face any discomfort or distress in this study. Should that happen, participants would be assured that they are free to withdraw from the study and their intervals were to be withdrawn form the result chapter too.

For the analysis of the reading test samples, participants were provided with the information sheet again to remind them of the aims of the research, the anonymity of their identities & educational settings' names, the voluntary participation in this study, the right of withdrawal. They were made aware that by sending the materials to the researcher, they are giving consent to use these materials for the sake of this research.

3.7 Limitations of the Methodology

The main limitation of the study is the small sample size. Yet, due to various reasons, the sample in this research is small in size, especially the number of LESLLA participants who took part in this research. Research of this nature and the vulnerability of such a specific group of participants who are refugee, low/ non-literate learners made accessing this proportion not easy. Yet, investigating a sample of 8 LESLLA participants allowed the researcher to offer an overview to the progress made by this group. The fact that a longitudinal design has been adopted also means that the usual experimental design and assessment of sample size cannot and should not be irrespectively applied. The research aimed to broaden the scope of L2 phonology and phonetics inquiry beyond the tradition lab-based design, as well as to include hard to reach participant groups such as those included in this study. The limited sample size does not necessarily mean that the validity of data is affected, and this can be mitigated by using non-parametric alternatives which do not assume a normal distribution of data. This can be supported by a study conducted by McManus, et al. (2023) who stated that studies that focus on group level may fail to focus on individual levels and the generalisability of the findings could be an issue because they do not represent all individuals. This is an issue that should be mitigated by designing studies that can investigate whether the findings represent most individuals, which is the focus of this study. While having a small sample size is in and of itself not necessarily a problem, and despite the small sample the study is still very important.

This research adopts a phenomenological interpretive approach which means that quantitative analysis with large samples is not the norm. It is not an acquisition study; it is an exploratory study of the assessment. Therefore, a control group was not

needed because the aim of the research is not to measure the effectiveness of the treatment or intervention in relation to another treatment. The research has mainly focused on how effective the assessment and feedback in capturing the progress that LESLLA learners make which is not usually captured in traditional assessment tasks that always presuppose literacy. The investigation is about the micro-developments that learners are able to demonstrate through a more fine-grained assessment instrument in comparison to tradition impressionistic measurements common in this pre-A1 non-/low- literate context. It is not an investigation about the effectiveness of the intervention, which renders the use of a control group unnecessary. In fact, it is unclear what adding a control/ comparison group would achieve but to add to the burden of precious and already limited resources allocated for this group of vulnerable learners, which may well be the unethical thing to do.

3.8 Summary of the Chapter

To sum up, this chapter presents the background importance of the study by discussing the philosophy and its role in assisting researchers in selecting the research approach to answer the research questions. A participatory action research approach has been utilised in this study, involving both quantitative and qualitative methods that provide rich data presenting a holistic image about the assessment process in pre-A1 ESOL classes. In addition, this chapter has presented the sampling technique, data collection tools used, their importance and shortcomings, how data has been analysed, and the ethical considerations obtained in this study. As this study has included two phases of data collection; the first set collected from ESOL practitioners, while the other was collected from LESLLA learners, the findings and analysis of each set will be presented in a separate chapter. Thus, chapters four & five will reflect the findings and analysis of each set separately. The next chapter will present the data obtained from practitioners with discussion of the findings in the light of literature.

Chapter Four: Phase One Results Chapter
4 Introduction

This participatory action mixed methods research has provided a holistic view of the assessment framework in pre-A1 ESOL classes and investigated the suitability of the assessment to LESLLA learners. This has been done in two stages, and the first stage will be reflected in this chapter. An analysis and discussion to all collected data from ESOL practitioners will be presented in this chapter, which will focus on the views of practitioners collected via the questionnaire, combined with an analysis to the materials used in the reading assessments in pre-A1 ESOL classes in England and the criteria used to design them. This section will answer the RQs 1, 2 & 3. The next chapter (chapter 5) includes an analysis and discussion of the findings from the small-scale task-based study conducted with LESLLA learners, which will answer questions 4 & 5. By doing so, this chapter will provide analysis on how valid and reliable the assessment criteria are used in pre-A1 ESOL classes with LESLLA learners and the next chapter will discuss then generated agreed assessment criteria for pre-A1 level that will help ESOL teachers to assess their low-literate learners prior and post the course. This chapter will provide answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the holistic views of stakeholders (ESOL Managers, teachers, etc.) on assessments? Materials used, criteria used, challenges
   a. Initial assessment
   b. Tracking progress/ learning gain (summative, formative)
   c. Level promotion
2. What are the existing materials that are currently used to assess low-literate learners?
   a. Initial assessment
   b. Tracking progress/ learning gain (summative, formative)
   c. Level promotion
3. What are the criteria used to design the assessments?
   a. Initial assessment
   b. Tracking progress/ learning gain (summative, formative)
   c. Level promotion

4.1 Overview of Findings

The questionnaire has investigated 25 ESOL practitioners' views in terms of the reading assessment framework in Pre-A1 ESOL courses in England. Also, 10 of those practitioners have shared samples of their reading assessment tools to analyse the suitability of these tools to LESLLA learners. The findings are organised by the emerged 7 themes, which are understanding the relationship between L1 literacy and L2 learning, challenges faced by LESLLA learners in acquiring L2 literacy, validity, reliability, suitability of the reading assessment tools used to measure LESLLA learners' progress, criteria used to design the assessment tools and suitability of the rubric employed. ESOL teachers/managers' holistic views regarding the reading assessment system at pre-A1 level and its suitability for LESLLA learners will be discussed and analysed in this section. Moreover, an analysis to samples of the existing materials that are currently used to assess LESLLA learners and the criteria used to design these materials will be presented. This will provide answers to the first three research questions. Findings from both data collection tools will be analysed and discussed in this section to answer RQs 1, 2 &3.

4.2 L1 literacy is an influencing factor in L2 learning:

92% of participants agree and strongly agree that L1 literacy is essential for L2 learning, while 8% of them stated that they neither agree nor disagree as appears in figure 2. Learners with L1 literacy have "transferable skills" (P12) and they progress faster than those without. Thus, L1 has a great influence on L2 learning especially as it "provides a framework for learning L2" (P4). While LESLLA learners lack literacy principals and study skills, L2 learning becomes a challenge as P22 indicates that "being in a classroom before and being able to read and write in L1 have a strong influence on facilitating L2 learning". Those who neither agree nor disagree explained their answer by stating that it depends on the aim of the L2 learning and lack of L1 literacy might affect the L2 literacy, "but not necessarily the ability to speak fluently" P8. In literature, there seems to be a strong connection between L1 literacy and the ability to learn L2 and lack of L1 literacy can cause challenges to LESLLA learners when aiming to be literate for the first time but not in L1 (Artieda, 2017). Artieda (2017) emphasises that L1 literacy is a threshold for low-literate learners who might struggle to learn a second language until they achieve a certain level in L1 literacy. This study

has aligned with previous research which show that LESLLA learners are slower learners compared to literate learners who can read and write in non-Roman script (Kurvers and Stockmann 2009; Warren and Young 2012). Convenient evidence from those studies has stressed the impact that L1 literacy has on L2 learning, and more specifically on L2 reading (ibid).

5. To what extent do you agree that L1 literacy is a very significant aspect for L2 learning
25 responses
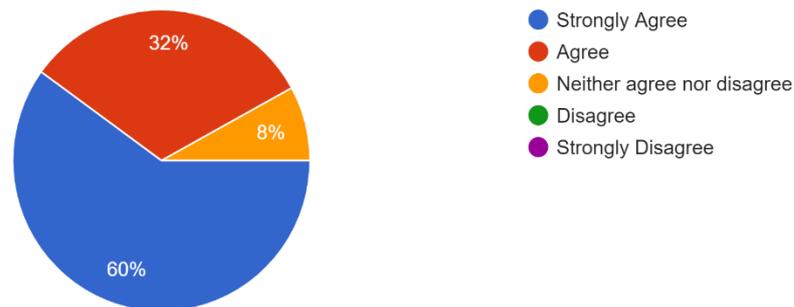
Figure 2: L1 Literacy & L2 Learning

4.3 Challenges faced by LESLLA learners

4.3.1 Low-literate learners face challenges when they learn a L2

As appears in Figure 3, 96% of participants strongly agree that low-literate learners face challenges in their L2 learning journey, while only 4% disagree with that. Those who disagree stressed that challenges can only exist if the initial assessment fails to reveal the gaps or if there were "no clear targets set to achieve." (P20). Whereas the other 96% indicate that they "lack pre-requisite knowledge" (P21) and "the sense of not being in an educational setting before" P22 makes learning L2 challenging for the studied proportion; thus, "they might need longer time to learn L2 compared to literate students" P23. Lack of metalinguistic knowledge and educational skills seems to have a significant impact on the L2 learning process for LESLLA learners as stated by literature and participants' views.

The challenges highlighted by ESOL practitioners can be divided into cognitive and circumstantial challenges. First, the cognitive challenges are "lack of print literacy and study skills" P10, "inability to recognise the end sound of a word and the beginning sound of the next word" P14, "not being able to adapt to classroom environments, or to study independently at home because most materials in pre-entry level are in written form" which is challenging for LESLLA learners given that fact that they are unable "to read and understand instructions" P24. These reasons make learning L2 challenging.

This puts LESLLA learners under pressure, with experiencing low self-esteem and frustration. Metalinguistic knowledge is an essential element in learning a language in general and in learning to spell, understand and read in particular (Donaldson, 1978). Metalinguistic knowledge, in particular, phonological awareness, orthographic knowledge, and morphological awareness, is an essential part in the development of reading skill to low-literate adult learners in L2 (Tighe, et. Al., 2019). As the cognitive and foundational areas are underdeveloped in LESLLA learners (Savage, 1993), such learners struggle in activities such as language awareness tasks as they use and process the language in a different way than literate learners (Kurvers, Vallen, & Hout, 2006).

Second, the circumstantial challenges are "mixed level groups, resources assuming adults are literate, teachers lacking support and training for the specific needs of these adults, psychological barriers to the idea of 'being a learner' or 'belonging in a classroom'" P2. Also, failure to grade the tasks for learners is considered a barrier to learn L2 for low-literate learners, specially features like "pronunciation, complicated grammar rules, different alphabet" P24. Therefore, more differentiation in class is required based on the literacy levels of learners. P20 adds that "challenges only present if initial assessment fails to show gaps and no clear targets set to achieve." The literature highlights these reasons alongside others that contribute to the challenges faced by LESLLA learners in an educational context. According to Kruidenier, et al. (2010) & Kedar (2015), the challenge emerges not only from that learners are acquiring a new language and literacy skills but having to do so in an unfamiliar educational context, in which learners are exposed to implicit assumptions about how the education experience and literacy are connected. The written form is the main norm of learning in L2 learning contexts, which could exist in the shape of written texts on the board, textbooks, and worksheets. This requires learners to develop three intersecting skills simultaneously; learning the new language, understand the print of this language and read in the acquired target language (Kruidenier, et al., 2010). Given other personal reasons, such as undiagnosed learning difficulties, traumas and caring responsibilities, teachers need to be trained to deal with the various and complex needs of their learners (Learning & Work Institute, 2019). However, there is little attention being paid by policy makers to the non-accredited pre-A1 course and the complex needs or learners at this level. Thus, there are scarce

opportunities of teacher training/career development opportunities, and scarce up-to-date and attractive materials for this level (ibid).

6. To what extent do you agree that low-literate learners face challenges when they learn a L2
25 responses

- ● Strongly Agree
- ● Agree
- ● Neither agree nor disagree
- ● Disagree
- ● Strongly Disagree

88%

8%
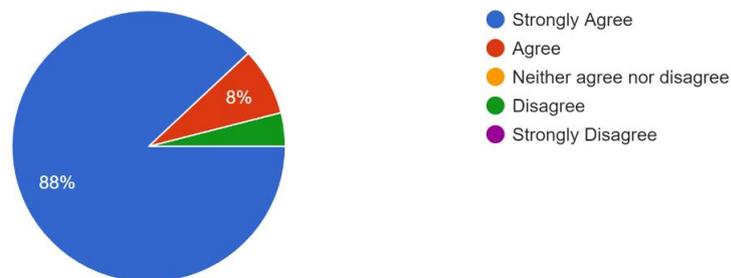
Figure 3: Challenges when Learning L2

4.3.2 Low-literate learners face challenges when they learn to read in L2

The majority of participants (92%) agree or strongly agree with the statement that low-literate learners face challenges when they learn to read in L2, while the other 8% neither agree nor disagree (see figure 4). The latter has stated that it depends on the age of learners as the brain becomes more elastic as well as the daily commitments that learners might have, which increase the load on them. As for the majority of respondents, learning to read in an L2 is extremely challenging for low-literate learners, for various reasons. First, the learners' unfamiliarity with the semantics and syntax of the English Language. According to P2, it is "very difficult to learn to read and write in a language before speaking it - we don't expect this of native speaking children, but we do of ESOL adults". "Low-educated students do not have much experience with the written form of the language, nor the spoken language, which make them disadvantaged when learning to read in L2" according to P6.

Second, pronunciation challenges is another barrier for low-literate learners to read a L2. Even learners who master the spoken form of English might still struggle to learn reading in English because the "written English is so different to the spoken sounds." P17. Low-literate learners have pronunciation problems because "decoding words and understanding the pronunciation of these words may seem problematic to some extent if they do not have experience of silent letters or combination of two letters for example 'sight, write, knight' or change of pronouncing some letters like 'laugh, cough, pharmacy, and phone'." P20. Low-literate learners have also problems understanding

the text (P17) as they do not have "skimming and scanning techniques" or connection between one word and the other in terms of "meaning building", according to P4.

The third challenge is phonological challenges as the L1 phonology is sometimes different from that of L2, learners cannot build on it when learning the sounds of letters and how they are pronounced, as stated by P8. Learning to read in L2 could be a challenge to LESLLA learners because they "lack (the) phonetic and grapho-phonemic ability" P21. P9 adds that "students need to learn new symbols (letters) that represent sounds. They need to learn to recognise these unfamiliar symbols and process the sounds associated with them in order to 'decode' a new word. They will also need to learn to recognise familiar everyday words and numbers, when they may not have ever learned to notice or read these types of 2D symbols before. Someone with L1 literacy will already have at least some understandings of these concepts.".

Fourth, age and motivation have a great impact on acquiring a L2. Apparently, low-educated learners learn with a slower pace, and they lack the momentum, which have a negative impact on their motivation, especially among older learners as the youth learners are more malleable and show more motivation than older ones as P3, P 10 and P15 agree.

L1 literacy is not necessarily the main component of gaining L2 literacy as stated by Cook & Bassetti (2005) because learners whose L1 has different alphabetic writing system might still not benefit from their L1 literacy skills because different metalinguistic awareness might be required for different writing systems. Yet, with the lack of metacognitive and educational skills, it is no wonder that LESLLA struggle to acquire a second language literacy as discussed in the findings. Several skills need to be acquired to learn how to read a language, such as encoding the language alongside "its different phonological, syntactic, morphological, lexical components, as well as train word recognition skills." (Malessa, 2018, p. 27). Learners are required to establish a relationship between the spoken language and its morphemic and morphological level to encode written texts (Perfetti, 2003). Various reasons have been identified by practitioners and in literature indicating the challenges LESLLA learners face when learning to read in a new language. According to Kurvers (2007), emergent readers start the process of L2 learning by using a visual recognition strategy in a non-systematic way, in which they work on creating a correspondence between the context

clues and meaning, which means that those learners are gradually learning to use the sequential decoding strategy. This finding matches the study of Barmao et al. (2007), which shows that organisational skills that learners need in language learning can be promoted when low-literate learners learn to read because adults who lack print literacy are less systematic than learners with print literacy, which helps in scanning the visual codes in a text. Phonological awareness might intersect with metalinguistic awareness in the subject of L1 literacy and L2 learning. Low-literate learners might find it challenging to master the phonological awareness because it requires them to identify words within a context, while the language, according to low-literate is concrete as they lack print literacy, and they are unable to conceptualise the language (ibid).

4.4 Suitability of Assessment Materials

Having established that being literate for the first time but in a new language is challenging to LESLLA learners, there is no wonder that the assessment itself poses an extra layer of complexity on LESLLA learners' learning journey. The assessment in the ESOL provision is normally divided into initial, tracking progress and level promotion assessments, and ESOL practitioners were asked about their perceptions regarding the assessment suitability to LESLLA learners in each stage separately. The findings revealed that in most cases, the initial assessment is "skipped because learners state that they know no English" P12. Also, the tracking progress assessment can sometimes be skipped, because 'formal assessment is not necessary" P9, could take a formative assessment shape (P11) or notes are being taken by teachers at these stages to measure learners' progress (P5, P9, P17 & P20). Those who use a summative assessment, they use the same assessment designed for level promotion and students' failure to answer the questions mean that they have not made progress, and they are not ready to join or move to A1 class (P12, P14 & P18). The level promotion assessments are categorised as self-designed assessment, online holistic assessment and adapted E1 assessment.

To discuss ESOL practitioners' views regarding the suitability of the assessment materials to LESLLA learner, the currently used materials at pre-A1 level will be reviewed first and then connected with the participants' views. This will be discussed in correlation with the analysis of the materials used by ESOL practitioners to assess learners at pre-A1 level. It is not possible to be comprehensive and present all materials used in assessments for this level by all ESOL providers in England because

assessments vary and there is no national standardised assessment or guidance (Young Scholten & Naeb, 2020), and each college is using its own individualised assessment. Therefore, this section will show some of the collected samples from the 10 ESOL practitioners used in a few colleges in England, which are categorised as self-designed assessment, online holistic assessment and adapted E1 assessment. Up to four samples of each category were analysed due to the word-count of this thesis. These samples were selected because they represent various types of activities, minimizing repetition and allowing for the analysis of as many different examples as possible to give a comprehensive overview of the materials' suitability for LESLLA learners.

4.4.1 Self-designed assessment materials

Some practitioners believe that assessing LESLLA learners is challenging, as each college creates its own diagnostic test as stated by P3 because "bespoke design works better" (P16). This includes tasks such as reading "social sight words, numbers, postcodes, alphabet letters etc" (P13) or using "basic English about introducing a person". Having viewed the provided samples, self-designed assessments have included two main types of tasks – print awareness and comprehension questions. Some of the self-designed tasks in this research were either purely self-designed by some tutors or adapted from the ESOL Assessment Framework (SQA, 2020) that is officially used in Scotland for Pre-A1 level assessment, which includes guidance to teachers on how to design their assessment tools and adapt the activities provided by adding instructions and images to be used to assess the Beginner level. Such activities could include identifying letters and sounds, reading numbers, explaining the meaning of signs and reading short texts. There are no written instructions or images provided in the SQA tools, and guidance implies that teachers have to conduct the assessment on one-to-one basis. Although this practice is positive for LESLLA learners, it might not be practical given the cuts in funding to ESOL provisions (Simpson, 2021) and the students number in class.

4.4.2 Print Awareness Tasks

These type of assessment materials include activities like filling the gap of the missing letter from the alphabets (see activities A & B), match words with the initial sound (see activity C), add the missing letter to words with pictures displayed (Activity E), match numbers with their spellings, and match signs with their instructions. In some activities,

students are asked to do double tasks, such as matching a picture with its initial letter and with the word it reflects (Activity D). One of the very common questions used in assessment is presented in activities A & B below. Activity A is self-designed assessment which contains other tasks with a set of instructions accompanied by photos, model answers and hand-written matching lines. This has been shared by one of the participants while Activity B is adopted from SQA as suggested by P10. In both tasks, examinees are required to add the missing letter from the alphabets, and instructions are provided either written, as in activity A or orally by tutors as in activity B.

Activity A   Activity B

Fill in the gaps.

| ℬ U H K P G S X N |

A **B** C D E F _ _ I J _ L M

_O_ _ Q R _ T _ V W _ Y Z

Letters and sounds

Aa Bb Cc ___ Ee Ff Gg ___ Ii

Jj ___ Ll ___ Nn Oo Pp Qq ____ Ss

Tt ____ Vv Ww Xx ____ Zz

Both activities include the alphabetical letters from A to Z. Instructions in both activities are written in bold, which indicates that the phrases are of importance to test takers. Yet, in Activity A, it is written in smaller font compared to the letters' font, which should not be the case for instructions. It is not clear in this instruction what exactly will be added to fill the gaps. Similarly, Activity B instruction does not indicate any requirement from test takers. Yet, in the guidelines for the SQA, it appears that teachers are required to provide verbal instructions alongside the written ones. According to P18, the assessment should be done "with the learners (not to them) so the teacher is there by their side". This could be a better practice for LESLLA learners, but not necessarily practical because one-to-one assessment is time-consuming and with lack of funding (Simpson, 2021), teachers might be stretched and not able to allocate time to do so.

There are positive points regarding the presentation format of both tasks that should always be considered when designing assessment tools, while there are certain points

that could cause confusion to learners who lack testing literacy skills. For example, the utilisation of a model answer using a different colour (blue) in A is significant to show test takers what they need to do to fulfil this task, but that is missing from activity B's instructions, even though studies (for example Freed & Cain, 2021) stress the impact that clear presentation format and modality have on test takers' performance in reading assessments. Another positive presentation format in A but missing in B, is providing a box with the missing letters in A at the top and there is enough space between every single letter, but if dashes are added in between the letters, it would be much clearer that each letter stand by itself, and it is not part of a word. All letters in activity A are written in upper-case, which is an indication that test takers need to fill the gaps with upper-case letters only. However, LESLLA test takers might not realise this, and they might add the lower-case letter of the previous letter. In contrast, test takers need to add both upper- and lower-case forms of the missing letter in activity B, which is less confusing compared to A. Moreover, the lines provided to do the task are all short, which is an indication that the answer has to be short (just a letter), while the line is longer in B, which indicates that the answer could be slightly longer compared to A. According to Flores (2021b), literate learners could be familiar with this test genre, and they use their testing skills to fill the empty spaces (gaps) with what is required, but LESLLA learners lack testing literacy, and it is less likely that they respond to the task in the required way.

In activity C, learners need to choose the initial letters of the words represented in pictures and add them to a small box provided underneath each picture.

Activity C

143

In pre-A1 level, it is positive to use pictures in assessments to make the tasks easier, but it would be better if the words are also provided to allow test takers to visually connect the initial letter with the correct word. if this task used as an initial assessment when learners still do not speak the language, LESLLA learners might not be able to respond to this task as they may not know the words provided. Thus, teachers might need to read the words for them to be able to do the task because recognising a word is a step ahead of the phonemic awareness of sounds (Marrapodi, 2013). In addition, as the pictures are out of context, this task might be problematic to LESLLA learners (Flores, 2021b; Faux & Watson, 2018; Kurvers, 2015) because even though this is a print awareness task, it still has to be provided as a topic-based context with which learners are familiar to reduce the challenge on test takers (Faux & Watson, 2018). Thus, relating images to a context, such as health or family could be better. It is unclear if the first picture is an apple or a plum and using such unclear pictures in assessments can increase learners' confusion and misinterpretation to the task requirement, which affects test results (Flores, 2021b). Similar to Activity A, the instructions and letter choices are written in bold to highlight their importance to test takers, the number of choices is exactly the same as the number of pictures and small boxes provided under each one. The space for answers is small, which is an indication that a one letter is required for each image/box. All these could form as guidance to test takers on what is expected from them alongside the modal answer provided. The format of the task is based on the concept of Real & Ideal from the grammar of visual design (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2020), where the images and instruction are the general information or the Ideal, while the answer spaces/boxes are the specific information, or the Ideal needed to finish this task. That said, test takers should follow the instruction, look at the images and use the letters provided on the top to fill the boxes with the correct answers. However, to be able to do so, test takers should not only obtain test literacy but also visual and multimodal literacies. Awareness in test genres and the multimodal component of a test is crucial for test takers to read and understand the instructions and respond in the expected manner (Flores, 2021b). The layout and format of the task are helpful aspects for learners with test and visual literacies, yet for LESLLA learners who lack these literacies, the use of images, bold font to differentiate between the instruction and the task itself and modal answers are not particularly helpful because they do not necessarily convey meaning (Flores, 2021b).

The self-designed activities are usually graded, moving from easy to more difficult tasks. This appears in Activities D & E.

Activity D

Match letters and words.

1. A
2. C
3. D
4. E
5. F

car
dog
egg
fish
apple

Activity E

Fill in the gap:

Sounds – *a e i o u*

m _ n   b _ n   m _ p   s _ n   t _ n

The double action required from text takers in Activity D increases the complexity of the task as they have to match the letter with the image first and then match the image with the correct word. The instruction does not clarify the double action required, even though the modal answer shows this. Formatting needs attention as the letters, images and words are not horizontally organised – more horizontal spaces between the letters and the words are needed for better presentation. Also, using the same misleading

images could affect the test results massively. Activity E is also a hard task for LESLLA, in which the missing middle vowel of CVC words should be added to five words. The five vowels are provided at the top, but not inside a box. Inconsistency in formatting could also create an extra layer of complexity for LESLLA learners. The same issues have been noticed in both activities D & E. The pictures provided in Activity E can be easily misinterpreted by LESLLA given the fact that number 10 in the image is made out of flowers, the sun is personalised, and the man image is real, while learners are not familiar with him. Images can be misinterpreted, and learners might not answer the questions in the expected manner due to lack of multimodal & visual literacies. Not only this, but also failure to use a contextualised topic, provide enough spacing between the letters at the top and between the words, and provide long space for the answers are all elements that impact the way LESLLA learners might respond to the task. Moreover, LESLLA learners are more likely not aware that a CVC word consists of a first, middle and end sounds (Schwarz, 2008 cited by Faux & Watson, 2018), which is the most problematic aspect in this task because learners might not know what is required to complete the task. This can be specifically challenging for LESLLA learners if they have to complete the task as part of an initial assessment as they are more likely not trained to answer such questions.

4.4.3 Comprehension Tasks

Self-designed assessment could include comprehension tasks alongside the print awareness ones (activities A – E) as appears in activities F, in which test takers will read a short passage and fill a table with information from this text. This can also take the shape of answering comprehension questions using the text. Activity G is being extracted from SQA, in which learners are required to read and then copy a short text. The use of Ali's photo in Activity F aimed to complement the text to trigger the test takers' responses and to reflect ethnic diversity and inclusiveness, which makes the task appealing to learners from diverse backgrounds. According to Flores' study, (2021c) the inclusion of people's images involved in everyday situations has positive impact regarding the response rate of LESLLA in tests compared to tests that do not involve such images (such as Activity G). The layout of both activities F & G is starting logically aligning from left to right and in terms of its structure, it is from top to bottom. The instructions are at the very top, then followed by the text (and the image in Activity F), while the answer space is at the bottom. This reflects the Real & Ideal principle of

the grammar of visual design (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2020) as test takers has to follow the instructions and read the text (the Real) to complete the task (the Ideal). The layout gives learners' an indication that what is being provided at the top will be used to complete the task (Flores, 2021c). The Real is the heading, text and image, which is the general information that will be used to complete the tasks, while the table (F) and the lines (G) are the Ideal, on which test takers will provide their answers to show their level of comprehension/knowledge based on the general information provided in the instruction, text & image (Flores, 2021c). The main drawback of these activities' designs is that the contextual and visual clues provided could not be clear to all readers, especially to LESLLA as stated by Khalifa and Weir (2009). This is because written instructions, images and semiotics could be clear indications in test tasks to literate learners on what is required from them, but LESLLA learners might not make meaning from these modes (Flores, 2021a) as they do not have "a significant sight word vocabulary, the ability to decode at word level as opposed to phonemic or even alphabetic decoding" (Allemano, 2013: 69). The lack of understanding or deducing the test semiotic clues included in reading tests affects the way LESLLA learners respond to tasks.

Activity F

Reading

I am Ali.

I live in Huddersfield.

I like cooking and shopping.

I have two children.

Name:	Ali
Address:	
Likes:	
Family:	

Activity G

Reading

My name is Agnes and I come from Poland. I live in Scotland with my husband and my children. I have one son and two daughters.

Writing

_____

_____

_____

According to ESOL practitioners, these types of questions could be not suitable for LESLLA. P5 believes that "those who prepare and create these resources work very hard at making it appropriate for this particular cohort but there are many factors that

can impact it, such as cultural understanding, level of educational experiences, mental health, familiarity with reading texts and the exercises that accompany them." There are various elements that should be considered when assessing such learners as it is not fair to assess low-literate learners using the same materials with those who have high literacy as stated by P6. "In most cases, they (the materials) are suitable for literate, rather than low-literate learners." P1. Thus, the assessment "should be more considerate of their (LESLLA learners') skills" P5. P4 stressed that even though "materials are made to be as appropriate as possible for the learners but there is still room to adjust the materials as it may need to be quite specific to meet the needs of any particular learner." P4.

4.4.4 Online Holistic Assessments

Some teachers state that they use online holistic assessments in pre-A1 level whether it is initial or level promotion tests. These tests normally contain 50 questions, and the number of the correct answers determine the right level of learners. One of the commonly used tests is Straightforward Quick Placement (SQP) test (n.d.), which includes 50 questions. The first 40 questions are grammar tasks (see activity H), while the last 10 are vocabulary ones (see activity I). Students who get the score 0-15 fail the pre-A1 reading test which means that they are not ready to move to A1 class (see the conversion chart below extracted from SQP, n.d.).

Total score	Level
0 – 15	Beginner
16 – 24	Elementary
25 – 32	Pre-intermediate
33 – 39	Intermediate
40 – 45	Upper-Intermediate
46 – 50	Advanced

Figure 4 SQP Test Conversion Table

Activity H	Activity I
1. I _____ from France. A) is B) are C) am D) be	42. It's cold so you should _____ on a warm jacket. A) put B) wear C) dress D) take

Another common online holistic assessment is Oxford Placement Test (OPT) (n.d.). The test is divided into two sections; the Use of English & Listening, and each has a separate score. For this research, samples were extracted from the first section only as the focus is on the reading, not listening skill. Questions in the Use of English section focuses on grammatical form and meaning (see activities K & J).

Activity J

Part 1 – Focus on form

Test takers read a short, gapped dialogue and then complete the dialogue by selecting one of four options.
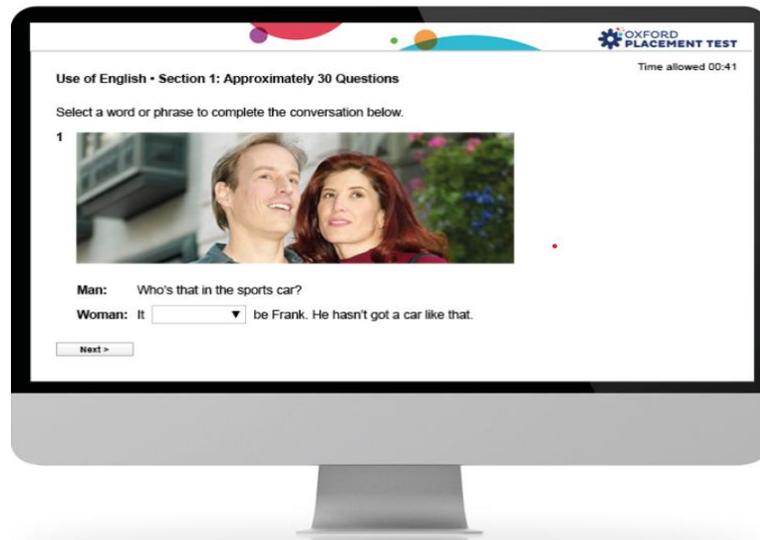
Activity K

Part 2 – Focus on meaning

Test takers need to understand the meaning communicated in a short dialogue. The meaning tested may be explicit, or it may be implied, where the meaning is understood from context.
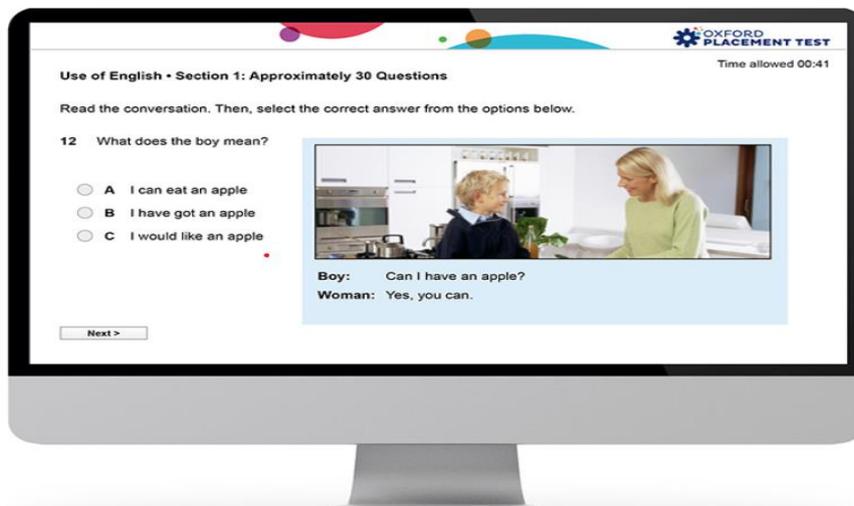
Part 2 – Test takers read a short dialogue and identify what a speaker means. Here the focus is on explicit meaning.

From the examples above, it seems that instructions are missing, like in SQP (Activities H & I) or written format is the main mode of instructions for these tests, and

this is sometimes accompanied by images, like in OPT tasks (Activities J & K) to simplify & clarify the requirement of the task to test-takers. It is crucial to remember that LESLLA learners lack the familiarity of written instructions in tests, whether this is in L1 or L2 (Faux & Watson, 2018). As a results, key words like 'select, dialogue, conversation & phrase' can be new to LESLLA learners and the unfamiliarity with the instructions hinder their ability to proceed in the assessment or answer in the expected way. This is particularly problematic to those whose language is vocal rather than written because they may have no reference to rules or grammar, and for them, written words do not exist in their first language (ibid). In addition, the use of multiple-choice options could seem like a technique that helps test-takers to complete the tasks, but actually it could make the task challenging and misleading to LESLLA learners due to the complexity of this multimodal modes of meaning making that is often overlooked by teachers who use such tasks with LESLLA learners. LESLLA learners are unfamiliar with test genres and their multimodal components, which are essential for test-takers to be able to answer the questions correctly and in the expected way, according to Flores (2021c), because based on social constructivism, test-takers use their prior knowledge to answer questions in tests. The semiosis in MCQs is biased to literate learners and LESLLA learners lack familiarity with test genres. Even when test-takers are familiar with MCQs genre, such tasks remain problematic to LESLLA because of the complex and misleading components of the multiple options provided, which could not be picked up by them and hinder their ability to answer correctly. They also could not answer in the expected manner as they do not recognise the need to choose one out of the three or four options provided to complete the task (ibid). Moreover, the images used in OPT may not be interpreted in the expected way that test designers have assumed (Flores, 2021b). In activities K & J, the images could be easily misinterpreted by LESLLA test-takers because the images show a man & a woman in front of a building (Activity J) and a woman and a child in a kitchen (Activity K), who are having conversations. However, both have no clear connection or clues of the requirements of the tasks which are focusing on the form (Activity J) or deducing meaning from a short dialogue (Activity K). Therefore, it is a main requirement that the assessment designed for LESLLA learners should not include hypothetical questions or traditional tasks (MCQ, etc..) as they are based on test literacy, which could affect the scores of assessments (Carlsen, 2017).

4.4.5 Adapted Entry Level 1 (A1) Assessment

Some ESOL practitioners (P8, P10, P15, P19) state that they use Entry 1 materials and "adjust them to make them suitable for the lower level" P10. Various resources are being utilised for extracting materials and using them in classes and assessments, such as from "English My Way, SQA (Scottish Qualifications Authority) and Excellence Gateway" (P10), which shows that teachers are most likely adjusting materials from Entry level 1 as P8 states. Two samples (Activities L & M) have been chosen to show an example of how A1 assessment tools are sometimes adapted and used to assess learners in pre-A1 level. Activity L has been extracted from a diagnostic test provided by the Education & Training Foundation (n.d.) and Activity M has been extracted from ESOL Activities' book (Babenko, 2010). It is worth noting that the materials used in A1 assessments are biased toward literate learners because they are designed based on the assumption of literacy. In activity L, the texts come in the shape of adverts or notes because of the board pins and coloured background used. This might look clear for learners with schooling background, but LESLLA learners might not be familiar with this multimodal semiotics. There are no clear instructions on what is expected from test takers to answer questions. Literate learners with testing literacy might anticipate that boxes are places where the answers should be added in the shape of tick or cross, yet for LESLLA learners who lack visual literacy, it is still a new concept for them that an image or symbol could convey meaning (Burt, Peyton, & Schaetzel 2008; Marrapodi, 2013), which is why they might not be able to interpret the semiotics in this activity and answer in the expected manner. In other words, people are normally born with the ability to see things, but their ability to understand what they see is based on learning and habit. Therefore, LESLLA test-takers' understanding to the test designs, in this context, as well as the multimodal semiotic and visual components of test is unidentifiable to them if they have not been taught or experienced testing before. Those who lack schooling experience are not expected to clearly grasp the meaning of test instructions, designs and visual components (Marrapodi, 2013; Flores, 2021b). In Activity M, learners are expected to read a letter from hospital that includes information about an appointment. The instructions are written in bold, and an eye symbol as well as a circle are used to indicate that test-takers should read the text and circle the correct answer for multiple choices. Although test designers assumed that the symbols are used to simplify the instructions, similar to the previous discussion, LESLLA are not ready yet to interpret and understand those symbols and instructions

clearly if they are not introduced to them in class and practiced before (Flores, 2021b), which might affect their ability to answer correctly. Moreover, both tasks require test-takers to read a text and then skim it & scan it to extract information to answer the questions. Yet, this complex skill is still not mastered by new readers and writers. Even though the tasks do not require written answers, and they only require simple form of answers, such as circle or tick, LESLLA learners might not be able to answer in the expected way.

Read these and answer the questions.

Activity L

Lost
Large black dog,
called Spot.
Please phone 07664
387982 if you see him.

Garden help
I will help with your
garden: hedges, trees, etc.
No job too small.
Call Bill 07965 458 278

For Sale
Bicycle, nearly new, blue,
10 gears.
£50.
Call Jan on 07966 321 321

Wanted
I collect old stamps,
clocks and pictures.
Do you have any of these?
Please contact me.
I will pay good prices.
Stan: 07965 411 784

What is for sale?

☐   ☐   ☐

What can Bill help with?

☐   ☐   ☐

What has been lost?

☐   ☐   ☐

Activity M

NHS

18 June 2011
District Hospital,
Church Road,
Hillbury,
H24 3LS
01392 686712

Dear Mrs Simms,

You have an appointment with the consultant, Mr Dawkins, at Hillbury District Hospital on 7 July 2011, at 10:45.

Please come to reception in the Bronte Building.

If you are unable to attend, please contact the number shown at the top of the letter.

Yours sincerely,

District Hospital Administration Services

Read the letter. Circle the answer.

1	Who is the letter to?	the hospital	Mrs Simms	NHS
2	When is the appointment?	7 July 2011	18 June 2011	25 August 2011
3	What time is the appointment?	1:35	2011	10:45
4	Where is the appointment?	July	Mr Dawkins	Bronte Building

P6 has stressed that the published materials are not suitable for low-literate learners in terms of the "topics, font of writing and spaces between sentences" as P6 indicates. The adjusted materials "should be more considerate and graded especially for those who are low literate" (P4). Moreover, the lack of suitability comes from the fact that these materials prioritise "literacy skills rather than social-related practices or what is relevant to the learners' lives" (P2). It appears that it is hard to judge the learners' progress based on the assessment that focuses merely on literacy as low-literate students might not be able to respond to progress track assessment independently and they require one to one support according to P3, which is hard to apply when big number of students in classrooms exist. Both P13 & P16 believe that some published materials are suitable for children rather than adults and that "infantilizes learners", which is demotivating. P16 adds that pre-entry published assessment in general can be frustrating for low-literate learners because they are "sometimes aimed at children which is inappropriate or requires support from others" and "the emphasis is on what they can't do", while the "assessment materials do nothing to boost a learner's confidence and show what they can do" P14.

Having looked closely into the materials used by ESOL practitioners to assess pre-A1 learners, it can be concluded that the materials are good for beginner level and literate learners, while they are not suitable for LESLLA learners due to the complexity or unclarity of instructions and semiotics used by test-designers. According to the views of ESOL's practitioners, most of them agree that the materials used in the initial pre-A1 reading assessment are not quite suitable for the low-literate learners as most answers reveal.

As a result, the materials used to assess learners' reading in pre-A1 level are not suitable for low-literate learners for various reasons according to ESOL stakeholders. First, they are often aimed at assessing children's reading rather than adults. Second, they are designed with the "assumption that the learners can speak the L2 well" P1. Third, a lot of support and guidance is needed for such students because they do not only lack the literacy skills, but also the experience of being in an educational setting as well as the experience of testing itself. Fourth, the words and language used in assessment questions form "a barrier for weaker readers who can read the text but not understand what they are being asked to do." according to P11. According to figure 5, the various answers become clear as 36% disagree or strongly disagree with the statement, which is explained by the reasons above, but 28% neither agree nor disagree, which can be explained due to the fact that the materials might be suitable, but it is significant to "consider the context that the assessment may be taking place in, how learners feel about approaching such an assessment, what it means for them and are they able to apply their skills in a natural way" P14 and when the feelings of nervousness or being under pressure are removed from the assessment context. Moreover, it is clear that published materials are not suitable for low-educated learners for a previously mentioned reasons; thus, they should be avoided or amended by skilful teachers when used for the studied group. On the contrary, 36% of respondents agree or strongly agree that the materials are suitable because they are just basic introductory language and if the assessment "is designed properly for low literate learners then, yes, it can be." P7.

The factors discussed in this section align with the literature as it is obvious in Minuz & Kurvers' study (2021) that LESLLA learners ability to respond to task is affected by their poor metalinguistic abilities, the various ways they use to process visual symbols and oral language, their lack of study skills and test literacy as well as their working memory which are all presupposition in L2 teaching and assessment. Thus, according to Flores (2021b), ESOL practitioners should include in their course some practices that prepare LESLLA learners to acquire knowledge about test genre as well as visual and multimodal literacies to be ready for level promotion assessment, in which literacy is required.

Based on the assessment tools' analysis and the discussion above, the fairness of these test tools to assess LESLLA learners seem to be compromised as this population of test takers seem to struggle to demonstrate their knowledge and skills

due to irrelevant factors, such as the characteristics of those rating the test takers' performances, poorly designed tasks, and ambiguously worded test items (Bruzos et al., 2018; Rocco et al., 2020). Moreover, systematic bias could be experienced by LESLLA test takers as the test format favours literate learners over LESLLA (Carlsen, 2017). LESLLA test-takers may be particularly vulnerable to various factors during assessment that incorporate such tools, including the types of tasks used, the assessment rubric, the training provided to raters, and the overall quality of their evaluations (Rocco et al., 2020). It can also encompass the idea that candidates' success in tests should not be influenced by irrelevant factors or inadequate representation of the test construct (Flores, 2020). Moreover, the usage of the test scores, the consequences of the test results' interpretations and the political and social values should be taken into consideration when assessing the fairness of the assessment tools (Kunnan, 2004). It is undeniable that failing the assessment has detrimental consequences on LESLLA learners in England, such as exclusion from mainstream education and negative implications in terms of residence permit (Rocco, et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the assessment tools analysed above raise questions about their validity mainly because they are not grounded in research, and they are developed by inexperienced test-designers who have not necessarily received training to understand and accommodate for the complex needs of LESLLA learners when designing the currently used test tools (Allemano, 2018). In most of the tools analysed above, the contextual clues that readers need to understand the requirements of the task are not clearly presented in these exam papers and according to the Cognitive Processing approach, this could pause a validity issue because context plays a crucial and interconnected role in the reading process (Khalifa and Weir 2009; Altherr Flores, 2021a). In addition, the level of interpretation, understanding, and inference that readers experience when faced with a reading text can be significantly affected by how learners approach test tasks. LESLLA learners may find it difficult to comprehend the formats used in these test questions, including written instructions, images, or symbols (Altherr Flores, 2021b), particularly when they lack "a significant sight word vocabulary, the ability to decode at the word level rather than relying on phonemic or even alphabetic decoding" (Allemano, 2013: 69). Based on the findings from RQ4 (see Chapter 5), LESLLA learners' participants are still relying on phonemic decoding,

which shows that they still cannot read at the word level. Thus, the validity of these test tools to LESLLA learners is again questionable as the reading burden is increased because the reading ability is assessed by doing tasks such as excluding wrong answers in a multiple-choice question, deducing meaning from a text, answering a question with yes or no and answering open-ended questions. Although the tasks might align with their real-life skills, their complexity hampers their performance in an examination context (Allemano, 2013). Besides, the rubric used in reading assessments can pose a greater challenge for learners than the test itself, exemplifying what Kortez (2008: 221) referred to as the construction of "irrelevant variance", which is regarded as a major threat to validity, particularly for assessments that involve constructed responses and contextualised situations (Geisinger et al., 2013).

13. To what extent do you agree that the material used in assessing reading are suitable for low-literate learners
25 responses
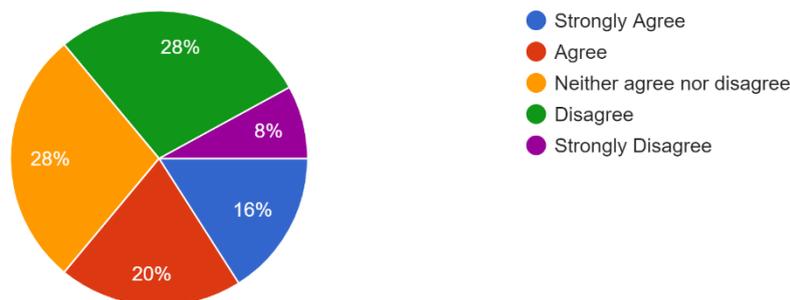
Figure 5 Suitability of Reading Assessment Materials to LESLLA

4.5 Criteria Used to Design the Assessment tools

In this section, both ESOL practitioners' views and the analysis of the reading assessment materials will be utilised to provide an answer to research question 3, which focuses on the criteria used to design assessment tools in the pre-A1 level of ESOL courses and the impact this may have on the validity and reliability of the assessments carried out with LESLLA learners.

4.5.1 Research-Based Assessment Design Criteria
From what has been viewed above, it is evident that the materials used in assessment in the pre-A1 level is not based on research due to lack of

standardisation, which shows that there is no comprehensive assessment used among institutions in pre-A1 level in England similar to the standardised ones used in Entry level and above. Neither there is a standardised rubric used to evaluate the performance of test takers against. ESOL tutors are faced with the challenge of developing assessment tools for their learners, and assessments are created in-house by each provider or tutor while they are not prepared nor trained to be test-developers. The questionnaire participants believe that reading assessments used in pre-entry level classes are based on the experiences of tutors. P14 stresses on this concept by stating that assessment materials have been produced 'in house' by experienced ESOL tutors. They are based on "experience rather than research" P21. This is evident in P17 comment; "our assessments are designed by staff who have worked with this level for a number of years. Every year, we reflect on whether this is still a valid assessment and tweak it if we need to". As the pre-entry "course is not accredited, the criteria and specifications are not based on studies yet" P1. It is believed that the research conducted about reading assessments is insufficient in relation to the studied proportion; thus, tutors have to "rely on personal experience and adapted ideas from different areas of language education." P2. There is a wide range of studies regarding reading assessment (see for example, Grabe & Jiang, 2013; Afflerbach, 2016), but they might not be specific for ESOL, adult learners, or even low-literate learners. Although teachers consider the studies and research done regarding reading assessments, it remains broad when it comes to "literacy and learning process generally." P5. They are more focused on people with "cultural and capital understanding" rather than on low-educated people (P7). These answers explain the contradictory answers presented in figure 6 below and the differences in participants' opinion as about third the participants neither agree nor disagree, another third agree or strongly agree while 28% disagree or strongly disagree.

Although a recent report by Curcin et al. (2022) has identified areas of improvement in the Skills for Life qualifications and standardised assessment for Entry levels and Levels 1 & 2 ESOL courses, content of courses and assessment designs are based on research and continuous improvements, unlike the case in pre-A1 level. P12 has highlighted this important point, which is the need of "a clear core curriculum at pre-entry (level) to enable learners to progress". This aligns with literature as several studies (e.g. Rocca et al., 2017) stress the importance of having a CEFR descriptor below A1 that particularly focus on adult literacy in language learning. According to

practitioners, a lot of students are "failing to reach E1 because teachers are not equipped with the skills/resources/correct guidance" P16. Also, "class sizes are too big and more one to one and small group time is needed." P22.

11. To what extent do you agree that the criteria used to design the reading assessment is based on studies and research

25 responses
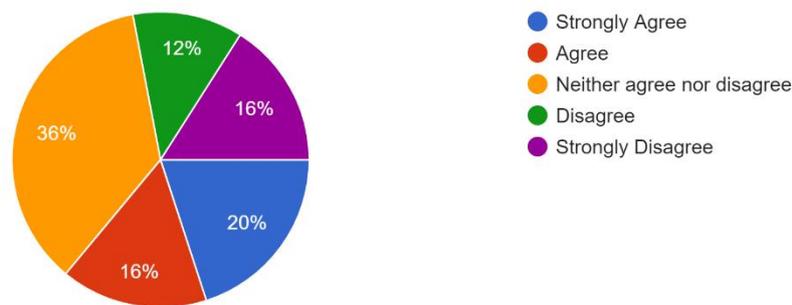
Figure 6 Research-based Assessment Design Criteria

4.5.2 Reflecting the Real Progress of Learners in Reading

Having stated that the assessment materials are not suitable for LESLLA learners, and they are not based on research, it is questionable whether these materials do accurately measure the progress of learners or not. This will be further unpacked & discussed in Chapter 5 in the light of the findings from the PAT pre-test post-test, but now the ESOL practitioners' views will be analysed. Figure 7 reveals that tutors' answers vary in regard to showing the real progress in reading in the assessment. A considerable percentage of respondents neither agree nor disagree with the statement and they justify their answers by stating that it varies depending on "the nature of the assessment" P25. According to P22, "each student is different as tutors set individual targets for each learner against which these learners are being assessed". Some teachers, for example, depend on learners' performance and class work to track their learners' progress, especially in the middle of the course rather than using official assessment to do so as indicated by P 5, 7, 17 & 20. However, that would lead to an issue of lacking records of learners' level during the course, which makes it hard to track their progress in one specific skill, i.e. reading. Moreover, when it comes to level promotion, some teachers (P12, P14 & P21) state that they utilise a holistic approach in the level promotion process, which entails writing reports about the level of learners and their readiness to move to the next level. These reports (see samples analysed in

158

section 5.2) are subjective, very broad and generalised, and do not show detailed evaluation of the learners' progress. Also, literacy, in such reports, is framed as a skill that a learners can either possess or not, rather than a capability that is context-related as well as situated (Hooft, et al., 2021). As LESLLA learners progress slower than literate learners, and they progress in small steps (Kurvers & Stockmann, 2009; Warren and Young 2012) these steps might not be shown in assessments results; thus, they are not reflected in such reports, especially when they are based on unsuitable assessment materials that shows what learners cannot do rather than what they can do. 48% of participants agree or strongly agree that LESLLA learners cannot show their real progress in the assessment, for various reasons. First, "low-literate learners receive support during reading assessment, especially when reading, as they cannot finish it individually; thus, it is hard to tell whether it is their ability or from the support they are receiving" P13. Second, learners are being "trained to pass official assessment as opposed to making progress" during their course because "funding sadly depends on the former rather than the latter" P5. Third, when learners fail the assessment, the same assessment is repeated (P10) even though the test itself is not an enough tool to detect the small knowledge gained from a course, especially when it comes to the pre-entry level where learners do not have the chance to show their real level in an assessment, even though they progress slowly and become able to read as P6, P10, P12 indicated. This can also be clearly reflected in P17's comment "I suspect that reliable progress would be difficult to establish." Participants comments affiliate with findings from recent studies conducted in various countries (e.g. Gonzalves, 2017) stating that the tests that are used in educational settings presuppose literacy skills obtaining and familiarity with test literacy and print awareness (ibid). Even though LESLLA learners show very small and slow progress when learning to read and write compared to literate learners who can read and write in non-Roman scripts, that is still not reflected in assessment results (Kurvers & Stockmann, 2009; Warren and Young 2012). Lack of literacy has proven to be a crucial element that affect the results in the assessment process given the fact that L1 literacy is a significant element in L2 learning in general and L2 reading in particular (ibid).

Only 16% of participants disagree with the statement, their answer can be explained as each tutor/college develop their own assessment, they design it to be able to track the learners' progress beginning with "simple letter recognition, sound symbol recognition, simple CVC word recognition before using simple texts." P10. P14 adds

that "we assess according to the students we are working with. For some, a recognition of some letters is progress. For others, it may be being able to read a sentence. We give all learners targets and assess them against their individual targets". This could be true, but it is worth stating that the final assessment with low-literate learners should be done on an individual basis using one-to-one support at this level because learners are unable to do the assessment individually. Otherwise, tracking their progress might be inaccurate. Overall, ESOL practitioners believe that the progress of low-literate learners in reading is not always accurately captured by the assessment materials currently used as the materials used are not suitable for this proportion, which can question the validity of the assessment, unless it is done on one-to-one basis and assessment is individualised for each learners based on their level that is determined in the initial assessment & tracking progress and based on their needs.

12. To what extent do you agree that low-literate learners cannot show their real progress in reading in the assessment
25 responses

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
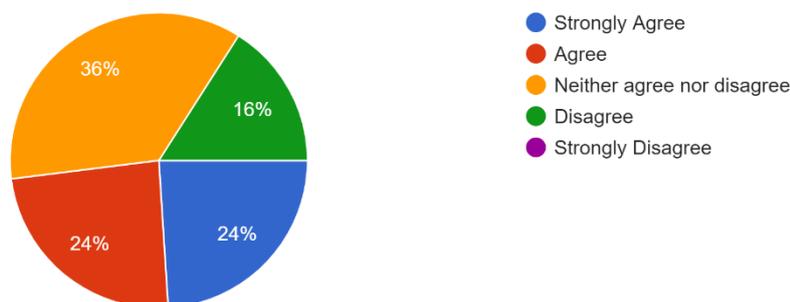
Figure 7 Measuring the Real Progress of LESLLA learners

4.6 Validity

In light of the previously discussed concerns regarding the appropriateness of assessment tools for LESLLA learners, the validity of the reading assessment utilised at the pre-A1 level for this group has been a subject of disagreement among ESOL practitioners. Some stated that the reading assessment used with low-literate learners is valid but needs improvement and those who believes it is invalid. As there is no standardised assessment, teachers have to invent one. Therefore, it depends on the tutors' experience and skills and the graded tools suitable for the learners' level. Therefore, 60% of the answers (see figure 8) is neither agree nor disagree in terms of the validity of the reading assessment for the studied proportion, while 15% disagree with that as they believe that it depends on the assessment tool used in each

institution. P1 believes that "it is difficult to create materials that would be entirely appropriate for these learners, but I do believe that they would be valid and suitable for them" when more is "taken into the context of their use and how they are used with the learners. Perhaps giving learners more autonomy and voice as well in applying and accessing these tools" P1. This indicates that when the assessment tools started in a low enough level, then the assessment can be valid. On the other hand, 25% of participants agree that there is a validity problem with assessing low-literate learners. This is because the progress of such learners is hard to be traced based on the test results. It is agreed that the assessment tools have serious problems in terms of its focus on literacy and transcript of record method. Most assessment tools seem to be "predicted (based) on L1 instruments" P12. Learners with a low-literacy background are probably migrants that come from a place with limited access to education; therefore, they might not be familiar with assessment. Moreover, P8 indicates that "reading assessment tools at this level have significant problems with most aspects of validity in many instances [especially in relation to the L1] …. I do not know any tool that truly overcomes this problem [most seem to be predicated on L1 instruments anyway]."

According to Malessa (2018) & Hooft et al. (2021), reading development progresses through four primary stages: emergent, early, transitional, and fluent. In the emergent stage, learners begin by connecting oral language, written words, and printed materials. Next, they tackle reading new words by gathering contextual clues. As they advance, they become adept at understanding more complex and longer texts by employing various strategies to aid comprehension. Finally, in the fluent stage, learners can read independently for extended periods, relying more on the written content than on illustrations (ibid). Based on the assessment tools' analyses, it is clear that the four different levels of literacy (Malessa, 2018; Hooft et.al., 2021) are not taken into consideration when designing or adapting the E1 tools to assess LESLLA learners. The validity of the assessment used is, therefore, relatively questionable as it cannot definitely detect the literacy level of learners, and failing the assessment could have high-stakes impact on decisions related to benefits or residency permit, when passing a language test is a requirement (Hooft, et al., 2021). Yet, it worth stating that such tests can identify test takers' inability to be level promoted (ibid). Thus, a balance between the current level and nature of literacy, and the requirement of

establishing a standardised test that can clearly identify detectable and actionable output is required to ensure valid and fair assessment approach (Perry et al., 2018).

16. To what extent do you agree that the reading assessment tools used in pre-A1 level with low-literate learners are valid

25 responses
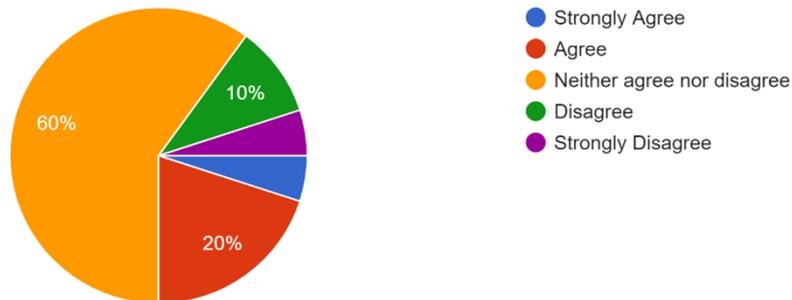
Figure 8 Validity of Assessment Tools to LESLLA learners

4.7 Reliability

The ESOL stakeholders' answers about the reliability of the reading assessment reflect their comments to the previous point, which is the validity. The answers again vary between agree, disagree and neither agree nor disagree, which can be seen in figure 9. According to the comments, some stated that the assessment is not reliable because "learners can have different results if tests are repeated to them using different materials, marking grid or simpler instructions." P1, while others believe that it is reliable but "could be improved" P24 since there is always "a space for unreliability in any assessment" P16. Teachers use their own designed assessments; therefore, they are less likely to state that it is invalid or unreliable, which is clear in P5, 6 and 9 comments respectively "It depends on the tool, I use my own" "As much as any assessment is reliable" "What I make to use is reliable but not from a formal source." Two participants were unsure in their answers but more inclined to question the reliability of results for two reasons; first, "the additional support that low-literate learners receive during the assessment can compromise the results" P12 and second, the assessment in general "cannot provide in-depth information as there are so many factors that come into play when using them. But if you work with that understanding that it is an over-all picture rather than specific then they would serve their purpose." P3.

P20 added that "the assessment used in some colleges are old and repetitive while other colleges invent their own tools and materials. Yet, none of them are based on research to assess their validity and reliability." P14 has also questioned the reliability of profile reporting to identify the progress made by learners during the course of study because "reports are not based on clear grid, and based on the subjectivity of teachers, (so) they might affect the reliability of the assessment"

As assessment tools at this level are not based on research, they are different from one setting to the other, there is no clear curriculum or rubric that teachers can follow in their teaching and assessment practices, the reliability of the assessment tools is questionable when it comes to assessing LESLLA learners. Rubrics are considered as instructional tools that have positive implications on the teaching and learning processes as rubrics act as grading tools that ensure unbiased, consistent as well as reliable grading to students' work (Chowdhury, 2019). A well-designed rubric offers objectivity in teaching and assessment processes. Therefore, it is undeniable that the lack of rubric for the pre-A1 level, the use of unsuitable assessment tools to LESLLA learners, the lack of learners' familiarity of assessment tasks as well as the rubrics (De Silva, 2014) are all factors that make the reliability of assessment questionable.

17. To what extent do you agree that the reading assessment tools used in pre-A1 level with low-literate learners are reliable
25 responses
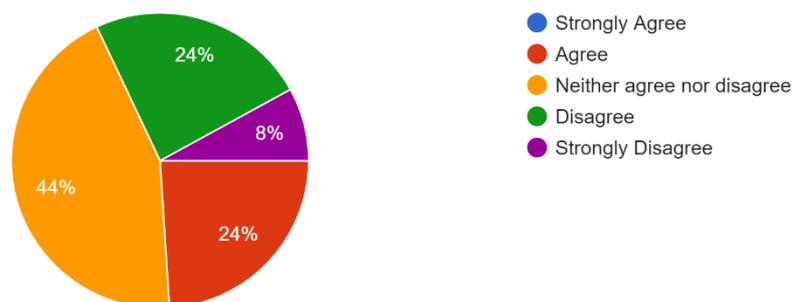
Figure 9 Reliability of Assessment

4.8 Rubric

Three teachers stated that they do not use rubrics at all, and others use the A1 rubric as a guidance to assess against. According to the CEFR, A1 level readers can comprehend familiar names and words, very basic sentences, simple phrases regarding personal details and needs, short, straightforward texts, one phrase at a time, brief, simple greetings and messages, basic information in simple daily

materials such as advertisements, web pages, timetables, and catalogues, information about people presented in very short and simple descriptions and short, uncomplicated instructions and directions pertaining to everyday situations (Council of Europe, 2001). All these factors represent the third stage of reading acquisition, which is named as 'orthographic stage' according to (Firth, 1985; Spiegel & Sunderland, 2006; Van de Craats et al., 2006) and as 'Alpha C' stage according to Stockmann (2006, p. 154). Both Alpha C and the orthographic stages are equal to the lowest level of CEFR; A1, where learners can understand short and uncomplicated phrases or texts, they can identify familiar words and phrases and reread them again when required (Council of Europe, 2001), which is the target level required from ESOL learners in the lowest level of certification in the UK. This indicates that teachers who use A1 descriptor to evaluate LESLLA learners' progress are overlooking the early stages required for reading acquisition, which are the logographic (Alpha A) and alphabetic (Alpha B) stages. Literacy is pre-assumed in the descriptor. Therefore, applying it to LESLLA learners will only highlight their challenges in participating in A1 level classes, rather than accurately representing their true level and progress made over time. This explains why LESLLA learners fail to show their real progress when A1 descriptor is being used as it focuses on the third stage of reading acquisition that require longer time from LESLLA learners to master.

Yet, the rubric is designed to show the progress of literate learners because it is very general, while the small steps achieved by low-literate learners require more detailed rubric as the current rubric might show some but miss others. Therefore, it is unreliable when applied to low-literate learners. P6 adds that if the rubric wording is worded accurately to clearly detail the steps being taken, it becomes suitable, which shows that changes are required in the rubric used against which low-literate level is evaluated. Actually, the current rubric does not show detailed records to show the small progress achieved by learners. The wording should be accurate to clearly reveal the steps being taken. Some exam boards, like the Ascentis, have qualifications that reflect the smaller steps as indicated by P13 and "some AOs (Awarding Organisations), for example C+G (City & Guilds), allow interlocuters to read the rubric out so as not to disadvantage those with limited literacy skills." P15. However, P5 believes that there is no basis from which teacher can start. Even though the reading assessment is objective, it depends on multiple choice questions or on writing skills, not only on reading skills to answer the questions, which makes it

challenging to understand the validity and reliability of assessments and rubric. It is worth pointing that P12 stressed that if the assessment materials are designed well, then the rubric is suitable. Yet, at the time being, there are not enough details in the rubric that can show the small progress achieved by learners.

ESOL practitioners' comments have shown that with the lack of rubric, the validity and reliability of the assessment used cannot be determined. Also, the small progress made by learners cannot be detected as what is being used is very generic. As discussed earlier, the lack of well-designed rubric has a significant impact on the design of assessment and the measurements of students' progress. There are no criteria used to design assessment questions for this level, the assessment used is not based on research and it has been proven to be unsuitable for LESLLA, especially as E1 rubric is sometimes used to assess the readiness of students to move to E1 class and the online holistic assessment use a general numeric rubric, while self-designed assessments do not have rubrics. Thus, the pass and fail criteria is vague and depends on teachers' subjectivity. This has made the reliability of the used assessment at pre-A1 level questionable as the results could be different based on the assessment tools used and the teachers' subjective views of learners' progress. This might have an adverse impact on learners' ability to remain in the country or receive certain benefits (Beacco, 2021). This reflects P4's comment that due to formal assessments "a lot of Pre-entry learners can't access mainstream education." Not only this, but also, failure to show learners' progress in an assessment could demotivate learners and hinder their ability to integrate in mainstream education (Xie, et al., 2018). This has reflected P19's comments the "assessment is highly problematic with this level,… progress needs to be measured and can be motivational. However, it is incredibly difficult in a way that offers real insight into learner progress in a way that is meaningful for both the student and the institution." According to Rezaei & Lovorn (2010), if rubric raters are not well-trained to design rubrics and employ them effectively in measuring learners' progress, the validity and reliability of the assessment is in doubt. A well-designed rubric should value and recognise test-takers different responses and allow a space for various interpretations to both their correct and incorrect responses (Flores, 2021b).

18. To what extent do you agree that the rubric used to evaluate the reading assessment in the A1 level can show the small steps of progress that low-literate learners do in pre-A1 level
20 responses

Legend:
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
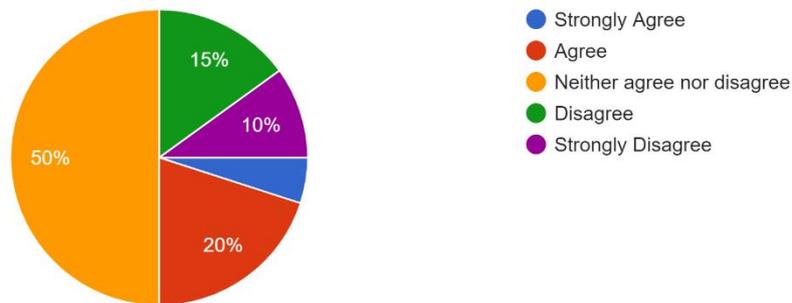
Figure 10 Rubric

All in all, the existing materials used to identify literacy can be divided into partial measures, self-reports or certain proxies, such as the L1 years of schooling. The years of schooling does not give a specific identification to the literacy skills that learners obtain, and the uniformity of this identification could mean different in different educational systems (Vágvölgyi, et al., 2016). Also, self-reports are based on teachers' subjectivity and such reports reflect on literacy as a skill that either the learner possess or not instead of a capability that is situated as well as context-related (Hooft, et al., 2021). Technical literacy tests are also limited to detect certain competencies, such as technical reading skills or vocabulary. Also, some of the technical literacy tests used with adults are designed to measure children's literacy competence. While recent studies have found similarities between children and adult neurobiological developmental patterns (Rüsseler, et al., 2021), the tests used with children are not necessarily meaningful for adults (Hooft, et. Al., 2021). Even international tests such as the International Assessment of Adult Competences (PIAAC), that are used at a large scale, do not offer individualised diagnosing to test-takers' literacy level and do not determine the level of functional literacy of test-takers. It only estimates on a large-scale the existence of literacy skills and analyse the implications for policies (Deygers, et al., 2021). Thus, such tests cannot be validated as diagnostic screening tool. Moreover, literacy tests that are used locally and nationally in the UK are designed to assess the literacy of English as L1, but such tests fail to consider the needs of L2 users, such as migrants who might not be able to administer their correct level of literacy due to their unfamiliarity with the mediating language of the test (Hooft, et al, 2021). Therefore, the use of test takers' first language

or a language they competently master in the diagnostic test is recommended by Vágvölgyi, et al. (2016), which reflect P5's main recommendation.

4.9 Additional Information from the Questionnaire

Almost all participants indicate that there are challenges and sometimes problems when low-literate learners are learning a L2 or being assessed in L2. However, the majority stated that they neither agree nor disagree when it comes to statements related to the suitability of the reading assessment and the rubric used against which the low-literate learners' level is evaluated. Each teacher uses different assessment tools due to lack of standardisation of assessment at this level. Even though teachers know their students well, they might not be professional enough to design test tools that are valid and reliable and according to Alderson (2001), language teachers cannot necessarily be good test developers. It is understandable that teachers are reluctant to state that they are facing a validity and reliability problem with their assessments and level promotion, especially as these aspects are closely connected to the course funding. Yet, looking closely at samples of the assessment tools and considering the challenges that LESLLA learners face in their learning and assessment journey, it can be stated that there is a significant problem that should be overcome by introducing a reference guide that support teachers' delivery of pre-A1 courses and assessing students with mixed abilities and schooling backgrounds. From these findings, it appears that teachers are going through the right track, but there is a room for improvement as they feel they need more guidance of framework to help them design materials to teach the reading skill and prepare students for the reading assessment. They also require assessment tools that are designed by professional test tools' designers based on research. Therefore, better collaboration between researchers, test developers and LESLLA teachers is required to benefit from the competence of each party when designing assessment tools/standardised assessment that can be used nationally in ESOL provisions, especially as passing or failing these tests have significant consequences of immigrants' lives in the country (Beacco, et al., 2021). Thus, more attention is required by policy makers to enhance integration in England.

Due to the challenges LESLLA learners face when are tested in reading in L2, and they fail to show their real level, phonemic awareness pre-test & post-test have been conducted with a group of LESLLA learners to investigate whether LESLLA learners

make progress, even small, or not. This idea will be further investigated in Chapter 5 by analysing and discussing the pre-test post-test data (section 5.1) and the rubric used by teachers at a local college in England. The next chapter will also compare the rubric used by one of the local ESOL providers in the UK and descriptors from LASLLIAM to reveal which rubric is providing a clear overview of the progress that LESLLA learners do, even the small progress (section 5.2).

4.10 Summary of Findings Based on Key Themes

These findings suggest substantial improvements are necessary in the assessment frameworks for LESLLA learners, advocating for further professional development for ESOL practitioners and the implementation of tailored assessment strategies to ensure fairness and clarity in evaluating learner progress.

This chapter has analysed the findings from the questionnaires and analysis of reading assessment tools based on 7 main themes. It began by exploring ESOL tutors' understanding of the relationship between L1 literacy and L2 learning. The initial findings indicated that there is a lack of standardised assessments at the pre-A1 level, resulting in inconsistencies in how practitioners perceive and address the relationship between a learner's first language literacy and second language acquisition when it comes to assessment, which aligns with Artieda's findings, (2017) that L1 literacy has an impact on achievements in L2 for adult learners as L1 reading skills can be transferable when learning L2 (Lightbown and Spada, 2006). Many practitioners skip initial assessments or promote students prematurely without appropriate evaluations, which can lead to inaccurate understanding of learners' needs and capabilities.

Looking into the challenges faced by LESLLA learners in acquiring L2 literacy and being assessed in L2, LESLLA learners experience numerous barriers when acquiring L2 literacy or being assessed in L2, primarily due to assessments that are not suited to their specific contexts. Issues such as lack of previous educational experience and difficulties in understanding assessment language create significant obstacles. This directly aligns with the literature as lacking metalinguistic awareness can negatively affect the L2 learning process (Kurvers, Vallen, & Hout, 2006; Nagy, 2007). Moreover, the lack of educational skills can hinder the learning process (Brod,

1999). LESLLA learners need certain techniques to make transition into schooling smooth (Bramao et al., 2007; Altherr Flores 2021b). Due to the challenges faced in the learning process, it is undeniabl that the assessment process pauses a challenge to LESLLA learners. Many current assessment tools are inappropriate for adults, often being aimed at children or assuming some proficiency in L2, which does not match the needs of LESLLA learners (e.g. Allemano, 2013; Kurvers, et al., 2015).

It also considers the validity (e.g. Kortez, 2008) and reliability (e.g. Deygers, 2019) of assessments for LESLLA learners. The validity of assessment practices for LESLLA learners is called into question due to poorly designed tools that do not accurately measure learners' abilities. The absence of formal assessments leads to randomised materials that fail to reflect true progress, while the lack of individual targets makes tracking learners' advancements difficult and often inaccurate. Thus, the nature of the activities that are included in a reading test need to be examined and compared to reading activities in which learners are engaged in non-test periods as suggested by Khalifa & Weir (2008). The reliability of the assessments is compromised as practitioners often use tools with no clear research backing, relying instead on their own experiences (Day & Naeb, 2022), which can affect the reliability of the assessment and would result into unfair assessment with LESLLA learners (Carlsen, 2017). The inconsistency in assessments results in outcomes that fluctuate widely based on the tools employed, which do not align with the learners' actual progress or potential.

Moreover, the suitability of the reading assessment tools used to measure LESLLA learners' progress has been discussed as a main theme in this chapter. Reading assessment tools currently in use are largely self-designed or adapted from materials intended for more literate learners. These tools include tasks that are not contextually appropriate for LESLLA learners, such as matching exercises or activities requiring advanced skills like skimming and scanning texts. The lack of relevant content hinders the ability to measure real progress effectively, which is a similar finding to Flores (2021) study.

The assessment materials used at the pre-A1 level are not grounded in research due to a lack of standardisation, resulting in a lack of comprehensive assessments similar to those employed at Entry level and above in England. There is no standardised rubric

to evaluate test-taker performance, which poses a significant challenge for ESOL tutors who must develop their own assessment tools without proper training in test development. Participants in the questionnaire indicated that reading assessments in pre-entry level classes are largely based on the personal experiences of tutors rather than established research. As such, these materials are deemed unsuitable for LESLLA learners, raising concerns about their ability to accurately measure learners' progress. ESOL practitioners recognise that the current materials often fail to capture the progress of low-literate learners effectively. This is directly aligned with other studies like Allemano (2013) & Carlsen & Rocco (2021). The findings from this study suggest that true validity can only be achieved through performance-based assessment, such as individualised assessments conducted on a one-to-one basis, tailored to each learner's abilities determined during initial assessments and tracking of progress based on their specific needs (Griffith & Lim, 2012).

The rubrics currently in use lack specific guidelines for assessing LESLLA learners, relying instead on general descriptors which do not adequately reflect the nuances of this population's learning journey. The inability to assess against a clear and suitable grid contributes to the shortcomings in determining learner progress effectively. Therefore, using a well-established framework that accurately reflects the Pre-A1 level, such as LASLLIAM (Minuz et al., 2022), can help address this issue.

Chapter Five: Phase Two Results Chapter
5 Introduction

This participatory action mixed methods research offers a comprehensive overview of the assessment framework within pre-A1 ESOL classes and examines its appropriateness for LESLLA learners. The study is conducted in two phases. The first phase was detailed in the previous chapter and provided an answer to the first three research questions focusing on practitioners' perspectives obtained through a questionnaire, alongside a review of the materials used in reading assessments within pre-A1 ESOL classes in England and the criteria used to create them. The views of ESOL practitioner and analysis to the assessment materials were discussed in the previous chapter. In the light of the findings that the reading assessment tools used in pre-A1 ESOL courses are not designed based on key criteria, but on teachers' experience; it is concluded that the tools are not suitable for LESLLA learners and changes are required to ensure fair assessment and evaluation to the progress made by this group of learners. This chapter addresses research questions four and five. It will analyse and discuss the findings from a small-scale task-based study conducted with LESLLA learners. Through this approach, the study assesses the validity and reliability of the assessment criteria employed in pre-A1 ESOL classes for LESLLA learners and aims to develop agreed-upon assessment criteria for the pre-A1 level that will assist ESOL teachers in evaluating their low-literate learners both before and after the course. This chapter will answer the following research questions:

1. How effective are the assessments used in colleges in relation to assessment tasks based on phonological awareness (the phonemic awareness and the GMC)? To what extent are those materials suitable for the low-literate students' level?
2. How effective is using rubric specifically designed to assess the progress of learners in capturing their progress?

5.1 The Effectiveness of the Assessment Tasks Based on Phonemic Awareness

Based on the PAT pre-test & post-test, the effectiveness of the assessment tasks based on phonemic awareness and the suitability for LESLLA learners have been analysed. ESOL practitioners in the questionnaire had divided views. Some teachers think PAT is suitable and effective as it starts from looking into the "onset and rime with the beginner readers and then move up to word and sentence level with those who have more knowledge." P12. PATs are more useful than written tasks, they can help in "detecting the small steps achieved by these learners" and it can detect the progress they made in terms of "fluency and pronunciation" P5. Also, such tasks might be effective, and they should give "more margin for students' phonological attempts", but they should be conducted by "trained professionals and individually so a thorough assessment can take place with all learners" P10. Also, lack of rubric makes it almost impossible to measure the small progress LESLLA learners might make. The use of E1 rubric is very generic and does not show detailed records of students' actual level based on the questionnaire's findings.

Those who disagree with the effectiveness of PATs in capturing the progress of LESLLA think PAT "are aimed at children" P11 or assumption that the learner "can speak the L2 well" P19, and "they might not capture everything, it can only demonstrate the start of their level as it is through the classes, the full level of a learner will be seen and explored more" P23. PAT does not reveal the true level of learners; it rather shows that they are not ready for Entry level 1 (P23). As the views are divided, this study has tested the integration of PATs in the reading assessment of learners of English as an additional language who have little or no literacy skills (LESLLA); in this case a small group of Syrians learners with Arabic as a first language. It argues that introducing PATs in teaching these students can give a more accurate picture of their fine-grained progress which is not formally assessed within the ESOL policy in England, as the existing range of tools fail to capture learners' micro-achievements.

This study aimed to investigate whether LESLLA learners make progress during a course of study that could not be detected in end of course report or traditional assessments designed by pre-A1 tutors. Phonemic awareness tasks (PATs) were used in pre-test and post-test with 3-month intervention between both tests. During the three-month intervention, students attended structured sessions twice a week, each lasting two hours. Throughout these sessions, a variety of topics were covered

to ensure a well-rounded educational experience. While all four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—were targeted, particular emphasis was placed on developing reading skills, recognizing its critical importance for literacy acquisition, which was the focus the pre and post-tests were measuring. Students were introduced to a diverse range of topics that were relevant to their everyday lives. These included social language, family, time, dates, and numbers, as well as practical concepts such as home and furniture, education, jobs, shopping, food, clothing, and health. By selecting these topics, the course aimed to engage learners with familiar contexts, thereby making the learning process more relatable and meaningful. Visual aids, such as images, flashcards, and realia, were effectively incorporated into the lessons to enhance comprehension and retention of vocabulary. Such visuals not only supported the meaning of new words but also helped in contextualizing them within real-life scenarios, making the learning experience more dynamic.

Each week was carefully structured to allocate specific time for focused activities aimed at building literacy skills among LESLLA learners. This approach recognised that developing literacy is a fundamental step for those learners, who often face unique challenges due to their limited prior educational experiences. Activities designed for literacy development included recognising letters of the alphabet, identifying the first and last sounds in words, and adding missing letters to consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words. Additionally, a variety of engaging phonics games were introduced, which centred on sound-letter correspondence. For example, students participated in activities that required them to identify words that rhyme or use letter tiles to construct simple words. These games not only made the learning process enjoyable and interactive but also fostered critical phonemic awareness skills, which are essential for effective reading development.

The structured approach of the intervention, with its clear focus on relevant topics and the integration of visual aids and literacy-building activities, created an enriching environment where learners could effectively develop their reading and overall language skills. Such comprehensive support not only aimed to enhance their reading abilities but also to boost their confidence and independence as they navigated the challenges of acquiring a new language.

While the study does not focus on measuring the success of the intervention, the English language input provided to participants was controlled. The pre- and post-tests aimed to determine whether learners made progress during the three-month course, as this progress was not detected through the traditional assessments conducted by the ESOL provider. All participants received the same amount of instructional time, as they were only enrolled in this ESOL course. None of the participants were learning English elsewhere, and they also reported that they lacked the knowledge or skills to study independently. Therefore, the progress made in their phonemic awareness was attributable to the intervention and not due to chance.

Findings show that the use of PATs helped detect the progress made by participants, which was not detected in the assessment carried out by the ESOL college at the end of pre-A1 course. Comparing the pre-test and post-test scores showed significant gains in phonemic awareness after the intervention program. Table 5 shows a comparison between the average of pretest and post-test scores achieved by each participant for each task, which are different from one task to the other as appears in the table below. Also, the total score of all points in pre-test and post-tests are compared per individual participant to show the overall progress made. The last column shows the difference between the total score in pre-test and post-test for each participant individually, while the last two rows show the significance as well as the effect size of the progress made by all students in each task.

Table 6 Analysis of Phonemic Awareness Tasks

Task/score	Task1 /15		Task 2 /18		Task 3 /27		Task 4 /15		Task 5 /3		Task 6 /18		Total /96		Difference
	Pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	
P 1	2	11	5	8	14	19	3	3	2	3	6	9	30	53	23
P2	9	12	10	12	17	20	10	13	3	3	7	12	54	72	18
P3	2	11	2	13	15	18	9	11	3	3	6	8	36	64	28
P4	7	9	10	12	12	15	8	11	3	3	12	17	51	67	16
P5	4	12	2	10	9	19	6	7	3	3	7	11	31	62	31
P6	2	10	2	11	12	17	8	10	3	3	7	10	34	61	27
P7	11	12	12	13	16	20	9	12	3	3	13	15	62	75	13
P8	9	11	10	13	16	21	7	11	3	3	7	9	50	68	18
Sig	0.008		0.008		0.007		0.011				0.007		0.008		

Effect Size r	0.63	0.62	0.63	0.6		0.63	0.63	

Looking at the scores for all the phonemic awareness tasks in the pre- and post-test, it can be seen that each of the students improved (table 5). These differences are apparent across all the tasks except for task 5 where students performed almost the same in the pre and post-tests. Statistical analysis for task 5 is not run because the scores in the pre-test and post-test are almost the same with slight difference made by one participant, scoring one more point in the post-test. The results revealed that the difference across the pretests and post-test scores are statistically highly significant overall and for all the tasks tests (task 1 to 4 and 6). Looking at the difference in scores between individuals' pre and post-test scores, improvements have been made by all the students and ranged between 13 and 31 extra points scored in the post-test. This means the difference between the pre- and post-test scores has shown that participants made progress following the 3-month intervention. P scores ranged between 0.01 and 0.008 which confirms that the progress is not due to chance, while the effect size r ranges between 6.0 and 6.3, which is, according to Cohen (2016), a sign that the progression is somewhere between medium (0.5) and large (0.8). Using phonemic awareness tasks revealed the progress that these students have made which is not always apparent when looking at their final reports or traditional assessments scores.

Looking closely at the data, post-test scores were substantially higher across nearly all tasks for all participants. In Task 1, 4 of the 8 participants were unable to replace a letter with another letter and reread the word in the pre-test, while in the post-test all participants were able to do so. There is a small improvement in their reading and the pronunciation of the new words after replacement. Yet, some sounds like / ʃ /, <sh> were challenging to all 8 students as they failed to read the word 'shop' after replacing /m/ <m> with / ʃ /, <sh>. The findings show that the learners' phonemic awareness has improved, but as LESLLA learners are slower in comparison to literate learners (Faux & Watson, 2018), they will need more time to develop their reading skill. Yet, it is worth stating that phonemic awareness is a significant skill for learners to develop into competent readers (Malessa, 2018).

In Task 2, the average again demonstrates that learners' abilities to manipulate the sound units have developed after the intervention. Seven learners managed to read the CVCC one-syllable words only (e.g. 'cold) but struggled to read the CVCV word (e.g. nose) and the 2-syllable words in the pre-test (e.g. cowboy). In this task, 4 of the 8 participants completely failed to delete a sound or syllable from the words given, and the reading of the newly emerged words was mostly inaccurate. Whereas, in the post-test all learners managed to delete the required sound or syllable from most of the words, but their pronunciation of the newly emerged word has not well improved. Reading complex words with 2 syllables was still challenging to the participants. Also, findings show that participants are still unable to distinguish between a sound and a letter. Even though the researcher had stressed in Arabic that it is the sound that needed deletion, rather than a letter, all participants were unable to delete the last sound from the word 'nose' and they all deleted the letter <e> only. Those findings show that learners have mastered the 'logographic' & 'alphabetic' stages of reading in the post-test time, while they have not mastered the 'orthographic' stage yet (Van de Craats et al., 2006, p. 14) according to the stage model that has been widely discussed in section 2.4.2.

For phoneme isolation, which is task 3, participants were to read a group of 9 words, isolate the first, middle or last sounds of the words and then recognise the isolated sound. The reading of words was mostly inaccurate by all participants and only 3 managed to isolate the required sounds. There was a confusion among almost all participants as they were unable to distinguish between letters and sounds in the pre-test. The participants' ability to recognise the sounds in the post-test significantly improved, which is a positive outcome, but this is mainly noticed in their recognition of consonants, not vowels. This could be explained as the Arabic language has a consonantal writing system (Bassetti, 2008), where only the long vowels are written while short vowels are represented by a diacritics system, which is usually omitted (Grosvald, et al., 2019). The differences in the vowel system between both languages makes it harder for Arabic speakers to read words with short vowels correctly in the English language. Also, some participants were still confused and at times unable to distinguish between letters and sounds. For example, 7 participants stated that the /e/ rather than /n/ is the last sound in the word 'vine' in the post-test. This could be due to the different metalinguistic awareness required to read the Arabic and English

languages. In Arabic, all written symbols have to represent a sound, which is not the case in the English language (Cook & Bassetti, 2005) as appears in the word 'vine'.

In Task 4, participants were asked to read a group of words, identify the odd one out based on the different initial, middle or end sounds and then pronounce the sound that was different. All participants managed to categorise the odd word out from a group of three words in both the pre- and post-tests. Yet, a clear improvement has been detected in participants' reading of certain words, but the words pronounced correctly were all CVC words. Words with vowel digraphs, like /i:/, <ea> in 'beach' and /aɪ/, <i-e> in 'nine', are still mispronounced in the post-test by all participants. Again, according to the stage model, the participants have shown an improvement going from one stage to the other in reading acquisition, but more time is required to master the 'orthographic stage' or what is referred to by Stockmann (2006, p. 154) as 'Alpha C' stage, which is the 'automized direct word recognition' as learners can automatically decipher syllables, assemble them to read a word, and they can identify, recognise and understand words faster (Van de Craats et al., 2006, p. 14). Both Alpha C and the orthographic stages are equal to the lowest level of CEFR; A1, where learners can understand short and uncomplicated phrases or texts, they can identify familiar words and phrases and reread them again when required (Council of Europe, 2001), which is the target level required from ESOL learners in the lowest level of certification in the UK. This explains why LESLLA learners fail to show their real progress when A1 descriptor is being used as it focuses on the third stage of reading acquisition that require longer time from LESLLA learners to master.

Task 5 included three groups that consist of three words each. A group of three words have been read to participants at a time and then they were asked if a certain word was included in the group of words read to them. The verbal memory task depends on using the short memory. It appears that all participants did not find it challenging to remember if a word has been said to them. Thus, the scores in pretest and post-test are almost identical as shown in table 5. This finding aligns with Tarone's (2010) & Van de Craats et al. (2006) studies which stated that there is no difference noticed in the short-term memory of literate and low-literate learners when it comes to L2 acquisition.

Finally for Task 6, a group of retrieval tasks were given to participants. The first one was listening to a group of five letters and repeat them in the same order they were said. Then, participants listened to a group of six words and then repeat them in the same order they were said. The last task was to give a word that starts with /m/ and ends with /p/. It appears that learners have shown progress in terms of retrieving letters and words. Also, as the vocabulary repertoire has increased following the 3-month course, 6 out of 8 participants managed to make a word starting with /m/ and ending with /p/ in the post-test, while only 3 participants managed to do so in the pre-test. The findings show again that memory tasks did not cause any challenges for LESLLA learners (ibid) and they could be utilised while teaching and assessing the literacy skill of this proportion.

While those participants were totally unable to respond to the initial assessment provided by the ESOL provider before commencing the course, the pre-test results show that learners are aware that a letter is connected to a sound and that English words go from left to right, which is considered as level 1 of the print awareness descriptor in LASLLIAM (Minuz, et. Al., 2022) (see section 5.2 for more details about the descriptor). Those learners show limited ability to read accurately but still had a degree of print literacy that was not detected in the traditionally used assessments. When the right tools were used, learners were able to show the level of knowledge they have got when it comes to literacy. In the post-test, the most improved areas were sound replacement, sound isolation, sound deletion, and letter retrieval. Moderate improvements occurred in reading sounds, pronouncing words, and making new words. The only skill without significant gains was verbal memory. These results provide evidence that the phonemic awareness intervention led to considerable improvements in key phonemic skills for manipulating and identifying sounds in words. Students made especially strong improvements in replacing, deleting, and analysing sound components. This shows that the participants have captured certain levels of phonemic awareness during the 3-month intervention, but not yet mastered the other pillars of developing strong reading skills, such as vocabulary, fluency & comprehension. Further targeted instruction and extended courses could help improve the fluency of reading and accuracy of pronunciation of complex words with digraphs and trigraphs. However, the intervention has successfully strengthened core phonemic abilities that are foundational for reading development. This could be

different from literate learners who may develop the reading skills faster and show more proficiency in reading after a 3-month course (Tarone, 2010). Most language teachers often seek guidance from second language acquisition (SLA) research when it comes to teaching or assessing L2 learners, but the majority of studies on oral SLA have concentrated on educated and highly literate learners (Bigelow & Tarone 2004; Tarone, Bigelow & Hansen 2009). It appears that there has been an assumption that the insights derived from such research apply universally to all learners, including those with limited or no literacy skills. However, findings from cognitive and experimental psychology indicate that acquiring grapheme–phoneme correspondence—the skill of linking phonemes with their corresponding visual symbols— could be mastered at different levels and speeds by low-literate learners compared to literate ones and this alters the way oral language is processed (Tarone, 2010). This is something that ESOL practitioners need to be aware of when assessing this group of learners.

The findings have not only proved that LESLLA learners made slow but steady progress, but it also shows that the assessment used by the ESOL provider was unsuccessful in terms of showing that progress. By the end of the 3-month course, assessments in all 4 skills were made to all students, followed by a report written to each student individually that reflected their progress. The reports were generic and included the results of all 4 assessments (see section 5.2 for detailed analysis). Such traditional assessment seems to be impressionistic and includes global judgment of learners' level which unfortunately failed to capture progress made by pre-A1 learners. Compared to the assessment conducted by the ESOL provider and the reports written in the students Individual Learning Plans (ILPs), it seems that the fine-grained PATs discussed in this study can provide a better picture of what skills learners have gained and what is still challenging or what requires more attention. Whereas, the reports were very generic, stating that learners did not do much progress in their reading skill as they are still unable to respond to reading assessment tasks, like MCQs or true and false questions, which are suitable for A1 level learners. The reports stated that learners gained more confidence to speak, but not much progress made in reading and writing. Yet, such reports seem unfair given the findings of this study as learners have indeed shown progress in the reading skill when the appropriate tasks were used, i.e. more fine-grained phonemic awareness tasks. The PATs used allowed the

detection of improvements that learners go through when acquiring reading skills. More consideration should be given to the challenges LESLLA learners face and the time needed for them to master the skill as well as the development of appropriate assessment tasks. Going forward, the "can do" statements in The Literacy and Second Language Learning for the Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants (LASLLIAM) reference guide, funded by the Council of Europe, can be used at the pre-A1 level as learning goals and benchmarks against which learners can be assessed.

5.1.1 Discussion

The research questions examined whether LESLLA learners made a progress in the reading skill after the 3-month intervention and whether PATs detected learners' progress, which was often not captured in traditional assessment carried out by individual colleges. The results revealed that substantial progress has been made in aspects of phonemic awareness, such as abilities to replace, isolate and delete sounds from words. That said, more time and efforts are still to be given for the learners to be competent readers as learners acquire reading skills gradually when learning to read an alphabetic script; the development of phonemic awareness is only a start. It is agreed that learners go through three to four stages from the beginning of their learning journey, till they can read and write in short texts (Seymour et al. 2003). Learners use different strategies at each stage to read or write a word. Learners in this study were all at level/stage 1 at the time of the pre-test. They were using a holistic approach when attempting to read by directly recognising familiar words, perceiving and then reproducing them as a whole. At this stage, learners are usually only able to recognise personally relevant or basic words with contextual hints or marked visuals (Minuz, et al., 2022). Then learners become able to analyse and synthesise simple phonological words by cracking the phonemics codes and sounding out simple words. Such elementary reading could still be challenging for the participants as English is considered an unfamiliar language for them because their first language (Arabic) has a different phonological structure from English (Saiegh-Haddad & Geva, 2008). Then, in the post-test, most participants showed progress as they were using level 2 strategies to read. Participants started to use an analytical or indirect word recognition approach when reading words by slowly encoding phonemes (Seymour et al. 2003). Yet, this has been achieved with simple words with simple phonological structure (CVC) only, which consists of 1-to-1 correspondence between individual sounds and

their represented sounds, which makes words' decoding possible. They were still unable to read complex words (CVCV) that do not have a one-to-one correspondence between individual sounds and their represented letters, which are typically decoded at level 3 when learners consolidate their ability to read complex words fluently (Minuz, et al., 2022). At this stage, participants showed understanding of alphabetical principle and the grapheme phoneme correspondence in short words, which is partially a language dependent aspect. In the post-test, participants started to read independently but slowly, and they only correctly pronounced simple words with similar structure.

Participants did not show ability to read at level 3 or level 4, which is the level of automatization and the ability to analyse and produce words fluently and directly (Treiman & Bourassa, 2000). This shows that participants need more time to practice and teaching to master reading using the strategies in these stages (Palmer, et al., 2014). Generally speaking, opaque orthographies, like English, might take longer for learners to master (Malessa, 2018). Also, it is worth noting that first-time readers might need to acquire more skills, such as distinguishing the various features of letters, before they are able to respond to tasks or show their progress (Kurvers & Stockmann, 2009). In the Arabic language, which is a root language, the consonants are the main carrier of meaning, which is not the same in English (Minuz, et al., 2022). It is also important to consider the sound inventory in English and its difference from the one in the Arabic language when investigating the participants' progress in reading. Some phonemes are written differently but pronounced the same in English, such as /i:/ in 'beach' and /ɛ/ in 'head' yet as phonemes they are not distinguished in Arabic due to the different vowel system between both languages. Also, some phonemes like <p> and <v> do not exist in Arabic, thus, they are confused with <b> and <f> by Arabic speakers (Heyn, 2013). Therefore, this challenge should be considered when considering the slow progress made by this study's participants and the kind of issues detected during the phonemic awareness tasks. It is crucial to note that even though the participants are familiar with their L1 alphabetic writing system (Arabic language), they still cannot benefit from their L1 literacy skills because different metalinguistic awareness might be required for different writing systems (Cook & Bassetti, 2005). It has been argued that language systems do not only reflect "their representation of language units, but also placed on a continuum of orthographic depth, also known as

phonological/orthographic transparency or orthographic regularity" (Cook & Bassetti, 2005, p. 7, 13). All these aspects can contribute to the fact that the process of reading acquisition can take longer for participants in this study who are also LESLLA learners (Rocca et al. 2020).

During the intervention, learners have developed phonemic skills and become aware that written words represent meaning in a language. Their literacy skills have also developed as they also become familiar with some of the reading strategies, classroom instructions and task requirements. While interviewing LESLLA participants was not part of the data collection process, several participants shared their thoughts about the positive experiences they had during the pre- and post-tests. These comments have been translated into English by the researcher. The feedback highlights the participants' eagerness to be assessed in a manner that accurately reflects their progress. Many expressed that the phonemic awareness tasks were engaging and helped them reflect positively on their learning by understanding their strengths and areas for improvement. They valued the opportunity to see how far they had improved in their reading skills and felt more confident in their abilities. Overall, the participants appreciated the assessments as a meaningful way to track their learning journey, reinforcing their commitment to continue improving their literacy skills. P2 & P8 have expressed their gratitude for taking part in these tasks as they believe it helped them practice their reading skill. P2 stated: "Thank you for giving us the time to practise our reading more on my own not inside the class", while P8 stressed that "when you explained the task in Arabic, now I know what to do. Before, I couldn't respond to tasks because I didn't know what to do. Sometimes, I only need an explanation to the task. P3 emphasised that "these tests are much easier than the written ones, please continue to use them instead of the first assessment we've done in September". Sense of achievement has been reflected in P1 & P5's comments respectively "I didn't think that I've made progress, but this test showed me that I can improve, and I'm proud of that." "When I read the words for the first time (pre-test), I found them very hard, and I thought that I'm not going to learn to read in English at all. But now, I'm more confident. Thanks for this opportunity."

It is undeniable that more time is still required for those learners to develop automatization and fluency when analysing complex features of the English language, especially as the inventory of sounds are different from their mother language.

Alongside PAT pre- and post-tests, reading pre- and post-tests were conducted with the same students and the rubrics used by the ESOL provider has been compared to two of the can-do descriptors from LASLLIAM to investigate the suitability of the former to measure learners' real level in reading before and after a course. The findings and analysis of data collected via this method has been presented in the next section.

5.2 The Effectiveness in Using Rubric Specifically Designed to Assess the Progress of Learners in Capturing their Progress

The recently released LASLLIAM, the new reference guide of the Council of Europe (Minuz, et al., 2022) is connected to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. It includes "Can-do" descriptors for levels below and up to A1, along with comprehensive recommendations on how to utilise these descriptors to promote learner empowerment and development. The authors of this guide aim to improve language-learning opportunities for non-literate and low-literate adult migrants by assisting their educators in creating, implementing, evaluating, and refining curricula and teaching materials that are specifically designed to meet the unique needs of these learners. The guide includes various scales and tables that reflect on the technical literacy, communicative language activities & language use strategies as well as digital skills (Minuz, et al., 2022).

Technical literacy serves as a crucial foundation for utilizing literacy skills in genuine communication and is defined as the ability to access the written symbols of a language. In the context of alphabetic scripts, this involves learning to use the systematic relationship between letters (graphemes) in writing and sounds (phonemes) in spoken language, gradually achieving fluency until word recognition becomes automatic (ibid). The scales for technical literacy offer a comprehensive framework detailing how novice readers and writers in a second language develop these skills. The process of learning to decode written language begins with the rote memorization of a fundamental set of simple, short sight words, which serves as a stepping stone to understanding the systematic relationship between graphemes (letters) and phonemes (sounds) (ibid). This learning progresses from simple, short words with straightforward syllabic structures and consistent spelling (where each letter corresponds to a specific sound) to longer words that exhibit more complex linguistic features, such as consonant clusters and irregular grapheme–phoneme

correspondences. The final stage of this process emphasises fluency and speed in decoding. For beginners in reading and writing, it is also essential to develop an awareness of the complex relationship between spoken and written language and to understand the phonological structure of the target language. The development of technical literacy is captured in three dimensions: Language and Print Awareness, Reading, and Writing (ibid). Only the Language and Print Awareness, as well as Reading descriptors have been used for this research as the pre- and post-tests are mainly focusing on the reading skill.

A comparison between the rubric that is traditionally used at colleges and the descriptors from LASLLIAM have been applied to evaluate the data from pre-test post-test reading tasks to two of the participants. The recordings of the two students' reading pre-test & post-test have been analysed by a pre-A1 ESOL tutor using report style to offer feedback on the progress noticed between both the first and second recording to each student. This has then been compared to the detailed feedback provided by the researcher using the descriptors from LASLLIAM. The findings show that LASLLIAM provides detailed description to the students' level and progress, while the traditional way of feedback provided generic data, which shows that colleges usually fail to show the real progress students make.

Although this in not highly reliable, but it is an initial investigation into how the kind of feedback & assessments that are used with LESLLA learners can be improved and it just provides an insight of how LASLLIAM can be used to support pre-A1 ESOL practitioners in their teaching and assessment processes. Participants 1 & 2 were chosen because they were unable to respond to tasks in the initial assessment conducted by the local ESOL provider as the assessment was E1 adapted assessment, consisted of comprehension questions, grammar and writing tasks. Thus, the participants were still not quite familiar with reading for information as a technique and the initial assessment was not suitable for LESLLA learners, based on the analysis of the reading assessment tools presented in section 4.2. Instead, technical literacy descriptors (see appendices 7 & 8 for the full descriptors) were used to assess participants' level against. A week after the initial assessment, the pre-test took place. Participants had to read tasks 1 & 2, in which the pictures accompanied the tasks to support the participants' comprehension and cater for the different learning styles (see figures 11 & 12 for examples) and their voices were

recorded. The pre-test has given the researcher a better idea of the actual level of the two participants. As it is apparent in the post-test, new words and phrases were randomly added to the tasks to reduce the chance of correctly reading the words due to the participants' familiarity with the tasks as Knapp (2016) suggested. The aim of the test is to show if the participants had made a clear progress in their reading skills.

Figure 11 Reading Pre-test Task 1

Task 1: tap - rug - sink - oven - chairs - plates – dishes

Task 2: No Dogs - No mobiles - No food or drink - No Smoking- Be quiet - Keep books clean - Don't write on books. - Put trash in the bin.

Figure 12 Reading Pre-test Task 2

Post-test

Task 1: Chairs- Dishes- Spoons- Plates- Knives- A table- A fridge- A sink- A tap- An oven

Task 2: no Dogs- no food or drink- keep dogs guided - put trash in the bin- keep books clean - don't write on books - keep the place clean - be quiet - no mobile phones.

According to the ESOL teacher's evaluation to the reading skill of both participants based on the recordings from the pre-test and post-test, these reports were provided:

Pre-test report for the first participant: '*P1 is an unconfident reader, and her reading skill is very limited as she was unable to read simple words and phrases. She recognises few letters but her reading needs practice and improvement, especially when reading phrases. She depends heavily on interpretations to understand instructions given in English.*'

Post-test report: '*P1's reading is still limited, with lots of pronunciation mistakes and lack of intelligibility of the words and phrases she read. More support is needed as P1 is not ready to move to Entry level 1 because she cannot understand simple texts, like signs, short messages, and simple stories, with the help of illustrations or context.*'

Pre-test report for the second participant: '*P2's level is very basic and she is unconfident in reading. She recognises some letters but cannot connect them together to read simple words and phrases. More practice is needed to improve her reading skill. She depends heavily on interpretations to understand instructions given in English.*'

Post-test report: '*P2 has gained confidence during the course, but her reading skill is still limited as there is lack of accuracy in pronunciation, which affects the intelligibility of what she is reading. P2 needs more support in reading, and she is not ready to move to Entry level 1 class as she cannot read simple sentences or short written messages.*'

Those comments were generic, and they failed to reveal the participants' actual level in the pre-test before the intervention commenced, and in the post-test, after it finished. There is a lack of consistency in the way the teacher was reporting on the students' level, which indicates the subjectivity of the feedback provided and the impact this might have on the learners' ability to maintain their place in mainstream education. It also shows a lack of clarity of the individual needs of learners, as well as lack of reliability of the assessment process in the absence of rubric or assessment criteria (Rocco, et al., 2020). Rocco et al. (2020) add that it is not enough to have a rubric to ensure a valid assessment. Those responsible for rating should receive training to use the rubric correctly to ensure quality evaluation to the test takers performance.

According to LASLLIAM Framework, the language and print awareness & reading of participants 1 & 2 (P1 & P2) in the pre-test are at level 1 (see tables 6 & 8) as they were able to follow the direction of the script from right to left and they were attempting to read the list of words from top to bottom. They were able to recognise written words from symbols & numbers and managed to identify the initial graphemes and their corresponded phonemes of six out of the seven words provided (Minuz, et al., 2022, P.43).

Table 7 Participant 1 Pre-test Descriptor

Participant 1	Pre-test	
Level 2	Can read practised words by recognising highly frequent combinations of graphemes.	✕
	Can recognise most graphemes in a word, including visually confusing graphemes (e.g. b and d or f and t in Latin,	✕
	Can read single practised words with a simple syllabic structure by synthesising syllables (e.g. "ora", "doctor").	✕
	Can relate a grapheme to the corresponding phoneme in orthographically simple words (e.g. "hat"; "book").	✕
	Can analyse words with a simple syllabic structure into phonemes (e.g. "map" into "m-a-p").	✕
	Knows that some phonemes in the target language can differ from phonemes in the first language (e.g. the number of vowels; p-b for Arabic speakers).	✕
	Can synthesise phonemes into words with a simple syllabic structure (e.g. "c-a-t" into "cat").	✕
Level 1	Can show the direction of the script in the language they are learning (e.g. from left to right and top to bottom for Latin and Greek script).	✓
	Can identify some initial graphemes in practised words	✓

Table 8 Participant 1 Post-test Descriptor

Participant 1	Post-test	

Level 2	Can read practised words by recognising highly frequent combinations of graphemes.	✓
	Can recognise most graphemes in a word, including visually confusing graphemes (e.g. b and d or f and t in Latin,	✕
	Can read single practised words with a simple syllabic structure by synthesising syllables (e.g. "ora", "doctor").	✕
	Can relate a grapheme to the corresponding phoneme in orthographically simple words (e.g. "hat"; "book").	✓
	Can analyse words with a simple syllabic structure into phonemes (e.g. "map" into "m-a-p").	✓
	Knows that some phonemes in the target language can differ from phonemes in the first language (e.g. the number of vowels; p-b for Arabic speakers).	✕
	Can synthesise phonemes into words with a simple syllabic structure (e.g. "c-a-t" into "cat").	✓
Level 1	Can show the direction of the script in the language they are learning (e.g. from left to right and top to bottom for Latin and Greek script).	✓
	Can identify some initial graphemes in practised words	✓

Table 9 Participant 2 Pre-test Descriptor

Participant 2	Pre-test	
Level 2	Can read practised words by recognising highly frequent combinations of graphemes.	✕
	Can recognise most graphemes in a word, including visually confusing graphemes (e.g. b and d or f and t in Latin,	✕
	Can read single practised words with a simple syllabic structure by synthesising syllables (e.g. "ora", "doctor").	✕
	Can relate a grapheme to the corresponding phoneme in orthographically simple words (e.g. "hat"; "book").	✕
	Can analyse words with a simple syllabic structure into phonemes (e.g. "map" into "m-a-p").	✕

	Knows that some phonemes in the target language can differ from phonemes in the first language (e.g. the number of vowels; p-b for Arabic speakers).	✕
	Can synthesise phonemes into words with a simple syllabic structure (e.g. "c-a-t" into "cat").	✕
Level 1	Can show the direction of the script in the language they are learning (e.g. from left to right and top to bottom for Latin and Greek script).	✓
	Can identify some initial graphemes in practised words	✓

Table 10 Participant 2 Post-test Descriptor

Participant 2	Post-test	
Level 2	Can read practised words by recognising highly frequent combinations of graphemes.	✓
	Can recognise most graphemes in a word, including visually confusing graphemes (e.g. b and d or f and t in Latin,	✕
	Can read single practised words with a simple syllabic structure by synthesising syllables (e.g. "ora", "doctor").	✕
	Can relate a grapheme to the corresponding phoneme in orthographically simple words (e.g. "hat"; "book").	✓
	Can analyse words with a simple syllabic structure into phonemes (e.g. "map" into "m-a-p").	✓
	Knows that some phonemes in the target language can differ from phonemes in the first language (e.g. the number of vowels; p-b for Arabic speakers).	✕
	Can synthesise phonemes into words with a simple syllabic structure (e.g. "c-a-t" into "cat").	✓
Level 1	Can show the direction of the script in the language they are learning (e.g. from left to right and top to bottom for Latin and Greek script).	✓
	Can identify some initial graphemes in practised words	✓

It took P1 20 seconds, and P2 23 seconds to do the task with 7 and 10 seconds of pauses respectively and being hesitant frequently when moving from one word to the other (see table 10). The grapheme phoneme correspondence (GPC) was an issue for both participants in most of their reading. Both participants were not able to synthesise the phonemes and put them together and read the words clearly without hesitation.

Table 11 Reading task 1 Pre-test Data

Task 1 Pre-test	GPC	Speed	Hesitation	Pauses
Participant 1	4 mistakes	20 sec	5 times	7 sec
Participant 2	5 mistakes	23 sec	7 times	10 sec

Table 12 Reading Task 2 Post-test Data

Task 1 Post-test	GPC	Speed	Hesitation	Pauses
Participant 1	2 mistakes	16 sec	5 times	7 sec
Participant 2	3 mistakes	20 sec	7 times	10 sec

This has, however, been noticed in the post-test as the participants managed to synthesise the phonemes of simple syllabic structure words (5 words out of 7 for P1) and (4 words out of 7 for P2), put them together and read the words with less hesitation time (4 & 7 seconds respectively) (see table 11), which corresponds with level 2 in print awareness & reading descriptors from LASLLIAM (Minuz, et al., 2022). Participants also show an awareness that a phoneme corresponds to a grapheme, but mainly in the consonants rather than the vowels as there have been few pronunciation mistakes in vowels like the sounds /eɪ/ <a-e> in 'plates' /ʊ/ <u> in 'rug' /eəʳ/ <air> in 'chair'. Yet, it is worth mentioning that both participants did not show an awareness that some phonemes in English differ from their first language, such as the number of vowels in words like 'chair' and the letters b & p like in 'tap'. From task 1 pre-test and post-test results, it can be concluded that both participants have shown improvement in their print awareness and reading skill, but that was small progress as they have moved up the grid to level 2, but did not tick all the lists in the descriptors.

Similarly in task 2, both participants have shown an improvement moving from level 1 to level 2 in the print awareness and reading descriptors but not all level 2 descriptors have been ticked (see tables 7 & 9). The participants were able to recognise the graphemes and synthesise the phonemes, put them together to read words with less hesitation and pausing time and it took them less time to complete the tasks in the post-test. P1 has moved down from 31 to 28 seconds and P2 moved down from 40 to 35 seconds from the pre-test to the post-test. The hesitation and pausing time have been reduced from 14 to 11 seconds and from 19 to 14 seconds respectively (see tables 12 & 13). There have been still few pronunciation mistakes in vowels like the sounds /u:/ <oo> food - /ʊ/ <oo> 'book' <u> 'put' - /waɪ/ <uie> quiet - /i:/ <ee> keep - /æ/ <a> trash - /ɪ/ <i> bin and some consonants like /k/ <q> quiet – confusion between /p/ & /b/ for <p> in 'put'. However, a noticeable improvement from being able to identify initial phonemes to being able to synthesise the phonemes together in an attempt to read the words with less pauses and hesitation. This improvement has not been reflected in the ESOL tutor profile comments (see sample comments above) that are traditionally used in learners' ILPs to determine their ability to go to the next level. It is undeniable that in both the LASLLIAM rubric and the traditional profile reports, both participants are not ready to move to A1 class, but LASLLIAM rubric has captured the progress made by both learners in the 13-week course and can offer better insight and detailed feedback for students which is positive for both their learning progress and intrinsic motivations as this gives them a sense of achievement as they perform better.

Table 13 Reading Task 2 Pre-test Data

Task 2 Pre-test	GPC	Speed	Hesitation	Pauses
Participant 1	4 mistakes	31 sec	4 times	14 sec
Participant 2	6 mistakes	40 sec	9 times	19 sec

Table 14 Reading Task 2 Post-test Data

Task 2 Post-test	GPC	Speed	Hesitation	Pauses
Participant 1	3 mistakes	28 sec	2 times	11 sec
Participant 2	4 mistakes	35 sec	4 times	14 sec

5.2.1 Discussion

The traditional reports used in most colleges by ESOL providers are written based on what learners are not able to do and E1 descriptor is being the stepping stone for practitioners to determine their students' levels. The reports are unable to detect the small steps achieved by LESLLA learners in reading, especially in terms of their metalinguistic knowledge and technical literacy. Metalinguistic knowledge, in particular, phonological awareness, orthographic knowledge, and morphological awareness, is an essential part in the development of reading skill to low-literate adult learners in L2 (Tighe, et. Al., 2019). From the pre-A1 teacher's perspective, the participants are not competent readers in both the pre-test and post-test readings. Yet, this evaluation fails to show that the participants have developed their literacy skills and phonemic awareness, which was evident in their ability to blend sounds together to make words in the post-test, regardless of the pronunciation mistakes emerged due to the morphological transparencies between the participants' L1 (Arabic) and L2 (English) (Katz & Frost, 1992; Grosvald, et al., 2019). According to Chard and Dickson (1999), early reading depends mainly on phonological awareness which is understanding the words' internal syllable structures and on explicit instruction, especially phonemic awareness, which is the letter-sound correspondence. In the post-test, the participants were able to show an improvement in their phonological awareness, which should be taken into consideration when evaluating their reading level. It should also be taken into consideration that the differences in the vowel system between both languages makes it harder for Arabic speakers to read words with short vowels correctly in the English language. This shows that both languages do not only differ in their phonological features, but also the morphological features when it comes to the process of reading (Saiegh-Haddad & Geva, 2008). Thus, the participants need more than 13 weeks to be competent readers because not only lack of literacy in L1 can act as an obstacle to learning a new language during learners' life (Tarone, 2009; Artieda & Munoz, 2013), but also differences in phonological and orthographic systems between L1 and L2 have a significant impact on the development of the reading skill (Broselow & Kang, 2013; Malessa, 2018). This becomes clear as the participants have improved their reading and literacy skills but could not tick all the points in the descriptor as more time is required to overcome the barriers and become aware of the differences in phonological and orthographic systems between both languages. The participants have shown progress in the post-test, but it was small and

could not be detected in the traditional rubric. Yet, they developed their literacy skills and that was evident in the post-test. LASLLIAM rubric descriptors were able to show the development in the participants' reading skills, unlike the traditional rubric used at local colleges, which focused on what the participants are unable to do instead of what they can do.

Moreover, it is undeniable that teachers' reports might have reliability issues because of the subjectivity of such reports (Hooft, et al., 2021). Also, literacy is reflected in such reports as a skill that either exist or not (ibid). They do not provide individualised diagnosis to the level of literacy learners obtain or improved over a period of time. Thus, reliability of test results could be ensured if a well-designed rubric has been used by teachers after receiving training on how this should be employed to ensure effective assessment and feedback provided to learners (Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010). Recent research on the validity of language testing has been driven by social concerns regarding fairness in assessment practices, which manifest in two distinct ways (McNamara, 2010; Carlsen, 2017; Bruzos et al., 2018; Rocco et al., 2020). Firstly, individuals may struggle to demonstrate their knowledge and skills due to irrelevant factors, such as the characteristics of those rating the test takers' performances, poorly designed tasks, and ambiguously worded test items (Bruzos et al., 2018; Rocco et al., 2020). Secondly, specific groups of test-takers may experience systematic bias when taking the same test, particularly if the test format favours one group of learners over another (Carlsen, 2017). Certain test-takers may be particularly vulnerable to various factors during assessment, including the types of tasks used, the assessment rubric, the training provided to raters, and the overall quality of their evaluations (Rocco et al., 2020). All the above mentioned aspects are issues detected in the way assessment tools are designed, the criteria used to design these tools, and the way the assessment results are evaluated by practitioners. These issues raise concerns about the fairness of the assessments, making this a crucial topic for validity theorists (McNamara, 2010). The concept of fairness can be interpreted in a narrow sense, focusing solely on test scores. However, it can also encompass the idea that candidates' success in tests should not be influenced by irrelevant factors or inadequate representation of the test construct (Flores, 2020).

Reflecting on Carlsen's study (2017), this research shows that although there is room for improvement to ensure fair assessment for LESLLA learners, ESOL

practitioners are aware of the issue of validity and reliability of assessing this proportion of learners and teachers need more support in terms of being provided with guidance, framework and training to follow when designing their teaching materials and assessment tools. There is a need for developing valid assessment tools that can efficiently screen the literacy level of test takers while taking into consideration the lack of testing skills of the tested proportion (Hooft et al., 2021). Also, a detailed and clear rubric is needed to allow teachers to capture the progress that their learners do after a taught course (Minuz, et. Al., 2022). Therefore, collaboration between ESOL practitioners, test developers, policy makers and researchers are important. The rubric should not only consider the correct answers, but also the wrong ones by offering interpretations to learners' attempts that can be valued and recognised by policy makers and the learners themselves (Flores, 2021b). Not only teachers need to be trained to use such rubrics, but also learners need to be prepared to be familiar with the test literacy to be ready to undertake assessments when required (Flores, 2021b).

The findings indicate that while LESLLA learners demonstrated slow yet consistent progress, the assessment methods employed by the ESOL provider proved inadequate in accurately reflecting that progress. At the conclusion of the three-month course, assessments covering all four language skills were administered to every student, followed by individualised reports detailing their progress. However, these reports were overly generic, simply summarising the results from all four assessments. This traditional assessment approach appears to rely on broad, impressionistic evaluations of learners' abilities, which unfortunately do not effectively capture the advancements made by pre-A1 learners.

In contrast to the assessments conducted by the ESOL provider and the general reports articulated in the students' Individual Learning Plans (ILPs), the more detailed phonemic awareness tasks discussed in this study and the use of a rubric designed to include a descriptor for a level below A1, offer a clearer perspective on the specific skills learners have developed and the areas that still pose challenges or require additional focus. The reports often indicated minimal progress in reading, noting that learners struggled with tasks such as multiple-choice questions or true/false questions—activities designed for A1 level learners. Although the reports acknowledged an increase in students' confidence in speaking abilities, they painted

an unfair picture of reading and writing progress. According to Kunnan (2004), test fairness includes considering the usage of the test scores, the consequences of the test results' interpretations and the political and social values that are implicit in the construct of the test. An aspect that should be considered when test tools are designed to assess LESLLA learners. Kunnan (2014) has also presented four sub-principles that elaborate on the main principle of treating all test takers equally. The first sub-principle emphasises that learners should have the opportunity to acquire the skills and knowledge that will be assessed. The second sub-principle asserts that interpretations of test scores should be both meaningful and consistent. The third sub-principle highlights that assessments should not introduce bias against any group of test takers, particularly by evaluating areas that are irrelevant to the construct being measured. The fourth sub-principle states that assessments must implement appropriate standards for setting, access, and administration to ensure fair decisions for all test taker groups. Additionally, two sub-principles address the principle of promoting justice in society through public reasoning. The first of these indicates that assessment institutions should have a positive social impact, providing benefits to society. The second emphasises the need for assessment institutions to establish justice through transparent public reasoning (Kunnan, 2014).

This discrepancy is troubling given the study's findings, which reveal that learners have indeed made significant strides in their reading skills when appropriate tasks are implemented, such as targeted phonemic awareness exercises. The use of PATs facilitates the identification of the improvements that learners achieve as they develop their reading skills. It is essential to consider the unique obstacles faced by LESLLA learners and the time required for them to fully master these skills, alongside the development of suitable assessment tasks. Moving forward, the "can do" statements outlined in the Literacy and Second Language Learning for the Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants (LASLLIAM) reference guide, funded by the Council of Europe, can serve as valuable learning objectives and benchmarks for assessing learners at the pre-A1 level. These statements can help provide clearer expectations and guide both instruction and assessment in a more equitable manner, ensuring that the progress of LESLLA learners is accurately recognized and supported.

5.3 Summary

This chapter has presented the second part of the analysis of this research's findings. Chapter 4 has presented ESOL practitioners views regarding the suitability of the reading assessment tools used at pre-A1 level to LESLLA learners. This has been accompanied by an analysis to the sample tools provided by some practitioners. The findings reveal a lack of standardised assessments for pre-A1 ESOL course and in-house assessments are being designed by each provider/practitioner. The assessment tools used are deemed inappropriate for pre-entry learners due to issues with content focus, writing style, spacing, and an emphasis on literacy over social relevance. The tools employed in pre-A1 ESOL lack a research basis and do not have specific criteria for design, resulting in unreliable measures of learners' progress. The language and structure of assessment questions can form barriers to understanding for less proficient readers. Self-designed assessments often include inappropriate tasks for LESLLA learners, leading to ineffective evaluation methods that do not capture progress. Consequently, many students fail to reach E1 level due to inadequate teacher training and resources to create suitable assessment tools.

The second part of the findings presented in this chapter has discussed the data collected through the PAT & reading pre-tests post-tests to investigate whether the participants have achieved progress during the three-month intervention and whether the progress has been detected through the rubric used by local providers. Significant progress in phonemic awareness skills among LESLLA learners after a 3-month intervention has been detected by the PAT pre-test post-test. Despite traditional assessment methods failing to adequately capture learners' progress, the study highlights that with appropriate tasks, substantial advancements in reading skills are achievable. The findings suggest that traditional assessment methods do not accurately reflect the abilities or progress of LESLLA learners. Reports generated from these assessments tend to be generic and fail to recognize individual achievements, particularly in reading skills.

The next chapter will summarise the whole research and findings, discus the limitations of the study, suggest further studies and highlight the implications of this study to ensure that LESLLA learners are being fairly assessed in the pre-A1 ESOL courses.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

6 The focus of the Study

While the topic of how LESLLA learners acquire a second language has attracted significant attention from various researchers, including Kurvers, Van Hout, & Vallen (2006), Young-Scholten & Naeb (2010), Bagna et al. (2017), Carlsen (2017), Carlsen & Rocca (2021), Altherr Flores (2021), Gonzalves (2017), and O'Sullivan et al. (2021), there has been limited research focused on the assessment systems employed in ESOL institutions for low-literate or illiterate learners. Studies indicate that these learners face unique challenges as they strive for literacy in a second language, particularly within pre-A1 language classes according to the CEFR. Despite the pre-A1 course being non-accredited, learners are still required to take high-stakes assessments to progress to higher levels in ESOL, a segment of Adult and Further Education. As part of their integration process, LESLLA learners are expected to participate in high stakes written exams (Carlsen, 2021; Rocca et al., 2019) as assessment in many countries, including England, largely revolves around formal evaluation. However, there is no standardised assessment for this level, leading ESOL tutors to develop their own in-house assessment tools without adequate training as test developers. This poses challenges, as LESLLA learners, particularly those with minimal educational backgrounds, often struggle to engage with test questions that are designed with certain literacy expectations. Pre-A1 level learners could be a mix of those who are educated in their home country and those who lack both English knowledge and literacy skills in their native language, making ESOL classes diverse in terms of educational backgrounds and experiences. Some learners may have advanced degrees while others have very little formal education, which complicates classroom dynamics. LESLLA learners face significant hurdles when learning to read and write in a second language. Teaching them is particularly challenging, as they often encounter cognitive difficulties in language processing due to their lack of functional literacy.

While some researchers have examined how LESLLA learners acquire a second language, there is a gap in understanding the assessment materials used in ESOL programs for LESLLA learners. These learners experience unique challenges in becoming literate in a new language, often requiring more time than literate peers to progress. The UK's educational policy, which mandates formal assessments for level

progression in adult education courses, particularly disadvantages LESLLA learners, who may take over a year just to reach Entry Level 1. A significant obstacle within the assessment process is the reliance on traditional methods that assume basic reading and instructional comprehension skills, which many LESLLA learners lack. Even when they can extract meaning from texts for level-promotion tests, they often struggle with conventional assessments that do not accommodate their specific needs. As a result, there is a call for the CEFR to extend its criteria to include assessments below the A1 level to better reflect the progress of these learners, particularly in the early stages of language acquisition.

Research on fair assessment methods for this specific group is scarce, and there is a notable lack of appropriate assessment strategies tailored to the needs of LESLLA learners (Young-Scholten, 2008; Allemano, 2013; Tarone & Bigelow, 2012; Hooft et al., 2021), especially regarding equitable testing opportunities in language classes (Carlsen, 2017). Consequently, this study thoroughly investigated these issues through a research design tailored to this population. The aim was to examine the materials currently used to assess the reading skills of the LESLLA learners, the criteria for designing these assessment tools, and the perspectives of stakeholders— namely, ESOL practitioners and managers—regarding the suitability of these assessments to LESLLA learners. Furthermore, the study evaluated the effectiveness of assessment tasks related to phonemic awareness and the adequacy of the rubrics used in colleges for measuring learners' progress, even their incremental achievements. Participatory action research methodology has been employed to address the research questions, utilising a mixed-methods approach for data collection. The quantitative component involves a phonemic awareness tasks pre-test and post-test method to assess the effectiveness of the assessment strategies used in colleges across England. Qualitative methods encompass semiotic multimodal analysis to the reading test tools used by ESOL practitioners in England, open-ended questionnaires with those practitioners, and comparisons between traditional rubrics used by ESOL providers at pre-A1 level and the new LASLLIAM framework from the Council of Europe.

This study offered comprehensive insights into the challenges low-literate learners face during reading assessments and aims to guide ESOL providers in fairly evaluating these learners. It specifically focuses on low-literate learners in pre-A1

ESOL classes in England, along with their tutors and managers. To assess the fairness and effectiveness of assessment tools for this group, the study employed a participatory action research design with four data collection methods.

The study's objectives include:

- Exploring the perspectives of ESOL practitioners regarding the assessment process and identifying their views and needs for changes in the assessment system through an open-ended questionnaire.

- Analysing the suitability of reading assessment tools for LESLLA learners in Pre-A1 ESOL classes by evaluating <u>the materials</u> and <u>criteria</u> used by providers, employing a semiotic multimodal analysis method to determine their effectiveness in measuring learner progress.

- Measuring the reading progress of LESLLA learners after an intervention course and comparing this progress to their actual assessment results using pre-test and post-test measures.

- Comparing the rubrics used by colleges with the newly established LASLLIAM reference guide from the Council of Europe to evaluate the appropriateness of the existing rubric based on the progress observed in the reading pre-test and post-test results.

6.2 Research Questions

This research has provided answers to eth following research questions:

1. What are the holistic views of stakeholders (teachers, managers etc.) on assessments?
    a. Initial assessment
    b. Tracking progress/ learning gain (summative, formative)
    c. Level promotion
2. What are the existing materials that are currently used to assess low-literate learners?
    a. Initial assessment
    b. Tracking progress/ learning gain (summative, formative)
    c. Level promotion

3. What are the criteria used to design the assessments?
   a. Initial assessment
   b. Tracking progress/ learning gain (summative, formative)
   c. Level promotion

4. How effective are the assessments used in colleges in relation to assessment tasks based on phonological awareness (the phonemic awareness and the GMC)? To what extent are those materials suitable for the low-literate students?

5. How effective is using rubric specifically designed to assess the progress of learners in capturing their progress?

6.3 Summary of Findings

6.3.1 The Holistic Views of Stakeholders on Assessment

Based on both the ESOL practitioners' responses to the questionnaire and the analysis of the assessment tools used by them, it seems that there is no standardised assessment at the pre-A1 level in initial, tracking progress and level promotion stages. At some colleges, initial and level promotion assessments are skipped because learners state initially that they know no English and, on some occasions, due to funding purposes, students are promoted to E1 after studying pre-A1 level without being assessed. Assessments used in initial and level promotion can either be online holistic assessments, self-designed assessments, or adapted Entry level 1 assessments, which are generally inappropriate for LESLLA test takers due to issues with topics, writing styles, spacing between sentences, and a focus on literacy skills rather than social relevance or aspects pertinent to the learners' lives. Additionally, formal assessments for tracking progress are typically not conducted for this group, as some practitioners suggest they are unnecessary, while other teachers may simply take their own notes and maintain records to monitor progress.

The reading assessment tools employed in pre-A1 ESOL are not grounded in research; instead, they stem from teachers' experiences, and there are no specific criteria guiding the design of these tools. The absence of formal assessments means that the randomly selected materials cannot accurately measure the progress of LESLLA learners. Furthermore, the inability to accurately reflect learners' levels in

initial assessments can lead to issues, as individual targets are not established at the beginning of the course. Consequently, tracking progress may be inaccurate since learners are not assessed against their customized targets.

Unless tools are designed properly for LESLLA learners based on their very specific individual needs, the assessment is not fair for this proportion for various reasons. First, the assessment tools are often aimed at assessing children's reading rather than adults. Second, they are designed with the assumption that the learners can speak the L2 well. Third, a lot of support and guidance is needed for such students because they do not only lack the literacy skills, but also the experience of being in an educational setting as well as the experience of testing itself. Fourth, the words, semiotics, and language used in assessment questions form a barrier for weaker readers who can read the text but not understand what they are being asked to do. All these facts have an impact on the validity and reliability of assessment. Therefore, a lot of students are failing to reach E1 because teachers are not equipped with the skills, resources or the correct guidance to design assessment tools suitable for LESLLA or evaluate their performance in assessments. The designed assessment focus merely on literacy so learners might not be able to respond to assessment independently and they require one to one support, which is not practical with class sizes that are too big. Alternatively, due to funding purposes, students are moved to E1 without having an assessment, regardless of whether they are ready to be promoted to the next level.

6.3.2 Existing Reading Assessment Materials

The reading assessment tools used in pre-A1 ESOL are not based on research but rather originate from teachers' experiences, and there are no specific guidelines to inform their design. Looking into the samples provided by some ESOL practitioners, the assessment tools can either be self-designed by the ESOL practitioners, adapted from E1 assessment materials or online holistic assessment. Based on assessment tools' analysis, self-designed initial assessment tools are found inappropriate to LESLLA learners as they often include activities such as add the missing letter from the alphabet, match words with numbers, match words with pictures/signs, read a short paragraph to the tutor, answer questions from the paragraph (very short answers are required), match a picture with the letter with which the word start, add a missing sound to a word (a picture provided), read a short paragraph and fill a table with

information from the text. Even though pictures and model answers are provided, the pictures are out of context and the instructions are suitable for literate rather than LESLLA test takers. Moreover, the online holistic assessment is also not suitable to LESLLA learners because the test genre aspects cannot be identified by LESLLA learners, like reading all the misleading components of multiple-choice task, and knowing how to respond to such as a task and choose the correct answer, especially as semiosis is biased towards literate learners. The images used in such assessment are misleading or could be misinterpreted by LESLLA test takers. Moreover, materials in E1 assessments are designed based on the assumption of literacy. Tasks in such assessment require test-takers to skim and scan the texts to extract information, which are skills that require time to acquire. As LESLLA learners are new readers and writers, they might be unable to respond to the questions in the expected way, even though for some tasks, they are required to only tick or circle the correct answer, rather than write a full answer.

One-to-one bespoke assessment is recommended by a participant because they help teachers understand students' levels both at the start and the end of the course. Such an assessment can include reading simple letter recognition, sound symbol recognition, simple CVC word recognition before using simple texts, social sight words, numbers, postcodes, alphabet letters. However, it is time consuming as it has to be done on a one-to-one basis and might not be practical. Based on this interesting view and to investigate this point further, PAT and reading pre-test post-tests were conducted in this research.

6.3.3 Criteria Used to Design the Materials

The reading assessment tools used in pre-A1 ESOL are not based on research but rather originate from teachers' experiences, and there are no specific guidelines to inform their design. Looking into the samples provided by some ESOL practitioners, the assessment tools can either be self-designed by the ESOL practitioners, adapted from E1 assessment materials or online holistic assessment. Also, there is no clear grid used to assess learners against. Thus, ESOL practitioners rely on A1 descriptor, which reflects stage three (the orthographic or Alpha C stage) of literacy acquisition. Both Alpha C and the orthographic stages are equal to the lowest level of CEFR; A1, where learners can understand short and uncomplicated phrases or texts, they can identify familiar words and phrases and reread them again when required (Council of

Europe, 2001), which is the target level required from ESOL learners in the lowest level of certification in the UK. The lack of criteria to design assessment tools suitable for LESLLA learners and the lack of grid to assess learners against is jeopardizing the validity and reliability of the assessment practice in pre-A1 level. Changes are required and ongoing professional development for ESOL practitioners is significant to ensure an inclusive environment is being promoted in the ESOL provision.

6.3.4 The effectiveness & Suitability of the assessment tools used in colleges

The pre-test post-tests examined whether LESLLA learners made a progress in the reading skill after the 3-month intervention and whether PATs and LASLLIAM reference guide detected learners' progress, which was often not captured in traditional assessment and rubric carried out by individual colleges. The results revealed that substantial progress has been made in aspects of phonemic awareness, such as abilities to replace, isolate and delete sounds from words. That said, more time and efforts are still to be given for the learners to be competent readers as learners acquire reading skills gradually when learning to read an alphabetic script; the development of phonemic awareness is only a start. Learners in this study were all at level/stage 1 of the literacy gaining process at the time of the pre-test. Then, in the post-test, most participants showed progress as they were using level 2 strategies to read. Yet, this has been achieved with simple words with simple phonological structure (CVC) only, which consists of 1-to-1 correspondence between individual sounds and their represented sounds, which makes words' decoding possible. They were still unable to read complex words (CVCV), which are normally decoded in level 3 when learners consolidate their ability to read complex words fluently. Further targeted instruction could help improve the fluency of reading and accuracy of pronunciation of complex words with digraphs and trigraphs. But the intervention has successfully strengthened core phonemic abilities that are foundational for reading development.

The results revealed that the difference across the pre-test and post-test scores are statistically highly significant overall and for all the tasks tests and participants made progress following the 3-month intervention especially in replacing, deleting, and analysing sound components. P scores ranged between 0.01 and 0.008 which confirms that the progress is not due to chance, while the effect size r ranges between 6.0 and 6.3, which is a sign that the progression is somewhere between medium (0.5)

and large (0.8). Using phonemic awareness tasks revealed the progress that these students have made which is not always apparent when looking at their final reports or traditional assessments scores.

6.3.5 The effectiveness & Suitability of the Rubric used in colleges Compared to LASLLIAM Descriptors

Based on the reading pre-test post-test, during the intervention, learners have developed their reading and phonemic skills and become aware that written words represent meaning in a language. Their literacy skills have also developed as they also become familiar with some of the reading strategies, classroom instructions and task requirements. More time is still required for those learners to develop automatization and fluency when analysing complex features of the English language, especially as the inventory of sounds are different from their mother language.

Evidence shows that the assessment and rubric used by the ESOL providers were unsuccessful in terms of showing that progress. By the end of the 3-month course, assessments in all 4 skills were made to all students, followed by a report written to each student individually that reflected their progress. The reports were generic and included the results of all 4 assessments. Such traditional assessment seems to be impressionistic and includes global judgment of learners' level which unfortunately failed to capture progress made by pre-A1 learners. Compared to the assessment conducted by the ESOL provider and the reports written in the students Individual Learning Plans (ILPs), it seems that the fine-grained PATs and the one-to-one bespoke reading tasks as well as the detailed rubric provided by LASLLIAM reference guide can provide a better picture of what skills learners have gained and what is still challenging or what requires more attention. Whereas, the reports were very generic, stating that learners did not do much progress in their reading skill as they are still unable to respond to reading assessment tasks, like MCQs or true and false questions. The reports stated that learners gained more confidence to speak, but not much progress made in reading and writing. Yet, such reports seem unfair given the findings of this study as learners have indeed shown progress in the reading skill when the appropriate tasks were used, i.e. more fine-grained phonemic awareness tasks or simple contextual CVC vocabulary. More consideration should be given to the challenges LESLLA learners face and the time needed for them to master the skill as well as the development of appropriate assessment tasks. Going

forward, the "can do" statements in (LASLLIAM) reference guide, funded by the Council of Europe, can be used at the pre-A1 level as learning goals and benchmarks against which learners can be assessed.

6.4 Limitations

The primary limitation of the study is its small sample size; however, several factors contributed to this constraint.

It was not feasible to provide a comprehensive overview of all materials used in reading assessments for this level across all ESOL providers in England, as assessments differ and there is no national standardised assessment or guidance (Young Scholten & Naeb, 2020). Each college employs its own unique assessment methods. Consequently, this research has analysed some of the collected samples from 10 ESOL practitioners working in several colleges in England, categorised into self-designed assessments, online holistic assessments, and adapted E1 assessments. A maximum of four samples from each category were analysed, considering the word limit of this thesis.

Moreover, only ESOL practitioners from England have responded to the open-ended questionnaire. This study is focusing on practitioners in England only as practices vary in other parts of the UK, namely Scotland, Wales & Northern Ireland due to the devolution.

Accessing a specific group of LESLLA participants—refugee learners who are low or non-literate—proved challenging. Despite the limited sample of 8 LESLLA participants, the researcher was able to provide insights into the progress made by this group. The longitudinal design employed also suggests that traditional experimental design and sample size assessments may not apply in this context. The research aimed to expand the investigation of L2 phonology and phonetics beyond conventional lab settings while including hard-to-reach groups like those in this study. A small sample does not inherently compromise data validity, as non-parametric alternatives have been utilised that do not assume data normality. This viewpoint is supported by McManus et al. (2023), who noted that studies focusing on group levels may overlook individual variations, raising concerns about the generalisability of findings. To address this, studies should be designed to assess whether results apply to the majority of individuals, which is a goal of this research.

Although a small sample size can be problematic, it is crucial to justify its significance in the overall study.

This research adopts a phenomenological interpretive approach, meaning that large-scale quantitative analyses are not typically utilised. It is exploratory in nature, focusing on assessment rather than measuring the effectiveness of an intervention, which makes a control group unnecessary. The study primarily examines how effectively assessment and feedback capture the progress of LESLLA learners — progress often overlooked in traditional assessments that assume literacy. The focus is on the nuanced developments learners demonstrate through a detailed assessment tool compared to conventional, impressionistic methods common in pre-A1 non-/low-literate contexts. Additionally, it is unclear how a control or comparison group would contribute to the study, as it could impose unnecessary demands on limited resources allocated to this vulnerable group, potentially raising ethical concerns. As for the involvement of LESLLA learners in this study, given the difficulty in locating LESLLA learners, the present study is limited by a one-group pretest-post-test design (Mackey & Gass, 2013). Knapp (2016) stated that in a one-group design, it is difficult to discount the possible influence of outside treatment learners received (e.g. exposure outside classrooms) which can impact the results. However, those participants were enrolled in this ESOL course exclusively, where they received the bulk of their language input. Thus, we believe that any course of change is likely attributable to the intervention of this study. Also, the study did not directly explore a causality relationship, it only aims to investigate individual changes as it aims to detect whether or not those learners made progress, which is not detected in the traditional assessment carried out by the ESOL providers after the end of the 3-month course. Some might argue that participants' improvement might be due to an enhancement in task familiarity. To mitigate that, participants were not given a copy of pretest to practise, and since there was three-month gap between pre-test and post-test, familiarity effect probably did not play a major role.

The involvement of the researcher as the LESLLA participants' teacher could present potential limitation in the study. One significant concern is the possibility of bias. As their teacher, the candidate may have developed subjective perceptions regarding the students' abilities and progress, which could influence the interpretation of the pre- and post-test results. While this has been mitigated by

listening to the participants' recordings more than once and quantifying their correct answers based on a specific criterion (as discussed in Chapter 4), it would be beneficial to incorporate third-party observers or external assessors into the evaluation process in future studies. Moreover, the power dynamics inherent in the teacher-student relationship could affect the participants' willingness to participate in this study. Although several measures have been taken to mitigate this limitation (as discussed in Chapter 3), further studies could be conducted with learners from other groups/colleges.

Another potential limitation concerns the length of the intervention. It is possible that a three- month intervention might be insufficient for LESLLA learners to make huge progress and move up a level as LESLLA learners might require a year or more to finish pre-A1 level (Faux & Watson, 2018).

6.5 Recommendations for Further Studies

Based on the findings and limitations of the study, the following recommendations for further research can be proposed:

First, the sample size of our study was relatively small, so further study with a bigger group could be conducted to investigate the topic further. Future studies should aim to include larger and more diverse samples to enhance the generalizability of findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the learners' progress.

Second, this three-month study captured learners' progress from stage 1 to stage 2 in the reading acquisition process. Continued longitudinal research can help track changes over time, offering deeper insights into the development of non-literate and low-literate learners in various educational contexts. Longitudinal studies can determine the time required for LESLLA learners to master stages 3 & 4 of the reading acquisition process.

Third, research that compares the effectiveness of different assessment tools and methods on learner progress, especially in other parts of the UK could provide valuable insights into best practices for teaching and assessment in LESLLA environments.

Fourth, incorporating qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups with LESLLA learners, could provide richer contextual data regarding learners' experiences and challenges, enhancing the understanding of their needs and progress.

Fifth, investigating specific intervention strategies and their impact on learner outcomes can help determine effective practices for supporting LESLLA learners.

Sixth, conducting studies across different cultural and educational settings could shed light on the unique challenges faced by LESLLA learners and the effectiveness of various approaches to support their education. Also, the focus of this study is on Arabic speaking LESLLA learners. Another study could involve participants who speak various languages other than the Arabic. This may also allow comparison between Arabic speaking learners and others whose first language is different.

Seventh, running collaborative research partnering with organisations working with refugee populations can facilitate access to participants and ensure that studies are ethically conducted while addressing the needs of these vulnerable groups.

Eighth, this study focused on the reading skill. Further study is recommended to focus on other skill-specific assessments. Future research should explore assessments that specifically target various skills (e.g. writing, speaking) to provide a more detailed understanding of LESLLA learners' progress in each area.

Nineth, focusing on the impact of socioeconomic factors is another area of further research. Investigating the influence of socioeconomic factors on the learning experiences and outcomes of LESLLA learners can provide insights into barriers and support mechanisms.

Tenth, a study focusing on the development of assessment frameworks is worth investigating. Creating frameworks for assessing LESLLA learners more effectively can lead to improved educational practices that cater to their specific needs.

By addressing these areas, future studies could enhance the understanding and support of low/non-literate learners, particularly in refugee contexts.

6.6 Implications

Regardless of the limitations, the implications of this study remain highly significant for ESOL practitioners involved in teaching and assessing LESLLA learners. This research provides valuable insights into effective strategies and methodologies that

can enhance instructional practices and improve assessment outcomes for this unique group of learners. By understanding the specific needs and challenges faced by LESLLA students, educators can tailor their approaches to better support their language acquisition and foster a more inclusive learning environment. Ultimately, this study emphasises the importance of ongoing professional development for ESOL practitioners and the need for evidence-based practices in ESOL education.

This study can be summarized as a small-scale investigation into ESOL practitioners' views on the appropriateness of assessment tools for LESLLA learners, complemented by an analysis of the materials currently in use at colleges in England. The findings indicate that these assessment tools are inadequate for LESLLA learners, resulting in unfair assessments for this marginalized group and raising questions about the validity and reliability of existing assessments. Although some LESLLA learners may demonstrate competence and the ability to extract meaning from texts, they often struggle with test questions due to the bias of assessment tools towards more literate learners. These tools tend to capture what learners cannot do rather than their actual capabilities. It is recommended that literate learners be separated from LESLLA learners at the pre-A1 level, particularly with regard to assessments, since the latter require more time to acquire a new language. Assessment tools specifically designed to cater to the complex needs of LESLLA learners must be developed to accurately reflect their true level of progress. This research points to the need for standardised assessment frameworks tailored to the unique challenges faced by LESLLA learners, especially at the pre-A1 level. The absence of such frameworks complicates the efforts of ESOL tutors, who often create their own assessments without sufficient training, potentially leading to unfair evaluations of learner progress.

A thorough review of the assessment tools used by ESOL providers in England is essential, as the current materials fail to accommodate the diverse literacy backgrounds of LESLLA learners, who may struggle with complex test tasks and lack of criteria to reflect their achievements. The study highlights the critical need for assessment materials that consider the unique circumstances of these learners. This study reveals that current assessment practices often fail to accommodate the literacy backgrounds of low-literate learners, such as those who may have minimal educational experience or come from languages without a written script. As such,

there is a critical need for assessment materials and methods that reflect the distinct circumstances of these learners. Furthermore, the insights gathered from ESOL practitioners regarding the assessment process provide a valuable foundation for implementing necessary changes in assessment systems. By incorporating their feedback, ESOL programs can enhance the fairness and effectiveness of assessments, thereby improving the learning experiences and outcomes for low-literate learners.

The analysis of reading assessment tools and the comparison of existing rubrics with the LASLLIAM reference guide highlight the importance of using appropriate criteria to evaluate learner progress accurately. This suggests that ESOL providers should invest in training for educators to develop assessment strategies that are both effective and equitable for all learners, particularly those at the novice level. LASLLIAM reference guide has been used in this study to show its importance in detecting the small steps achieved by LESLLA learners and it provides guidance to teachers on how to design their teaching and assessment tools because it includes can-do statements that can be used by ESOL practitioners as learning goals at the pre-A1 classes. It also encourages the use of individual profiles for assessment for LESLLA learners.

Moreover, the mechanism used by adult learners to read in an L2 is mainly affected by the phonological representations of L2 and the orthographic processing, which includes mapping orthography with phonology and in a later stage with semantic. Participants in this study show that they made progress during the 3-month intervention as they moved from using a holistic to an analytical approach when approaching a written text. This progress is small and slow, and it might not be detected in the assessment system used by ESOL colleges (Day & Naeb, 2022). Thus, this study reveals the importance of integrating fine-grained PATs in the reading assessment as such tasks enabled learners to demonstrate their small progress in reading. Learners showed an increased awareness in the grapheme phoneme correspondence while reading simple words, which traditional generic/ impressionistic assessment fails to capture. Therefore, this research advocates the incorporation of PATs in assessment to measure the development of the reading skill achieved by LESLLA learners. The PATs can include assessments around, sound-symbol correspondence, differentiation between words and numbers, word

recognition, differentiation between the upper and lower case and assessing basic knowledge of learners in the letter-sound association (Spiegel and Sunderland 2006).

Finally, the measurable progress observed in LESLLA learners following tailored interventions illustrates that with the right support and assessment styles, these learners can achieve significant advancements in their reading skills. This emphasises the need for ongoing professional development for ESOL practitioners to ensure they have the skills and resources necessary to facilitate effective literacy instruction for low-literate learners.

In conclusion, the study advocates for an educational approach that recognises the unique challenges faced by LESLLA learners, promotes inclusive assessment practices, and ultimately strives to create a more equitable learning environment. Sometimes government funding for ESL/Literacy programs depends on learner progress in skills, of which reading is presented here, so being able to show even the smallest steps as achievements is imperative.

6.7 Reflection on the Position of the Researcher as ESOL Practitioner

Reflecting on my position as both a researcher and ESOL practitioner in light of the findings and implications of my study, I recognise that this research serves as a crucial exploration of ESOL practitioners' perspectives on the suitability of assessment tools for LESLLA learners. The investigation highlights significant inadequacies in current assessment practices that negatively impact this marginalized group, raising concerns about the fairness, validity, and reliability of existing evaluation methods.

The study suggests that many LESLLA learners, while capable of deriving meaning from texts, often struggle with traditional assessment questions due to the bias built into these tools, which tend to favour literate learners. This bias leads to assessments that focus on what learners cannot do rather than on their actual competencies. As a result, I strongly advocate for the separation of literate learners from LESLLA learners at the pre-A1 level during assessments, recognising that LESLLA learners require more time and customised support to acquire a new

language effectively. Furthermore, the findings underscore the urgent need for standardised assessment frameworks tailored specifically to the unique challenges faced by LESLLA learners, particularly at the pre-A1 level. The absence of such frameworks complicates the work of ESOL tutors, many of whom lack the training to design assessments that accurately reflect their learners' progress. This situation potentially leads to unfair evaluations, and therefore a comprehensive review of assessment tools used by ESOL providers in England is imperative. A finding that affected the way the reading assessment is conducted with LESLLA learners in my workplace, especially the initial assessment. As an ESOL practitioners and project officer, LESLLA Learners are being assessed on a one-to-one basis, using oral rather than written tests. The tasks incorporated in the assessment are graded and reflect the actual level of learners. Profiling has also been used to record learners' progress, with the use of LASLLIAM descriptors as guide to track their progress.

It is evident that current materials frequently overlook the diverse literacy backgrounds of LESLLA learners, who may struggle with complex tasks and lack appropriate criteria to demonstrate their achievements. The insights gathered from ESOL practitioners during this study provide a valuable basis for driving the necessary changes in assessment practices. By incorporating their feedback, ESOL programs can significantly improve the fairness and effectiveness of assessments for low-literate learners, enhancing their overall learning experiences and outcomes. The analysis of reading assessment tools and the comparison with the LASLLIAM reference guide further emphasises the necessity of using suitable criteria to evaluate learner progress accurately. As an ESOL project officer, training for educators in my workplace have been prioritised to support them in the development of assessment strategies that are not only effective but also equitable, particularly for novice learners. The LASLLIAM guide has shown its value in identifying small achievements made by LESLLA learners and offers guidance on crafting relevant teaching and assessment tools based on can-do statements suitable for pre-A1 classes. Additionally, it promotes the use of individual learner profiles, which cater explicitly to the unique needs of LESLLA learners. Moreover, understanding how adult learners read in a second language (L2) is influenced by their phonological representations and orthographic processing is crucial. Participants in this study demonstrated progression from a holistic to an analytical approach to reading texts

during a three-month intervention. However, this incremental progress may not be captured adequately by the existing assessment systems used in ESOL colleges. Thus, LESLLA learners can spend longer time in the pre-A1 level and not being promoted to a higher level unless they are completely ready to do so, which is determined based on the LASLLIAM descriptors and the stage model of reading acquisition. Moreover, integrating fine-grained phonemic awareness tasks (PATs) into reading assessments allows learners to showcase their small but significant progress, such as enhanced awareness of grapheme-phoneme correspondences when reading simple words—an achievement often overlooked by traditional assessment methods. Incorporating PATs, which assess skills such as sound-symbol correspondence, word differentiation, word recognition, and basic letter-sound associations, is essential for developing reading competencies among LESLLA learners. The measurable progress observed through tailored interventions underscores the potential for significant advancements in reading skills when learners receive the appropriate support and assessment methodologies.

6.8 Actionable Recommendations

This study ultimately calls for ongoing professional development for ESOL practitioners to equip them with the necessary skills and resources to facilitate effective literacy instruction for low-literate learners. To effectively support literacy instruction for LESLLA learners, several initiatives can be implemented. Organising regular workshops focused on phonemic awareness, literacy strategies, and teaching methodologies tailored for these learners would be beneficial, with LASLLIAM serving as a useful guide for the content. ESOL providers could also offer Pre-A1 tutors access to online platforms or webinars featuring experts who cover best practices in literacy instruction, language development, and assessment techniques. Additionally, establishing mentorship or peer coaching programmes can foster collaborative learning between experienced and less-experienced tutors. With the involvement of researchers, a centralised hub could be developed, providing research-based curriculum guides and teaching materials specifically designed for LESLLA learners. These guides would include lesson plans, assessment tools, and strategies for integrating phonemic awareness into everyday teaching, offering clear support for ESOL practitioners. Furthermore, training on effective assessment

techniques, including both formative and summative assessments, can help practitioners accurately measure learners' progress and adapt their instruction accordingly. Lastly, forming communities of practice where ESOL practitioners can share their experiences, challenges, and successful strategies in literacy instruction would create a valuable resource. Regular meetings within these communities can encourage discussion and provide a supportive network for continuous learning and improvement. These practices champion an educational framework that acknowledges the unique challenges faced by LESLLA learners and advocates for inclusive assessment practices aimed at promoting equity within the learning environment. Considering that government funding for ESOL and literacy programs often relies on demonstrable learner progress—especially in reading & writing—the ability to recognise and document even the smallest achievements is critical. This necessitates a focused effort to create assessment frameworks, such as performance-based assessment, that truly reflect the capabilities and progress of LESLLA learners, ensuring their rightful recognition and support in the educational landscape.

It is evident that the collaboration among policymakers, educators, and researchers plays a critical role in enhancing ESOL assessment frameworks through various strategic initiatives. Firstly, policymakers have the opportunity to partner with researchers to identify existing gaps within current assessment frameworks and prioritise areas in need of improvement. Such collaborative research initiatives can focus on the development of evidence-based assessment strategies that truly reflect the diverse needs of LESLLA learners. Secondly, it is essential to engage educators actively in the policy-making process. By facilitating regular consultations and feedback sessions, the insights of teachers—who possess firsthand experience with the complexities of assessment—can be seamlessly integrated into the formulation of new frameworks. This collaborative approach is likely to yield assessments that are more practical and relevant to the actual needs of learners.

Furthermore, the implementation of pilot programmes represents another significant avenue for collaboration between policymakers and educators. These programs can test new assessment frameworks in authentic classroom settings, allowing for the collection of data and feedback that will inform necessary adjustments, thus

ensuring the effectiveness and practicality of the assessments being evaluated. In addition, researchers can play a pivotal role by providing targeted training resources for educators regarding the latest assessment methodologies and best practices. Policymakers can bolster these efforts by allocating funding and resources for ongoing professional development that seeks to enhance assessment literacy among teaching professionals.

Moreover, the development of standardised assessment frameworks that retain a degree of flexibility to accommodate local contexts is an important consideration for policymakers. Collaboration with educators will be essential in determining which elements of assessments should be standardised and which may require customisation to cater to specific learner populations. Finally, it is imperative that educators and researchers advocate for policy changes that are aligned with contemporary best practices in ESOL assessment. By collectively presenting their findings and recommendations to policymakers, they can facilitate more informed decision-making processes and potentially instigate transformative changes in assessment standards.

The findings of this study underscore the necessity for policymakers to be particularly considerate of the slow progress that LESLLA learners typically make in their educational journeys. Recognising the unique challenges faced by this demographic, it is imperative that they are offered longer courses compared to other ESOL programs designed for literate learners. This extended timeframe would allow LESLLA learners to develop their skills at a pace that is more aligned with their learning needs.

Furthermore, policymakers must acknowledge and celebrate even the small increments of progress made by these learners. It is crucial to avoid implementing assessment systems that have detrimental consequences for these individuals, such as failing assessments leading to negative outcomes like loss of essential benefits or residence permits. Instead, assessment frameworks should be designed to provide constructive feedback and support rather than punitive measures.

To better serve this group, more opportunities should be afforded to LESLLA learners, facilitating continuous development and fostering a supportive learning

environment. By ensuring that assessment results do not interfere with critical decisions—such as eligibility for social benefits or residency—policymakers can create a more equitable framework that prioritises holistic learner development rather than merely quantifying progress through standardised tests.

Ultimately, these findings can inform national or regional ESOL policies by advocating for adjustments that recognise the distinct educational paths of low-literate migrants. Such changes will improve the experiences of LESLLA learners and contribute to their long-term integration and success within the community.

References

Abascal, E. & Rada, V. D. D., 2014. Analysis of 0 to 10-point response scales using factorial methods: a new perspective. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology,* 17(5), pp. 569-584.

Abedi, J., 2014. Accommodations in the assessment of English language learners. In: *The companion to language assessment.* Chichester: Wiley, p. 1115–1130.

Abou-Khalil, V., Helou, S., Flanagan, B., Pinkwart, N. and Ogata, H., 2019. Language Learning Tool for Refugees: Identifying the Language Learning Needs of Syrian Refugees Through Participatory Design. *Languages,* pp. 4 (71), pp. 1-17.

Adrian, J. A., Alegr´ıa, J. & Morais, J., 1995. Metaphonological abilities of Spanish illiterate adults. *International Journal of Psychology ,* pp. Vol. 30, pp. 329–353.

Afflerbach, P., 2016. Reading assessment: Looking ahead. *The Reading Teacher,* 69(4), pp. 413-419.

Al Otaiba, S., Kosanovich, M.L., Torgesen, J.K., Kamhi, A.G. and Catts, H.W., 2012. Assessment and instruction for phonemic awareness and word recognition skills. *Language and reading disabilities,* Volume 3, pp. 112-140.

Allemano, J., 2013. Testing the Reading Ability of Low Educated ESOL Learners. *Journal of Applied Language Studies,* pp. 7 (1), pp. 67-81.

Allemano, J., 2018. *Understanding the education culture gap: Teachers' perceptions of their role in preparing ESOL learners for speaking tests (Doctoral dissertation).* London: University College London.

Almashy, A., 2016. Mixed Methods in Linguistics Research: A Critical Methodological Review. *International Journal of Information Research and Review,* 3(7), pp. 2602-2603.

Altherr Flores, J. A., 2021b. Assessing Refugee-Background Adult Second Language Learners with Emerging Literacy: How a Social Semiotic Analysis Reveals Hidden Assumptions of Test Design. In: D. S. Warriner, ed. *Refugee Education across the Lifespan: Educational Linguistics.* Cham: Springer, p. 139–159.

Altherr Flores, J. A., 2021. The interplay of text and image on the meaning-making processes of adult L2 learners with emerging literacy: Implications for test design and evaluation frameworks. *Language Assessment Quarterly,* 5(508-529), p. 18.

American Library Association, 2011. *Every Child Ready to Read,* Chicago, IL: American Library Association.

Andringa, S. & Godfroid, A., 2019. SLA for all! Reproducing SLA research in non-academic samples. *2019 conference of the American Association for Applied Linguistics (AAAL)*, March.

Appadurai, A., 1996. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Artieda, G., 2017. The role of L1 literacy and reading habits on the L2 achievement of adult learners of English as a foreign language. *System,* pp. Vol. 66, pp. 168-176.

Artieda, G. & Munoz, C., 2013. *The role of age and literacy in adult foreign language learning.* Bern: Peter Lang.

Ascentis, 2018. *English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).* [Online]
Available at: https://www.ascentis.co.uk/esol [Accessed 20 September 2019].

Babenko, E., 2010. *ESOL Activities.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bagna, C., Cosenza, L. & Salvati, L., 2017. New challenges for learning, teaching and assessment with low-educated and illiterate immigrants: the case of L2 Italian. In: J. C. Beacco & H. J. Krumm, eds. *The Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants.* Granada: Council of Europe, pp. 411-417.

Bagna, C., Cosenza, L. & Salvati, L., 2017. New challenges for learning, teaching and assessment with low-educated and illiterate immigrants: the case of L2 Italian. In: J. Beacco & H. J. Krumm, eds. *The Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants.* Granada: Council of Europe, pp. 411-417.

Bailey, N., Madden, C. & Krashen, S., 1974. Is there a „natural sequence" in adult second language learning?. *Language Learning,* pp. Vol. 24, pp. 235-243.

Barkaoui, K., 2010. Explaining ESL essay holistic scores: a multilevel modeling approach. *Language Test,* pp. Vol, 27. pp. 515–535.

Barton, D., Hamilton, M. & Ivanic , R., 2000. *Situated literacies: reading and writing in context.* London: Routledge.

Bassetti, B., 2008. Orthographic input and second language phonology. In: T. Piske & M. Young-Scholten, eds. *Input Matters in SLA.* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, pp. 191-206.

Baynham, M., 2011. Language and Migration. In: *The Routledge Handbook of Applied Linguistics.* London: Routledge, pp. 413-427.

Baynham, M. & De Fina, A., 2005. *Dislocationd/relocations: Narratives of Displacement.* Manchaster: St Jerome.

Beacco, J., 2021. Principles for linguistic reception policies for migrants. The Council of Europe perspective. In: M. D'Agostino & E. Mocciaro, eds. *Languages and literacy in new migration. Research, practice and policy.* s.l.:Palermo University Press, pp. 19-28.

Bedford, J., 2003. Washback–the effect of assessment on ESOL teaching and learning. *Many Voices,* 21(9), pp. 1-8.

Bialystok, E., 2001. *Bilingualism in development: language, literacy and cognition.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bigelow , M. & King, K., 2015. Somali Immigrants Youths and the Power of Print Literacy. *Writing Systems Research,* pp. 7 (1), pp. 4-19.

Bigelow, M. & Tarone, E., 2004. The role of literacy level in SLA: Doesn't who we study determine what we know?. *TESOL Quarterly,* pp. Vol. 29, PP. 689-710.

Bigelow, M. & Vinogradov, P., 2011. Teaching adult second language learners who are emergent readers. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics,* Volume 31, p. 120–136.

Blackledge, A., 2009. "As a Country We Do Expect": The Further Extension of Language Testing Regimes in the United Kingdom. *Language Assessment Quarterly,* pp. 6 (1), pp. 6-16.

Blaz, D. (2001). *A Collection of Performance Tasks and Rubrics: Foreign Languages*. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

Blommaert, J., 2010. *The Sociolinguistic of Globalisation.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Blommaert, J. & Rampton, B., 2011. Language and Superdiversity. *Diversities,* pp. 13 (2), pp. 1-20.

Bowen, G. A., 2009. Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative research journal,* 9(2), pp. 27-40.

Brierley, J. A., 2017. The role of a pragmatist paradigm when adopting mixed methods in behavioural accounting research. *International Journal of Behavioural Accounting and Finance,* 6(2), pp. 140-154.

Brod, S., 1999. *What non-readers or beginning readers need to know: Performance-based ESL adult literacy.* Denver, Colorado: Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning.

Broselow, E. & Kang, Y., 2013. Second language phonology and speech. In: J. Herschensohn & M. Young-Scholten, eds. *The Cambridge handbook of second language acquisition.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 529-554.

Bruzos, A., Erdocia, I. & Khan, K., 2018. K. (2018). The path to naturalization in Spain: Old ideologies, new language testing regimes and the problem of test use. *Language Policy,* Volume 17, pp. 419-441.

Brydon-Miller, M. and Maguire, P., 2009. Participatory action research: Contributions to the development of practitioner inquiry in education. *Educational action research*, *17*(1), pp.79-93.

Caldas-Coulthard, C. R. & van Leeuwen, T., 2003. Critical social semiotics introduction. *Social Semiotics,* 13(1), pp. 3-4.

Carlsen, C. H., 2017. Giving LESLLA Learners a Fair Chance in Testing. In: M. Sosinski, ed. *Literacy Education and Second Language Learning by Adults: Research, Policy and Practice.* Granada: Editorial University of Granada, pp. 135-148.

Carlsen, C. H. & Rocca, L., 2021. Language test misuse. *Language Assessment Quarterly,* 18(5), pp. 477-491.

Carlsen, C. H. & Rocca, L., 2021. Language test misuse. *Language Assessment Quarterly,* 18(5), pp. 477-491.

Carmines, E. G. & Zeller, R. A., 1979. *Reliability and validity assessment.* London: Sage publications.

Center for Dyslexia, 2004. *Dyslexia Terms: A Glossary.* [Online]
Available at: http://dyslexia.mtsu.edu/about/terms.html

Chard, D. J. & Dickson, S. V., 1999. Phonological awareness: Instructional and assessment guidelines. *Intervention in school and clinic,* 34(5), pp. 261-270.

Chomsky, N. & Halle, M., 1968. *The sound pattern of English.* New York: Harper & Row.

Cibangu, S. K. & Hepworth, M., 2016. The uses of phenomenology and phenomenography: A critical review. *Library & Information Science Research,* 38(2), pp. 148-160.

City & Guilds, 2018. *ESOL Skills for Life (4692).* [Online]
Available at: https://www.cityandguilds.com/qualifications-and-apprenticeships/skills-for-work-and-life/english-mathematics-and-ict-skills/4692-esol-skills-for-life#tab=information [Accessed 15 May 2020].

Clarke, V. and Braun, V., 2017. Thematic analysis. *The journal of positive psychology*, *12*(3), pp.297-298.

Cohen, J., 2016. A power primer. In: E. Kazdin , ed. *Methodological issues and strategies in clinical research.* s.l.:American Psychological Association, p. 279–284.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K., 2017. *Research methods in education.* London: Routledge.

Condelli, L., 2002. *Effective instruction for adult ESL literacy students: Findings from the What Works study.* Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research..

Cooke, M., Bryers, D. & Winstanley, B., 2018. 'Our Languages': Sociolinguistics in multilingual participatory ESOL classes. *Urban Language & Literacies,* pp. 234-271.

Cooke, M. & Simpson, J., 2008. *ESOL: A Critical Guide.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cooke, M., Winstanley , B. & Bryers, D., 2015. Whose integration? A participatory ESOL project in the UK. In: *Adult Language Education and Migration: Challenging agendas in policy and practice.* New York: Routledge, pp. 214-224.

Cook, V. & Bassetti, B., 2005. An introduction to researching second language writing systems. In: V. Cook & B. Bassetti, eds. *Second language writing systems.* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, pp. 1-70.

Cornish, F. et al., 2023. Participatory action research. *Nature Reviews Methods Primers,* 3(34), pp. 1-14.

Council of Europe, 2001. *Common European Framework of Reference for languages: Learning, teaching, assessment.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Creese, A. & Blackledge, A., 2010. Translanguaging in the Bilingual Classroom: A Pedagogy for Learning and Teaching? *The Modern Language Journal,* pp. 94 (1), pp. 103-115.

Creswell, J. W., 2021. *A concise introduction to mixed methods research.* London: SAGE publications.

Creswell, J. W. & Plano Clark, V. L., 2011. *Designing and conducting mixed methods research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Croker, R., 2009. An introduction to qualitative research. In: *Qualitative research in applied linguistics. A practical introduction.* Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, p. 3–24.

Cronbach, L. J., 1988. Five perspectives on validity argument. *Test validity,* pp. 3-17.

Crotty, M., 1998. *The foundations of social research. Meaning and perspective in the research process.* London: Sage.

Croydon, A., 2005. *Making it real: Teaching pre-literate adult refugee students.* Washington: Literacy Network of Washington.

Croydon, A. B., 2005. *Making it Real: Teaching Pre-Literate Adult Refugee Students,* Tahoma: WA: Refugee and Immigrant Assistance Section, Washington State Department of Social and Health Services.

Cummins, J., 1984. *Bilingualism and special education.* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Curcin, M., Cadwallader, S. & Sweiry, E., 2022. *Understanding ESOL Skills for Life qualifications: Assessment properties, comparability, core curriculum and CEFR alignment,* London: GOV.UK.

Darling-Hammond, L., 1994. Performance-based assessment and educational equity. *Harvard educational review*, *64*(1), pp.5-31.

Davenport, M. & Hannahs, S. J., 2020. *Introducing Phonetics and Phonology.* London: Routledge.

Day, R. & Naeb, R., 2022. Day, R. and , R., 2022. Reading Assessment System in ESOL Courses for Low-Literate Learners. *Adult Learner: The Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education,* pp. 109-140.

De Silva, R., 2014. Rubrics for assessment: Their effects on ESL students' authentic task performance. *CELC Symposium,* pp. 136-141.

DeHart, J. D., 2020. "It is what it is": Literacy studies and phenomenology. *The Qualitative Report,* 25(3), pp. 596-603.

Dellatolas, G. et al., 2003. Cognitive consequences of early phase of literacy. *Journal of the International Neuropsychological Society,* pp. Vol. 9, PP. 771–782.

Denscombe, M., 2002. *Ground rules for good research: a 10 point guide for social researchers.* Buckingham: Open University press.

Deygers, B., 2019. Fairness and Social Justice in English Language Assessment. In: *Second Handbook of English Language Teaching.* Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, pp. 1-29.

Deygers, B. et al., 2021. Low print literacy and its representation in research and policy. *Language Assessment Quarterly,* 18(5), pp. 463-476.

DfES (Department for Education and Science , 2001. *Adult ESOL Core Curriculum.* [Online]
Available at:
http://cdn.cityandguilds.com/ProductDocuments/Skills_for_Work_and_Life/English_Mathematics_and_ICT_Skills/3694/Centre_documents/3694_Adult_ESOL_Core_Curriculum_v1.pdf [Accessed 27 February 2019].

DfES (Department for Education and Science), 2005. *Further education: raising skills, improving life chances.* [Online]
Available at: http://www.officialdocuments.gov.uk/document/cm67/6768/6768.pdf
[Accessed 20 Feb 2019].

DfES, 2001. *Skills for Life: The National Strategy for Improving Adult Literacy and Numeracy Skills.* London: Read Write Plus.

Donaldson, M., 1978. *Children's minds.* Glasgow: Collins.

Dörnyei, Z., 2007. *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics: Quantitative, Qualitative and Mixed Methodologies.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Douglas, D., 2014. *Understanding language testing.* London: Routledge.

Droop, M. & Verhoeven, L., 2003. Language proficiency and reading ability in first- and second language learners. *Reading Research Quarterly,* 38(1), p. 78–103.

Earl, L.M., 2012. *Assessment as learning: Using classroom assessment to maximize student learning*. Corwin press.

Eckman, F., 1981. On the naturalness of interlanguage phonological rules. *Language Learning,* pp. Vol. 31, 195-216.

Edexcel, n.d.. *Our Qualifications.* [Online]
Available at: https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/qualifications.html [Accessed 15 April 2020].

Education & Training Foundation, 2019. *ESOL SCREENING GUIDANCE.* [Online]
Available at: https://esol.excellencegateway.org.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/informational-page/New_to_ESOL_Screening_guidance_Aug_2019.pdf
[Accessed 7 April 2022].

Education & Training Foundation, n.d. *English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) support: Diagnostic Assessment.* [Online]
Available at: https://www.et-foundation.co.uk/professional-development/maths-and-english/english-for-speakers-of-other-languages-esol-support/
[Accessed 21 May 2022].

Education and Training Foundation, 2021a. *New to ESOL Outcome. Part1: Overview of learners and provision.* [Online]
Available at: https://esol.excellencegateway.org.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/informational-page/NtESOL%20Outcomes%20Framework%20Part%201%20Final.pdf
[Accessed 6 April 2022].

Education and Training Foundation, 2021b. *New to ESOL Outcome. Part2: The Pre-Entry Framework.* [Online]
Available at: https://esol.excellencegateway.org.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/informational-page/NtESOL%20Outcomes%20Framework%20Part%202%20Final.pdf
[Accessed 5 April 2022].

Elder, C., Knoch, U., Barkhuizen, G. & Randow, J. V., 2005. Individual feedback to enhance rater training: does it work?. *Language Assessment Quarterly,* p. Vol. 2. pp. 175–196.

Ellery, V., 2009. *Creating strategic readers.* Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

ESB, n.d.. *Qualifications.* [Online]
Available at:
https://esbuk.org/index.php?/qualifications/filter/eyJyZXN1bHRfcGFnZSI6InF1YWxpZmljYXRpb25zXC9maWx0ZXIjZmlsdGVyLWFsaWduIiwiY2F0ZWdvcnkiOiIxNSJ9#filter-align [Accessed 23 February 2021].

Extra, G., Spotti, M. & Van Avermaet, P., 2009. *Language testing, migration and citizenship: Cross-national perspectives on integration regimes.* London: Continuum.

Extra, G., Spotti, M. & Van Avermaet, P., 2009. *Language testing, migration and citizenship: Cross-national perspectives on integration regimes.* s.l.:A&C Black.

Faux, N. & Watson, S., 2018. Working with LESLLA Learners. In: M. Young-Scholten, Y. Ritchie & R. Musa, eds. *European Speakers of Other Languages: Teaching Adult Immigrants and Training their Teachers.* Newcastle: Newcastle University, pp. 3-28.

Flores, J. A., 2021. The semiotics of writing: How adult L2 learners with emergent literacy make meaning in assessment texts through writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing,* 51(100793), pp. 1-13.

Florez, M. C. & Terrill, L., 2003. *Working With Literacy-Level Adult English Language Learners. Center for English Language Adult Acquisition.* Washington, DC: Center for Adult English Language Education.

Foster, D. & Bolton, P., 2018. *Adult ESOL in England,* London: House of Commons Library.

Frank, M. & Perry, K., 2015. *Beginning Alphabetics Tests and Tools.* [Online]
Available at: https://atlasabe.org/resource/beginning-alphabetics-tests-and-tools-batt-2015/
[Accessed 15 Sep 2021].

Freed, J. & Cain, K., 2021. Assessment of inference-making in children using comprehension questions and story retelling: Effect of text modality and a story presentation format. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders,* 56(3), pp. 637-652.

Freire, P., 1972. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* New York: Herder.

Frith, U., 1985. Beneath the surface of developmental dyslexia. In: *Surface dyslexia: neuropsychological and cognitive studies of phonological reading.* London: Laurence Erlbaum Associates, pp. 310-330.

Frost, R., 2012. Towards a universal model of reading. *Behavioral and brain sciences,* 35(5), pp. 263-279.

Fulcher, G., 2015. *Re-examining Language Testing: A philosophical and social inquiry.* London: Routledge.

Fulcher, G., Davidson, F. & Kemp, J., 2011. Effective rating scale development for speaking tests: performance decision trees. *Language Test,* p. Vol. 28. pp. 5–29.

Galaczi, E. D., Ffrench, A., Hubbard, C. & Green, A., 2011. Developing assessment scales for large-scale speaking tests: a multiple-method approach. *Assessment Education Principle Policy Practice,* pp. Vol. 18, pp. 217–237.

Galliers, R., 1991. *Information Systems Research: Issues, Methods and Practical Guidelines.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Gass, S. M. & Mackey, A., 2013. *The Routledge handbook of second language acquisition.* Routledge: Routledge.

Gateway Qualifications, 2018. *ESOL.* [Online]
Available at: https://www.gatewayqualifications.org.uk/qualification-area/esol/ [Accessed 15 April 2020].

Geisinger, K. F. et al., 2013. *APA handbook of testing and assessment in psychology: Testing and assessment in clinical and counseling psychology.* S.L.: American Psychological Association.

Gerson, K. & Horowitz, R., 2002. *Options and Choices in Qualitative Research.* London: Sage.

Geva, E. & Siegel, L. S., 2000. Orthographic and cognitive factors in the concurrent development of basic reading skills in two languages. *Reading and Writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal,* 12(1-2), p. 1–30.

Ghauri, P. & Gronhaug, K., 2002. *Business Research Methods in Business Studies A Practical Guide.* Sydney: Prentice Hall.

Giddens, A., 1999. *Runaway World: How Globalisation is Reshaping our Lives.* London: Profile.

Ginsberg, D., Honda, M. & O'Neil, W., 2011. Looking beyond English: Linguistic inquiry for English Language Learners. *Language and Linguistics Compass,* pp. 5 (5), PP. 249-264.

Gonsalves, L., 2017. When Standardised tests fail: Informal assessment of LESLLA learners in California Adult School. In: M. Sosinski, ed. *Literacy Education and Second Language Learning by Adults: Research, Policy and Practice.* Granada: Editorial University of Granada, pp. 122-134.

Gonsalves, L., 2017. When standardised tests fail: Assessing ESL literacy learners in California. *LESLLA Symposium Proceedings,* 12(1), pp. 123-134.

Goswami, U., 2001. Early phonological development and the acquisition of literacy. In: D. K. Dickinson & S. B. Neuman, eds. *Handbook of early literacy research.* London: Guilford Publications, pp. 111-125.

Goswami, U. & Bryant, P., 1990. *Phonological skills and learning to read.* Hove: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Goswami, U. & Bryant, P. E., 1990. *Phonological skills and learning to read.* Hove: Psychology Press.

Grabe, W., 1991. Current developments in second language reading research. *TESOL Quartely,* 25(3), p. 375–403.

Grabe, W., 2009. *Reading in a second language.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Grabe, W. & Jiang, X., 2013. Assessing reading. *The companion to language assessment,* 1(2), pp. 185-200.

Grellet , F., 1981. *Developing reading skills. A practical guide to reading comprehension exercises.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Grieve, K., 2007. Assessment for whom and for what? Stepping back to ask important questions about assessment. In: B. Campbell, ed. *Measures of success.* Edmonton, Alberta: Grass Roots Press, p. 123–158.

Griffith, W. and Lim, H.Y., 2012. Performance-based assessment: rubrics, web 2.0 tools and language competencies. *Mextesol Journal*, *36*(1), pp.1-12.

Gronlund, N. E., 1993. *How to make achievement tests and assessments.* s.l.: Allyn & Bacon.

Grosvald, M., Al-Alami, S. & Idrissi, A., 2019. Word reading in Arabic: Influences of diacritics and ambiguity. In: R. Stockwell, M. O'Leary, Z. XU & Z. L. Zhou, eds. *36th West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics.* S.L.: Cascadilla Proceedings Project, pp. 176-181.

Guba, E. G. & Lincoln, Y. S., 1994. Competing paradigms in qualitative research. *Handbook of qualitative research,* pp. 2 (163-194), 105.

Halliday, M. A., 1978. Meaning and the construction of reality in early childhood. *Modes of perceiving and processing information,* pp. 67-96.

Harvey, C., 2015. Time for Reform? Refugees, Asylum-seekers, and Protection Under International Human Rights Law. *Refugee Survey Quarterly,* pp. 34 (1), pp. 43–60.

Hashemi, M. R., 2012. Reflections on mixing methods in applied linguistics research. *Applied linguistics,* pp. 33(2), pp. 206-212.

Hedge, T., 2000. *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Heidegger, M., 1958. *The question of being.* New York: Twayne Publishers Inc.

Hellerman, J., 2006. Classroom interactive practices for developing L2 literacy. A micro-ethnic study of two beginning adult learners of English. *Applied Linguistics,* pp. 27 (3), pp. 377–404..

Hellerman, J. & Harris, K., 2015. Navigating the language-learning classroom without previous schooling: A case study of Li. In: *Dialogue in Multilingual and Multimodal Communities.* Austin: John Benjamins Publishing Company, pp. 49-77.

Heyn, M. E., 2013. *Experiences of male Saudi Arabian international students in the United States.* Michigan: Western Michigan University.

Hibbard, K. M., Van Wagenen, L., Lewbel, S., Waterbury-Wyatt, S., Shaw, S. & Pelletier, K. (1996). *A Teacher's Guide to Performance-based Learning and Assessment*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Higton, J. et al., 2019. *DfE: English for speakers of other languages: Access and Progression.* [Online]
Available at:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/811750/English_for_speakers_of_other_languages.pdf
[Accessed 13 April 2022].

Hinkel, E., 2011. *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning.* London: Routledge.

Hodge, B., Hodge, R. I. V., Hodge , R. & Kress, G. R., 1988. *Social semiotics.* s.l.: Cornell University Press.

Hood, S., 1990. Second language literacy: Working with non-literate learners. *Prospect,* pp. 5(3), PP. 52-61.

Hooft, H., Schiepers, M. & Vandommele, G., 2021. Developing and validating a multilingual literacy test for asylum seekers. *Language Assessment Quarterly,* 18(5), pp. 530-546.

Husserl, E., 1965. *Phenomenology and the crisis of philosophy.* New York: Harper & Row.

ILTA, 2007. *ILTA guidelines for practice,* Barcelona: International Language Testing Association.

Isaacs, T. & Thomson, R., 2013. Rater experience, rating scale length, and judgments of L2 pronunciation: revisiting research conventions. *Language Assess Quarterly,* p. Vol. 10: pp. 135–159.

Iversen, Sejer, O., Halskov, K. & Leong , T. W., 2012. Values-led participatory design. *Co-Design,* p. 8: pp. 87–103.

Johnson, R. B., Onwuegbuzie, A. J. & Turner, L. A., 2007. Toward a definition of mixed methods research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research,* Volume 1, pp. 112-133.

Kahn-Horwitz, J., Shimron, J. & Sparks, R. L., 2005. Predicting foreign language reading achievement in elementary school students. *Reading and Writing,* Volume 18, pp. 527-558.

Karmiloff-Smith, A. et al., 1996. Rethinking metalinguistic awareness: representing and accessing knowledge about what counts as a word. *Cognition,* 58(2), p. 197–219.

Katz, L. & Frost, R., 1992. Orthography, phonology, morphology, and meaning: An Overview. In: R. Frost & L. Katz, eds. *Orthography, Phonology. Morphology, and Meaning. Advances in Psychology Volume 94.* Amsterdam: Elsevier, pp. 1-8.

Khalifa , H. & Weir , C., 2008. *A cognitive processing approach towards defining reading comprehension.* Cambridge ESOL: Research Notes.

Khalifa, H. & Ffrench, A., 2009. Aligning Cambridge ESOL Examinations to the CEFR: Issues & Practice. *Cambridge ESOL Research Notes,* Volume 37, pp. 10-14.

Khalifa, H. & Weir , C., 2009. *Examining reading. Studies in Language Testing no 29.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kindon, S., Pain, R. & Kesby, M., 2007. *Participatory action research approaches and methods: connecting people.* London: Routledge.

Kindon, S., Pain, R. & Kesby, M., 2007. *Participatory action research approaches and methods: connecting people, participation and place.* London: Routledge.

Knapp, T. R., 2016. Why is the one-group pretest–posttest design still used?. *Clinical Nursing Research,* 25(5), pp. 467-472.

Koda , K., 2008. Impacts of prior literacy experience on second language learning to read. In: *Learning to read across languages.* New York: Routledge, p. 68–96.

Koretz, D., 2008. *Measuring up.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Koretz, D., 2008. *Measuring up.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Kress, G. (1997). Visual and verbal modes of representation in electronically mediated communication: The potentials of new forms of text. In I. Snyder (Ed),Page to screen: Taking literacy into the electronic era. (pp.53-79). Sydney: Allen and Unwin.

Kress, G. & Van Leeuwen, T., 2020. *Reading images: The grammar of visual design.* s.l.: Routledge.

Kruidenier, J., 2002. *Research-based principles for adult basic education reading instruction.* Washington, DC: National Institute for Literacy & the Partnership for Reading.

Kruidenier, J. R., MacArthur, C. A. & Wrigley, H. S., 2010. *Adult Education Literacy Instruction: A Review of the Research,* Washington: National Institute for Literacy.

Kumar, R., 2014. *Research Methodology : A Step-by-step Guide for Beginners.* London: Sage Publications.

Kunnan, A. J., 2004. Regarding language assessment. *Language Assessment Quarterly: An International Journal,* pp. 1(1), 1-4.

Kunnan, A. J., 2014. Fairness and Justice in Language Assessment: Principles and Public Reasoning. In: *The Companion to Language Assessment.* Boston: MA: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 1098-1114.

Kurvers, J., 2007. Development of Word Recognition Skills of Adult L2 Beginning Readers. In: N. Faux, ed. *Low-Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition Research, Policy, and Practice Proceedings of the Second Annual Forum 2006.* Richmond, Virginia: The Literacy Institute, p. 23–44.

Kurvers, J., 2015. Emerging literacy in adult second-language learners: A synthesis of research findings in the Netherlands. *Writing systems research,* 7(1), p. 58–78.

Kurvers, J. & Stockmann, W., 2009. *Literacy in Dutch as L2. Learning load and determinants of success.* Tilburg: Tilburg University.

Kurvers, J., Vallen, T. & Hout, R. V., 2006. Discovering features of language: Metalinguistic awareness of adult illiterates. *LOT Occasional Series,* pp. vol. 6, pp. 69-88.

Kurvers, J., Van De Craats, I. & van Hout, R., 2015. Footprints for the future: Cognition, literacy and second language learning by adults. In: I. Van De Craats, J. Kurvers & R. van Hout, eds. *Adult literacy, second language, and cognition.* The Netherlands: Nijmegen, p. 7–32.

Kurvers, J., Van Hout, R. & Vallen, T., 2006. Discovering features of language: Metalinguistic awareness of adult illiterates. In: J. Van de Craats, J. Kurvers & M. Young-Scholten, eds. *Low-educated second language and literacy acquisition: Proceeding from the inaugural symposium Tilburg.* Utrecht: LOT, p. 69–88.

Kvale, S. & Brinkmann, S., 2009. *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Lambert, D. & Lines, D., 2000. *Understanding assessment – purposes, perceptions, practice.* London: Routledge.

Landgraf, S. et al., 2012. Impact of phonological processing skills on written language acquisition in illiterate adults. *Developmental cognitive neuroscience,* 2(1), pp. 129-138.

Latham, H., 1877. *On the action of examinations considered as a means of selection.* Cambridge: Deighton, Bell & Co.

Learning and Skills Council, 2006. *Our Annual Statement of Priorities.* [Online]
Available at: http://www.lsc.gov.uk/national/default.htm [Accessed 17 June 2022].

Learning and Work Institute, 2019. *NEW TO ESOL AND NEW TO LITERACY LEARNING.* [Online]
Available at: https://esol.excellencegateway.org.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/informational-page/New_to_ESOL_and_New_to_Literacy_Learning_Report_Aug_2019%20%281%29.pdf
[Accessed 7 Apr 2022].

LIAM, 2018. *CEFR, levels of proficiency and profiles.* [Online]
Available at: https://www.coe.int/en/web/lang-migrants/cefr-and-profiles [Accessed 24 March 2021].

Lightbown, P. & Spada, N. M., 2006. *How languages are learned.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Litosseliti, L., 2018. *Research methods in linguistics.* London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Lyytinen, H., Erskine, J., Hämäläinen, J., Torppa, M. and Ronimus, M., 2015. Dyslexia—Early Identification and Prevention: Highlights from the Jyväskylä Longitudinal Study of Dyslexia. *Current Developmental Disorders Reports,* 2(4), p. 330–338.

MacDonald, C., 2012. Understanding participatory action research: A qualitative research methodology option. *The Canadian Journal of Action Research,* 13(2), pp. 34-50.

Mackey, A. & Gass, S. M., 2016. *Second language research: methodology and design.* London: Routledge.

Malessa, E., 2018. Learning to read for the first time as adult immigrants in Finland: Reviewing pertinent research of low-literate or non-literate learners' literacy acquisition and computer-assisted literacy training. *Apples: Journal of Applied Language Language Studies,* 12(1), pp. 25-54.

Marrapodi, J., 2013. What Doesn't Work for the Lowest Level and Why?. *Journal of Applied Language Studies,* pp. 7 (1), pp. 7-23.

Marrapodi, J., 2013. What doesn't work for the lowest level literacy learners and why?. *Apples-Journal of Applied Language Studies,* 7(1), pp. 7-23.

Martin, W., 2017. *ESOL funding falls by £100m.* [Online]
Available at: https://www.tes.com/magazine/archived/new-magazine-experience
[Accessed 10 April 2022].

McCance, T. & Mcilfatrick, S., 2008. Phenomenology. In: H. McKenna, J. Keady, R. Watson & S. Cowman, eds. *Nursing research: Designs and methods.* London: Elsevier Health Sciences, pp. 243-250.

McNamara, T., 2010. The use of language tests in the service of policy: issues of validity. *Revue française de linguistique appliquée,* pp. vol. 15, pp. 7-23.

McNamara, T. & Roever, C., 2006. *Language testing: the social dimension.* Malden: Wiley.

McNamara, T. & Ryan, K., 2011. Fairness Versus Justice in Language Testing: The Place of English Literacy in the Australian Citizenship Test. *Language Assessment Quarterly,* pp. 8:(2), pp.161-178.

McNamara, T. & Shohamy, E., 2008. Language tests and human rights. *International Journal of Applied Linguistic,* pp. 18 (1), pp. 89-95.

McTague, T., 2017. *How Theresa May plans to reduce immigration after Brexit.* [Online]
Available at: https://www.politico.eu/article/how-theresa-may-plans-to-reduce-immigration-after-brexit/ [Accessed 21 August 2019]

McTighe, J., & Ferrara, S. (1998). *Assessing Learning in the Classroom*. Washington, DC: National Education Association.

Mechelen, V. M., Derboven, J., Laenen, A., Willems, B., Geerts, D. and Abeele, V.V., 2017. The glid method: Moving from design features to underlying values in co-design. *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies,* p. 97: pp. 116–28.

Merriam, S. B., 1995. What can you tell from an N of 1? Issues of validity and reliability in qualitative research. *PAACE Journal of Lifelong Learning,* Volume 4, pp. 51-60.

Meschyan, G. & Hernandez, A., 2002. Age of acquisition and word frequency: Determinants of object-naming speed and accuracy. *Memory & cognition,* Volume 30, pp. 262-269.

Messick, S., 1995. Standards of validity and the validity of standards in performance asessment. *Educational measurement: Issues and practice,* pp. 14(4), 5-8.

Mezzadri, M., 2017. *Testing Academic Language Proficiency.* Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

MHCLG, 2019. *Integrated communities action plan.* [Online]
Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/integrated-communities-action-plan
[Accessed 10 April 2022].

Minuz, F. & Kurvers, J., 2021. LASLLIAM. A European Reference Guide for LESLLA Learners. *LESLLA Symposium Proceedings,* 14(1), p. 453–470.

Minuz, F., Kurvers, J., Schramm, K., Rocca, L. and Naeb, R., 2022. *Literacy and Second Language Learning for the Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants,* Paris: Council of Europe.

Morais, J., Bertelson, P., Cary, L. & Alegr´ıa, J., 1986. Literacy training and speech segmentation. *Cognition,* pp. Vol. 24, pp. 45–64.

Morais, J., Cary, L., Alegr´ıa, J. & Bertelson, P., 1979. Does awareness of speech as a sequence of phones arise spontaneously? *Cognition ,* pp. Vol. 7, pp. 323–331.

Morais, J., Content, A., Bertelson, P., Cary, L. and Kolinsky, R., 1988. Is there a critical period for acquisition in segmental analysis? *Cognitive Neuropsychology,* pp. 5 (3), PP. 347-352.

Nagy, W. E., 2007. Metalinguistic awareness and the vocabulary-comprehension connection. In: *Vocabulary acquisition: Implications for reading comprehension.* New York: Guilford Press, pp. 52-77.

NATECLA, 2016. *Towards an ESOL Strategy for England.* [Online]
Available at: http://www.natecla.org.uk/content/631/ESOL-Strategy-forEngland
[Accessed 10 April 2022].

NATECLA, n.d. *ESOL Skills for Life qualifications.* [Online]
Available at: https://www.natecla.org.uk/content/596/ESOL-qualifications [Accessed 15 April 2022].

Nielsen, T. R. & Vinner, P., 2023. Cognitive assessment of literacy learning difficulties in adult non-or low-literate second language learners. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology,* 64(4. https://doi.org/10.1111/sjop.12905), pp. 453-460.

Norris, J. M. & Ortega, L., 2013. Assessing learner knowledge. In: S. Gass & A. Mackey, eds. *The Routledge handbook of second language acquisition.* London: Routledge, pp. 591-607.

O'Sullivan, B., Dunn, B. & Berry, V., 2021. Test preparation: An international comparison of test takers' preferences. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice,* 28(1), pp. 13-36.

O'Sullivan, B., Dunn, K. & Berry, V., 2021. Test preparation: An international comparison of test takers' preferences. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice,* 28(1), pp. 13-36.

Oxford Placement Test (OPT), n.d. *Oxford University Press.* [Online]
Available at: https://elt.oup.com/feature/global/oxford-online-placement/test-format?cc=gb&selLanguage=en
[Accessed 25 June 2022].

Pain, R., Whitman, G. & Milledge, D., 2019. *Participatory action research toolkit: An introduction to using PAR as an approach to learning, research and action,* Durham: Durham University & Lune Rivers Trust.

Palmer, J., Boon, R. T. & Spencer, V. G., 2014. Effects of concept mapping instruction on the vocabulary acquisition skills of seventh-graders with mild disabilities: A replication study. *Reading & Writing Quarterly,* 30(2), pp. 165-182.

Pennycook, A., 2001. *Critical applied linguistics: A critical introduction.* s.l.: Routledge.

Pennycook, A. & Otsuji, E., 2015. *Metrolingualism: Language in the City.* London: Routledge.

Perfetti, C., 2003. The universal grammar of reading. *Scientific Studies Of Reading,* 7(1), p. 3–24.

Perfetti, C. & Marron, M., 1995. *Learning to Read: Literacy Acquisition by Children and Adults,* Pittsburgh: NCAL Technical Report.

Perry, K. H., Shaw, D. M., Ivanyuk, L. & Tham, Y. S. S., 2018. The "ofcourseness" of functional literacy: Ideologies in adult literacy. *Journal of literacy research,* 50(1), pp. 74-96.

Pettitt, N. & Tarone, E., 2015. Following Roba: What happens when a low-educated multilingual adult learns to read. *Writing Systems Research,* 7(1), p. 20–38.

Phakiti, A. & Paltridge, B., 2015. Approaches and methods in applied linguistics research. In: *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics: A Practical Resource.* London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., pp. pp. 5-25.

Ramírez-Esparza, N., Harris, K., Hellermann, J., Richard, C., Kuhl, P.K. and Reder, S., 2012. Socio-Interactive Practices and Personality in Adult Learners of English with Little Formal Education. *Language Learning,* pp. 62 (2), pp. 541-570.

Reason, p. & Bradbury, H., 2008. *The Sage Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice.* London: Sage.

Reder, S., 2015. Expanding Emergent Literacy Practices: Busy Intersections of Context and Practice. In: M. G. Santos & A. Whiteside, eds. *Low Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition: Proceedings of the Nineth Symposium.* San Francisco, California: Lulu Publishing Services, pp. 1-29.

Rezaei, A. R. & Lovorn, M., 2010. Reliability and validity of rubrics for assessment through writing. *Assessing writing,* 15(1), pp. 18-39.

Riazi, A. M. & Candlin, C. N., 2014. Mixed-methods research in language teaching and learning: Opportunities, issues and challenges. *Language Teaching,* 47(2), p. 135–173.

Roberts, S. and Philip, R., 2006. The grammar of visual design. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, *22*(2), p. 209-228.

Robinson, A., 2017. *North East Migration Partnership Regional ESOL Coordinator Report,* Middlesbrough: NEMP.

Robson, C., 2002. *Real world research.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Rocca, L., Carlsen, C. H. & Deygers, B., 2020. *Linguistic integration of adult migrants: Requirements and learning opportunities,* Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publication.

Rocca, L., Minuz, F. & Borri, A., 2017. Syllabus and descriptors for illiterate, semi-literate and literate users. From illiteracy to A1 level. In: *Alfabetización y aprendizaje de idiomas por adultos: investigación, política educativa y práctica docente.* Granada: Universidad de Granada, pp. 207-218.

Rosenberg, S., 2007. *A Critical History of ESOL in the UK 1870-2006.* Leicester: NIACE.

Rüsseler, J., Arendt, D., Münte, T.F., Mohammadi, B. and Boltzmann, M., 2021. Literacy affects brain structure–what can we learn for language assessment in low literates? *Language Assessment Quarterly,* 18(5), pp. 492-507.

Saiegh-Haddad, E. & Geva, E., 2008. Morphological awareness, phonological awareness, and reading in English–Arabic bilingual children. *Reading and writing,* Volume 21, pp. 481-504.

Sanders, E., 2003. From user-centered to participatory design approaches. In: *Design and the Social sciences.* Boca Raton: CRC Press, pp. 18-25.

Sarantakos, S., 1998. Varieties of social research. In: *Social research.* London: Palgrave, pp. 31-71.

Saxena, M., 1994. Literacies among the Panjabis in Southall. In: *Worlds of literacy.* Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters, p. 195–214.

Schellekens, P., 2007. *The Oxford ESOL handbook.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Schwab, I., 2010. Reading. In: I. Schwab & N. Hughes, eds. *Teaching adult literacy. Principles and practice.* Maidenhead: Open University Press, p. 149–208.

Seymour, P. H., Aro, M., Erskine, J. M. & Collaboration with COST Action A8 Network , 2003. Foundation literacy acquisition in European orthographies. *British Journal of psychology,* 94(2), pp. 143-174.

Sidaway, K., 2024. Reflexive participant collaboration: researching 'with' adult migrant learners of English. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, *24*(5), pp.443-457.

Simpson, J., 2015. English Language Learning for Adult Migrants in Superdiverse Britain. In: J. Simpson & A. Whiteside, eds. *Adult Language Education and Migration: Challenging Agendas in Policy and Practice.* London: Routledge, pp. 200-13.

Simpson, J., 2016. English for speakers of other languages: Language education and migration. In: G. Hall, ed. *The Routledge handbook of English language teaching.* Routledge Handbooks in Applied Linguistics Oxon: Routledge, pp. 177-190.

Simpson, J., 2016. English for Speakers of Others Languages Language Education and Migration. In: G. Hall, ed. *The Routledge Handbook of English Language Teaching (Routledge Handbooks in Applied Linguistics.* Oxon: Routledge, pp. 177-190.

Simpson, J., 2021. ESOL, integration and immigration. *NYS Tesol Journal,* 8(2), pp. 5-17.

Simpson, J., Cooke, M., Callaghan, J., Hepworth, M., Homer, M., Baynham, M., Allen, T., Grant, R., Sisimayi, S., 2011. *ESOL Neighbourhood Audit Pilot (Harehills): The HENNA Project.* [Online] Available at: http://www.education.leeds.ac.uk/research/projects/henna-project [Accessed 25 September 2023].

Simpson, J., Sunderland, H. & Cooke, M., 2008. ADULT ESOL IN THE UK: PERSPECTIVES ON POLICY, PRACTICE AND RESEARCH. In: M. Young-Scholten, ed. *Low-Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition: Proceedings of the Third Annual Forum.* Durham: Roundtuit Publishing, pp. 25-31.

Sloan, A. & Bowe, B., 2014. Phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology: The philosophy, the methodologies and using hermeneutic phenomenology to investigate lecturers' experiences of curriculum design. *Quality & Quantity,* 48(3), pp. 1291-1303.

Sparks, R. L. & Ganschow, L., 1995. A strong inference approach to causal factors in foreign language learning: A response to MacIntyre. *The Modern Language Journal,* 79(2), pp. 235-244.

Sparks, R.L., Patton, J., Ganschow, L., Humbach, N. and Javorsky, J., 2008. Early first-language reading and spelling skills predict later second-language reading and spelling skills. *Journal of educational psychology,* 100(1), pp. 162-.

Spiegel, M. & Sunderland, H., 2006. *Teaching basic literacy to ESOL learners: a teachers' guide.* London: LLU+.

SQA, 2020. *ESOL Assessment and the Scottish Framework (SCQF).* [Online]
Available at: https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files/hn/FK8Y36.pdf
[Accessed 25 April 2023].

SQA, n.d.. *ESOL.* [Online]
Available at: https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/45678.html [Accessed 25 April 2023].

Stockmann, W., 2006. Portfolio methodology for literacy for literacy students. In: *Low-educated adult second language and literacy acquisition. Proceedings of the inaugural symposium.* Utrecht: LOT, p. 151–163.

Stoynoff, S., 2009. Recent developments in language assessment and the case of four large-scale tests of ESOL ability. *Language Teaching,* 42(1), pp. 1-40.

Straightforward Quick Placement, n.d. *Straightforward Quick Placement and Diagnostic Test.* [Online]
Available at: https://www.englishtestsonline.com/straightforward-quick-placement-and-diagnostic-test/?download-pdf
[Accessed 23 5 2021].

Strom, N. & Young-Scholten, M., 2004. *Factors determining adult non-literates' reading progress.* Long Beach: TESOL.

Tammelin-Laine, T., 2015. No Verbs, No Syntax: The Development and Use of Verbs in Non-Literate Learners' Spoken Finnish. In: M. G. Santos & A. Whiteside, eds. *Low Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition. Proceedings of the Ninth Symposium.* s.l.: Lulu, pp. 249-273.

Tammelin-Laine, T. & Martin, M., 2015. The simultaneous development of receptive skills in an orthographically transparent second language. *Writing Systems Research,* 7(1), p. 39–57.

Tammelin-Laine, T., Nieminen, L. & Martin, M., 2013. Editorial: Special issue on Second Language and Literacy Acquisition of Low-Educated Adult Immigrants. *Apples – Journal of Applied Language Studies,* 7(1), pp. 1-6.

Tarone, E., 2009. Second language acquisition by low-literate learners: An under-studied population. *Language Teaching,* 43(1), p. 75–83.

Tarone, E., 2010. Second language acquisition by low-literate learners: An under-studied population. *Language Teaching,* pp. 43 (1), pp. 75-83.

Tarone, E. & Bigelow , M., 2005. Impact of literacy on oral language processing: Implications for SLA research. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics,* pp. Vol. 25, PP. 77–97.

Tarone, E. & Bigelow, M., 2005. Impact of literacy on oral language processing: Implications for second language acquisition research. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics,* Volume 25, pp. 77-97.

Tarone, E., Bigelow, M. & Hansen, K., 2009. *Literacy and Second Language Oracy.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Teemant, A., Bernhardt, E. B., Rodriguez-Muñoz, M. & Aiello, M., 2000. A dialogue among teachers that benefits second language learners. *Middle School Journal,* 32(2), pp. 30-38.

Tighe, E.L., Little, C.W., Arrastia-Chisholm, M.C., Schatschneider, C., Diehm, E., Quinn, J.M. and Edwards, A.A., 2019. Assessing the direct and indirect effects of metalinguistic awareness to the reading comprehension skills of struggling adult readers. *Reading and Writing,* Volume 32, pp. 787-818.

Treiman, R. & Bourassa, D. C., 2000. The development of spelling skill. *Topics in language disorders,* 20(3), pp. 1-18.

Trinity College, n.d. *ESOL Skills for Life (UK).* [Online]
Available at: ttps://www.trinitycollege.com/site/?id=3235 [Accessed 20 October 2019].

UNISCO, 2017. *International Literacy Day.* [Online]
Available at: http://uis.unesco.org/en/news/international-literacy-day-2017 [Accessed 20 October 2019].

United Nations, 2017. *The International Migration Report 2017 (Highlights).* [Online]
Available at: https://www.un.org/development/desa/publications/international-migration-report-2017.html [Accessed 25 October 2019].

Vágvölgyi, R. et al., 2016. A review about functional illiteracy: Definition, cognitive, linguistic, and numerical aspects. *Frontiers in psychology,* 7(1617), pp. 1-13.

Van de Craats, I., Kurvers, J. & Young-Scholten, M., 2006. Research on Low-Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition. In: I. Van de Craats, J. Kurvers & M. Young-Scholten, eds. *Low-educated second language and literacy acquisition: Proceedings from inaugural symposium Tilburg 2005.* Utrecht: LOT, pp. 7-24.

Verma, J. P., 2012. *Data analysis in management with SPSS software.* London: Springer Science & Business Media.

Vertovec, S., 2006. *The Emergence of Super-diversity in Britain. Working Paper no. 25.* Oxford: Centre on Migration, Policy, and Society COMPAS, University of Oxford.

Vertovec, S., 2012. Diversity and the Social Imaginary. *European Journal of Sociology,* pp. 53, pp. 287-312.

Wagner, D. A., 2000. *Literacy and adult education. Global thematic review prepared for the UN.* s.l.: World education Forum, Dakar, Senegal. Paris: UNESCO.

Wallace, C., 1992. *Reading.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Walliman, N., 2017. Research Theory. In: *Research Methods: The Basics.* London: Routledge, pp. 13-28.

Warren, M. & Young, S., 2012. From metalinguistic awareness to social context: The role of L1 literacy in adult SLA. In: M. Young-Scholten, ed. *Low-Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition. Proceedings of the 3rd Annual Forum.* Durham: Roundtuit Publishing, pp. 99-107.

Weigle, S. C., 2002. *Assessing writing.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

White, N., 2018. *Migration Statistics Quarterly Report: February 2018,* London: Migration Statistics Quarterly Report.

Wienberg, J., Dutz, G. & Grotlüschen, A., 2021. Language Learning of Migrants: Empirical Evidence from the German Integration Course System with a Focus on Literacy Courses. In: J. Wienberg, G.

Dutz & A. Grotlüschen, eds. *Language Learning of Adult Migrants in Europe.* s.l.: Springer, Cham, pp. 95-118.

Winstanley, B. & Cooke, M., 2016. *Winstanley, B. and Cooke, M. (2016), Emerging Worlds, Emerging Words:,* London: report of the Reflect ESOL Planning Project. Action Aid. Available at: www.efalondon.org.uk.

World Demographics Profile, 2021. *World Demographics Profile.* [Online]
Available at: https://www.indexmundi.com/world/demographics_profile.html
[Accessed 18 October 2021].

Wright, S., 2004. *Language Policy and Language Planning: From Nationalism to Globalisation.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Xie, J. et al., 2018. Learner perceptions of demotivators in the EFL classroom: Experiences of failure on learning outcomes. *Journal of Asia TEFL,* 15(2), p. 491.

Young-Scholten , M. & Strom, N., 2006. First-time L2 readers: Is there a critical period. In: *Low-educated adult second language and literacy acquisition. Proceedings of the inaugural symposium.* Utrecht: LOT, p. 45–68.

Young-Scholten, M., 2008. Low-educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition. In: M. Young-Scholten, ed. *Low-Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition: Proceedings of the Third Annual Forum.* Durham: Roundtuit Publishing, pp. 5-6.

Young-Scholten, M., 2015. Adolescents and Adults who Developed Literacy for the First Time in L2. *Special Issue of Writing Systems Research,* p. 7 (1).

Young-Scholten, M., 2021. What do we know from 1 ½ decades of LESLLA symposia?. In: M. D'Agostino & E. Mocciaro, eds. *Languages and literacy in new migration. Research, practice and policy.* s.l.: Palermo University Press, pp. 69-82.

Young-Scholten, M. & Kreeft Peyton, J., 2020. Introduction: Understanding Adults Learning to Read for the First Time in a New Language: Multiple Perspectives. In: J. Kreeft Peyton & M. Young-Scholten, eds. *Teaching Adult Immigrants with Limited Formal Education: Theory, Research and Practice.* Bristol: Blue Ridge Summit: Multilingual Matters, pp. pp. 1-10.

Young-Scholten, M. & Naeb, R., 2010. Non-literate L2 adults' small steps in mastering the constellation of skills required for reading. In: M. Young-Scholten, ed. *Low Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition: Research, Policy and Practice.* Utrecht: University Library of Jyväskylä, pp. 80-91.

Young-Scholten, M. & Naeb, R., 2020. Acquisition and Assessment of Morphosyntax. In: J. K. Peyton & M. Young-Scholten, eds. *Teaching Adult Immigrants with Limited Formal Education.* s.l.: Multilingual Matters, pp. 79-103.

Young-Scholten, M., Peyton, J. K., Sosinski, M. & Cabeza, A. M., 2014. Leslla teachers' views of the knowledge and skills they need: an international study. In: I. van de Craats, J. Kurvers & R. van Hout, eds. *Adult literacy, second language, and cognition.* LESLLA Proceedings 2014: Nijmegen: Centre for Language Studies, pp. 155-.

Young-Scholten, M. & Storm, N., 2006. *First-time L2 readers: Is there a critical period?.* Tilburg, The Netherlands.

Zipke, M., 2011. First graders receive instruction in homonym detection and meaning articulation: The effect of explicit metalinguistic awareness practice on beginning readers.. *Reading Psychology,* pp. 32(4), pp. 349-371.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Questionnaire Questions

Personal information:

1. How long have you been working as an ESOL teacher?
2. How long have you been teaching in the pre-A1 level?
3. In which age group do you belong? 18-25   26-35   36-45   46-60   60+
4. How can you describe your gender?

To what extent do you agree with the following statements:

1. L1 literacy is an influencing factor in L2 learning

   Strongly agree   agree   neither agree nor disagree   disagree   strongly disagree

2. Low-literate learners face challenges when they learn a L2

   Strongly agree   agree   neither agree nor disagree   disagree   strongly disagree

3. Low-literate learners face challenges when they learn to read in L2

   Strongly agree   agree   neither agree nor disagree   disagree   strongly disagree

4. The materials used in the initial reading assessment in pre-A1 level are suitable for low-literate learners

   Strongly agree   agree   neither agree nor disagree   disagree   strongly disagree

5. The materials used in tracking the progress of the reading skill in pre-A1 level are suitable for low-literate learners

   Strongly agree   agree   neither agree nor disagree   disagree   strongly disagree

6. The materials used in the level promotion in relation to reading assessment in pre-A1 level are suitable for low-literate learners

   Strongly agree   agree   neither agree nor disagree   disagree   strongly disagree

7. The criteria used to design the reading assessment are based on findings from research on literacy

   Strongly agree   agree   neither agree nor disagree   disagree   strongly disagree

8. The criteria used to design the reading assessment are based on pedagogical principles

   Strongly agree   agree   neither agree nor disagree   disagree   strongly disagree

9. Low-literate learners' progress is not accurately captured by the asessement materials currently used in the institution

   Strongly agree   agree   neither agree nor disagree   disagree   strongly disagree

10. The materials currently used in your institution for assessing reading are suitable for low-literate learners

    Strongly agree   agree   neither agree nor disagree   disagree   strongly disagree

11. Phonological awareness tasks are effective in assessing the reading ability of low-literate learners

    Strongly agree   agree   neither agree nor disagree   disagree   strongly disagree

12. The assessment tools used in pre-A1 level with low-literate learners are reliable indication of their ability

    Strongly agree   agree   neither agree nor disagree   disagree   strongly disagree

13. The rubric used to design the reading assessment in A1 level can capture the small steps of progress that low-literate learners make in pre-A1 level

    Strongly agree   agree   neither agree nor disagree   disagree   strongly disagree

    If you'd like to add anything related to this topic, please state here:

Substitutions

The word is "mad" replace the first sound with /s/. What's the word?

The word is "hop" replace the last sound with /t/. What's the word?

The word is "fit" replace the middle sound with /a/. What's the word?

The word is "mop" replace the first sound with /sh/. What's the word?

The word is "bat" replace the last sound with /n/. What's the word?

The word is "sit" replace the middle sound with /a/. What's the word?

Deletion of Syllables and Phonemes

Delete syllable: Cowboy – now don't say boy

Delete syllable: Sunshine – now don't say sun

Delete syllable: Baseball – now don't say base.

Delete phoneme: say the word without the first sound 'cold'

Delete phoneme: say the word without the first sound 'nose'

Delete phoneme: say the word without the end sound 'pant'

Phoneme Isolation

What is the first sound in these words? rain, bunny, farm

What is the last sound in these words? hut, bug, vine

What is the middle sound in these words? hot, rug, bill

Categorization

• What word starts with a different sound: bag, nine, beach?

• What word ends with a different sound: fat, sun, lit?

• What word has a different middle sound: man, pit, win?

Verbal Memory Tasks

• boat/ ride/ seed – Did I say ride?

• lamb/ hat/ purse – Did I say limb?'

• Four/ six/ seven – Did I say five?

Retrieval Tasks

• Listen while I say a list of words and then repeat them to me in the same order in which I said them. fish, dish, spoon, moon, fork, pork.

• Give me a word that starts with /m/ and ends with /p/.

• Repeat this list: p q r s a

Appendix 3 Reading Pre-test Tasks

Task 1 in the Kitchen: A sink - A tap - An oven – Chairs – Plates - Dishes

Task 2 Transport: Green bus - Single ticket - Slow train - Double ticket - Bus timetable - Bus ticket - Car park

Task 3 In the Library: Be quiet - No mobiles - No food or drink - No Smoking - Don't write on books - No Dogs - Put trash in the bin - Keep books clean.

Task 4 Jobs: A teacher works in a school - A housewife works at home - A secretary works in an office - A plumber fixes toilet - A builder builds houses - A window cleaner cleans windows.

Appendix 4 Reading Post-test Tasks

Task 1 in the Kitchen: Chairs – Dishes – Spoons – Plates – Knives - A table - A fridge - A sink - A tap - An oven

Task 2 Transport: Bus ticket - Car park - Slow train - Green bus - Red car - Bus timetable -Ticket office - Double ticket - Single ticket

Task 3 In the Library: No Dogs - No food or drink - Keep dogs guided - Put trash in the bin - Keep books clean - Don't write on books - Keep the place clean - Be quiet - No mobile phones

Task 4 Jobs: A nurse works in a hospital. - An engineer works in an office - A teacher works in a school - A secretary works in an office - A housewife works at home - A plumber fixes toilet - A window cleaner cleans windows - A builder builds houses.

Appendix 5 Literacy Assessment Task

السلام عليكم،

انا اسمي حسن وعمري أربع وعشرون عاما. أنا طالب في السنة الرابعة في جامعه البعث وأنا أدرس اختصاص الكيمياء. أسكن مع والداي وإخوتي أحمد وصفاء. أخي أحمد في الصف السابع وأختي صفاء سنه أولى جامعه تدرس الأدب الانكليزي. في المستقبل، أتمنى انا أعمل في اختصاصي في مختبر للتحاليل

Appendix 6 Thematic Analysis of Teachers' Views

Themes	Participants' Responses
Relationship between L1 literacy and L2 learning	I have seen first-hand their learners with L1 literacy make much faster progress than those without (generally speaking) Because it is a comparable skill which if missing makes L2 learning difficult L1 literacy provides a framework for learning L2. When learning L2 literacy without L1 literacy, a student must also learn literacy principals for the first time, as well as "learn how to learn". L1 literacy provides a framework for learning L2. When learning L2 literacy without L1 literacy, a student must also learn literacy principals for the first time, as well as "learn how to learn". You are teaching people how to read and write as well as language skills. learners have no study skills, cannot use a dictionary. Primarly, engagement with literacy-based approaches to language learning in the UK and the study skills that already exist from previous educational experiences. It may affect L2 literacy but not necessarily the ability to speak fluently. Because if you have L1 literacy, you have some awareness of the relationship between phonology and the written script which helps you to decode the words. Also, you can use your own reading skills in L1 in your L2 reading, meaning you use higher level skills rather than following a purely bottom up approach. Having L1 literacy often gives students advantages to learning a second language. For example -they have a way to record new things, they have an understanding of sound - symbol connections for literacy work. On a more basic level the students who have L1 literacy will likely have had some schooling. Again, skills acquired at school, all help learning a second language eg how to hold a pen, organisational skills etc. Learners with basic literacy usually have more of a framework on which to 'hang' their new learning. This is not always the case, but very often is. In addition learners with basic literacy may have some understanding of study skills and the 'norms' of education. I've noticed that with low level learners with no or low literacy, they need to be exposed to the same new language more times for it to become internalised. Those with very strong L1 literacy have transferable skills. Because I see the struggle that learners with low levels of literacy have to learn a new language. Also, so much of modern life involves literacy (technology/phones/internet), without access to written forms is is extremely alienating for learners. For transferable skills and build on the language. Focusing on similarity and differences between L1 and L2 can help a lot in the learning process.

	I strongly agree in the extent to which it affects L2 literacy - according to what I have read. Speaking maybe less so but it relies heavily on the learners ability to remember language items. It depends on why the L2 is learnt People who do not read and write in any language have more barriers to learning their second language 19. I think learners will inevitably use their L1 strategies to apply to learning L2 and this can be a strength as well as an obstacle to progress. Range of vocabulary, use of grammar
Challenges LESLLA learners face when learning L2	cognitive challenges that may be more challenging to adapt to later in life and then trying to apply print literacy skills to a language you lack fluency in is not really based on any naturalistic language learning process. Also circumstantial challenges e.g. mixed level groups, resources assuming adults are literate, teachers lacking support and training for the specific needs of these adults, psychological barriers to the idea of 'being a learner' or 'belonging in a classroom' etc. In most cases they lack study skills, being in a classroom and experience of learning, e.g. making notes, reading texts, etc. In the models that I currently teach and learn in, it relies on a certain level of literacy for the learners to have in order to engage and progress. Learning a new language in itself is a challenge but added on top the disadvantage of low literacy skills can add further pressure and frustration for the learner. And requires more differentiation in class as there will be a range of literacy levels . the cognitive load is so much higher when you don't already have the L1 literacy framework in place. You are teaching people how to read and write as well as language skills. learners have no study skills, cannot use a dictionary - silk mar to milestone Because their use and knowledge of language to date is limited It is hard for people to make notes, remember new words, hear the end of one word and the start of another, hear the difference between certain sounds, and so on. because they don't have the educational background that literate learners have and they're unaware of the techniques used to learn a new language.

Cannot use prompts/handouts to study independently at home, must rely on memory. Often no or little previous education so lack study skills.

A lot of ESOL teachers do not know how to help pre-entry students and give a lot of inappropriate materials assuming higher levels of literacy.

They can struggle to understand and use English correctly

Because we can build on student's prior knowledge to acquire the second language.

Maybe technology will change this. However, when students were learning new words for example, if they couldn't record how to say the new word somehow (writing L1/L2 or other), they relied on another human being there to correct/prompt them again.

classroom learning is an issue because many materials are based on being able to read. Pre Entry classes are obviously geared to the fact that people are not literate and use pictures and other means to convey meaning. Because learners can't read vocab/language initially, it is easy for them to forget it between lessons because they can't always reread the notes . Unless this is mitigated by the teacher, it can be a challenge.

Much of the ESOL curriculum is designed around qualifications, so even from pre-entry level language teaching is focusing on literacy activities.

Too much L2 learning material appears in written form

Having difficulty reading and writing means that there is a huge amount of work your memory has to do in order to remember vocabulary, grammar etc. It is difficult to go back and review classes if you struggle to read the material. It can lead to feelings of frustration, depression, low self esteem which can compound the difficulties learning.

Previous answer, but also that we as teachers tend to rely on written sources, dictionaries, translation, etc. when working with low level learners. In addition, UK society is very geared towards the written word e.g. to enrol on an ESOL course they have already jumped over many hurdles. This can be very difficult without the support of someone with more language/ reading.

Challenges only present if initial assessment fails to show gaps and no clear targets set to achieve.

Challenges LESLLA learners face when learning to read in L2	As mentioned, literacy is a complex multi-modal skill that most often is learned in the context of a language where you have oral proficiency (i.e. L1) or is applied to a new language with some transferable knowledge based on L1 literacy. So, when there is neither previous experience with written forms in any language and low proficiency in the spoken language, you are at a major disadvantage in terms of learning to read.
	Lack of transferable skills, lack of awareness of literacy and study sills
	Having low literacy skills means that you have not acquired yet the skills to process , read and manage information often in your first language so then when an extra layer of challenge is added with a new script and text then this means these skills are pushed even further to the back.
	challenges include slower pace & lack of momentum which can affect motivation. Adult low-literate learners also face the challenge of being older when learning this difficult new skill, when the brain is less malleable than in youth.
	People do not understand genre , they don't have skills such as scanning and skimming and believe there is one to one word correspondence in meaning
	Because they will probably not have developed strong reading strategies to date
	Written English is so different to the spoken sounds.
	they're unable to read efficiently in their L1, and L1 has a strong influence on learning L2
	Very difficult to learn to read and write in a language before speaking it - we don't expect this of native speaking children but we do of ESOL adults
	There are not enough appropriate materials and also not enough time dedicated in ESOL class to learning to read. Students need more one to one support to develop their reading.
	Pronunciation problems, problems understanding the text. Learning the sounds of letters and the way of pronouncing them is sometimes different from L1, so we can't really build on L1 phonology.
	Students need to learn new symbols (letters) that represent sounds. They need to learn to recognise these unfamiliar symbols and process the sounds associated with them in order to 'decode' a new word. They will also need to learn to recognise familiar everyday words and numbers, when they may not have ever learned to notice or read these types of 2D symbols before. Someone with L1 literacy will already have at least some understanding of these concepts.

	Research says so and also that is my experience. This is also more pronounced in <mark>older illiterate learners</mark>. It is a <mark>new practice per se</mark>, not just in L2 <mark>Literacy shortfalls in L1</mark> are inevitably reflected in L2 If you mean learners with low levels of literacy in L1, yes, for the reasons identified above. <mark>Lack of awareness</mark> of the relationship between phonology and the decoding of words<mark>; bottom up reading skills; lack of experience being in a learning environment; difficulty in reviewing classes.</mark> Learning to read in a language other than your first language is always going to be more difficult. They have to learn new language aurally/ orally then also master literacy skills at the same time. I'm sure this can <mark>cause cognitive overload.</mark> Most people learn to read in a language they are already fairly 'expert' in even as children. In addition, <mark>learning as an adult can be</mark> <mark>more difficult</mark> as their brains are perhaps less 'plastic'. They may have many <mark>other priorities</mark> in their life which come first.
Assessment Materials used in initial assessments are not suitable for LESLLA learners	<mark>Prioritises literacy skills</mark> that are deemed important from a western education perspective, not the skills that are really relevant to the lives of the learners and socially-situated literacy practices. It <mark>depends</mark> which assessment is used. It is <mark>difficult</mark> to create materials for this level because everyone comes with <mark>different levels and awareness of</mark> <mark>literacy,</mark> particularly at this stage. I am sure that those who prepare and create these resources work very hard at making it appropriate for this particular cohort but there are many factors that can impact it, such <mark>as cultural understanding, level of educational experiences, mental health, familiarity with reading texts and the exercises that accompany them.</mark> If the material used in the <mark>initial assessment isn't suitable</mark> for low-literate learners, then the results will <mark>not be valid</mark> when used with low-literate learners. Most published materials have <mark>very small font and little white space. often the topics are not always suitable for the pre-Entry learners</mark> It depends on the assessment used, I have developed my own diagnostic to overcome this problem the assessment is <mark>general</mark>, and in most cases is <mark>skipped</mark> because learners state that <mark>know no English</mark>. Sometimes <mark>aimed at children</mark> which is <mark>inappropriate</mark> or requires <mark>support from others</mark>

	Often pre-entry assessment materials do nothing to boost a learner's confidence and show what they can do. All the emphasis on what they can't do. Also the question sounds as if there are official materials available but many teachers design their own due to lack of available resources. Uses basic English about introducing a person The material should be suitable to the students level to evaluate their performances. Im not sure which specific assessment you are refering too. In initial assessments, we assess all 4 skills and place students accordingly. Identifying if they have no reading ability in English for example is really important. We (large college with a large ESOL department) have developed reading assessments for complete beginners upwards. It depends on what the inital assessment is. In ours learners have to read social sight words, numbers, postcodes, alphabet letters etc. It depends very much on the assessment materials used to assess learners - bespoke design works best. There is no standardised material for IRA at pre-A1 [A0] level. I am not sure which assessment you are referring to. We use our own, and we do it with the learners (not to them) so the teacher is there by their side. Not sure which material you're referring to? As far as I know, there's nothing 'off the shelf' available as yet. Most organisations use their own methods. One does not exist but created separately by each organisation
Assessment Materials used in tracking progress are not suitable for LESLLA learners	I think it really varies and depends on the materials adopted by the language school. It depends what material is used. Similar answer to above, I am sure the materials are made to be as appropriate as possible for the learners but there is still room to adjust the materials as it may need to be quite specific to meet the needs of any particular learner. Most published materials have very small font and little white space. often the topics are not always suitable for the -Entry 1 learners See previous answer - I use my own resources for this I usually have to make my own notes and records to track progress, there isn't really anything formal to do this. I don't know which materials you mean We need a clear core curriculum at pre-entry to enable learners to progress. A lot of students are failing to reach E1 because teachers are not equipped with the skills /

	resources/ correct guidance. Also class sizes are too big and more one to one and small group time is needed. We don't have a system to check progress, only end of level testing Students usually achieve some progress while learing so we need to measure it with a right material. Again, Im not sure what material you are refering to. I imagine different teachers and institutions will have developed their own systems that work. I'm not sure what materials you refer to. We try to make/find suitable materials for that level Again, it depends on the materials you are using. There is no standardised material for IRA at pre-A1 [A0] level. Again, I am not clear which material you are referring to. We use our own assessments, our own materials and our own trackers. Again, I think there isn't as yet anything suitable, though I can't imagine what would work as it does take a holistic approach. I don't believe formal assessments are necessary or appropriate. However, this means that their teacher needs to be extremely skillful as they need to be able to assess their progress as well
Assessment Materials used in level promotion are not suitable for LESLLA learners	I think you end up teaching to the exam as learning can be slow and students are motivated by the progression tests. But can be really disheartening for both teachers and students. I am not entirely familiar with all the material offered to promote reading assessment. These low -literate learners require a lot of 1:1 support so it is often hard to judge what their independent response to such materials would be. Most published materials have very small font and little white space. often the topics are not always suitable for the pre-Entry learners We use assessments aimed at adults, but they cannot usually complete them independently. I don't know which materials you mean I do not think this is available. Teachers are cobbling materials together from English My Way, SQA and other resources. Sometime infantilizes learners There is no standardised material for IRA at pre-A1 [A0] level.

Criteria used to design assessment tool not based on research	In principle I agree but there is <mark>insufficient research</mark> in many areas related to this population so I am unsurprised that people <mark>rely on personal experience and adapted ideas from different areas of language education.</mark>
	I haven't seen the reading assessment. Do you mean 'a' reading assessment or a specific reading assessment? If so, which one?
	I am sure that in designing the reading assessment consideration is given to studies and research although it can <mark>be quite broad and not everything is known about or understood yet about literacy and learning processes generally.</mark>
	The topics are <mark>too affluential and depend on people having cultural and capital understanding</mark>
	Don't know
	I don't know about this. One would hope so!
	Some based on research but <mark>not always ESOL specific or adult specific</mark> and so not as applicable as assumed
	Which criteria and reading assessment is being referred to? We use an assessment that introduces a person and then asks questions about them. Uses some obvious first vocabulary used when learning a new language
	I can only comment on reading assessments we use. They have been <mark>produced 'in house'</mark> by experienced ESOL tutors. They are <mark>based on experience rather than research</mark>.
	I'm <mark>not sure</mark> which reading assessment you are referring to. It's hard for me to give a suitable answer to this question
	The question assumes that [one] there are such criteria and [two] sufficient and adequate reserach has been carried out. Our assessments are <mark>designed by staff</mark> who have worked with this level for a number of years. Every year, we reflect on whether this is still a valid assessment and <mark>tweak it if we need to.</mark>
	Not aware of any reading assessment? I know some awarding bodies have produced some quals, but they're not widely used for the previously stated reasons.
	<mark>No research</mark> I'm aware of
Materials used in reading assessment is not suitable	Often you need to offer <mark>a lot of support and guide</mark> students through as they not only lack literacy skills but educational experience with how tests work.
	See comment above. It depends what material is used, e.g. pictures, symbols, short texts, chart, alphabet, etc.
	Generally I think the material is suitable but one has to <mark>consider the context</mark> that the assessment may be taking

	place in, how learners feel about approaching such an assessment, what it means for them and are they able to apply their skills in a natural way when they may feel nervous or put under pressure.
	I know of some suitable assessments, and I know of some that are not suitable
	Most published materials have very small font and little white space. often the topics are not always suitable for the pre-Entry learners
	We try to find some appropriate materials to use.
	Often aimed at children or assumption that the learner can speak the L2 well
	It's basic introduction English
	Again, if it is designed properly for low literate learners then yes it can be.
	We have used City and Guilds and the E1 assessment (the first level a learner can do) can be very difficult to negotiate for weaker readers. It's very words and often the language in the questions is a barrier for weaker readers who can read the text but not understand what they are being asked to do.
	as before
	It depends on the material used [but most I have encountered are not especially suitable as designers and teachers are not accustomed to handling LLLs].
	We design it ourselves or source it from suitable materials.
	Don't think there is much out there that does this.
	Not suitable.
LESLLA learners can't show their real progress in reading assessment	It really depends on the student.
	See comment above.
	I think that low-literate learners often get a lot of support in reading texts so it is hard to tell what is from their own ability and what comes from the support they receive whilst doing these assessments.
	this question is not logical to me -- it seems to refer to a specific assessment, but I don't know what that assessment is
	Learners can be trained to pass official assessments as opposed to making progress with their reading - sadly funding depends on the former rather than the latter
	They cannot usually complete reading assessments independently.
	They fail their tests, even though they gained small knowledge from the course, but the test could not detect this small change.

	I think pre-entry learners often don't get an opportunity to show what they can do in an assessment . This is often down to funding restrictions which start at E1.
	We only have one assessment that can be repeated
	You have to design your assessments to be able to identify progress. It may need to begin with simple letter recognition. Sound symbol recognition, simple cvc word recognition before using simple texts.
	I don't know which assessment you refer to but we create assessments and can see learners progressing
	It depends on the assessment being used.
	It depends on the nature of the assessment [but on the whole I suspect that reliable progress would be difficult to establish].
	We assess according to the students we are working with. For some, a recognition of some letters is progress. For others, it may be being able to read a sentence. We give all learners targets and assess them against their individual targets.
	As before. Holistic approach more appropriate.
	Progress is slow but learners do start to read.
	Not enough scope to keep track of very diverse routes and rates of progress in one class.
	Depends which assessments are used.
	This depends a great deal on how the individual tutor applies these assessments and how consistently they are used to then track any progress. So it comes down to more how it is used rather then what is used at times.
	it depends on the assessment, some yes, some no
	We track learners as they progress through class work rather than tracking through official external assessments
	I don't think we keep detailed enough records to show a person's progress in reading.
	Not used them previously
	Again, depends on the assessment. If phonological small step assessments are used, then progress can be tracked.
	I can't answer this question
	as before
	The problem is less with the assessments than with the individual doing the tracking [and interpreting the outcomes] although once again some assessments are likely to be more effective than others. At this level assessments are likely to be highly individual in effectiveness.
	Because we design the course to have formal assessments at certain intervals so we can track progress. We also design them according to the stage students are at.

	See previous No formal assessments exists but many create own so it's kind of hit and miss.
Phonemic awareness tasks are effective assessment tools in showing LESLLA learners' level in reading	This has not been an aspect of the assessment in the places I have taught. Phonological assessment relates to phonics and that is only part of what is involved in reading. I agree for the most part that these tasks can be effective but it is also difficult to capture everything in an assessment and I think it is only can demonstrate the start of their level as it is through the classes, the full level of a learner will be seen and explored more. it depends on the assessment - some are effective (a local test we have called the ERLE test, for example) and some don't include any phonological assessment tasks at all (CASAS for example) I am not sure it is Specifically assessed unless learners are recorded or asked about how they decoded words They can help if used by a trained professional I don't think assessment really indicates a person's level, just that they are not ready for Entry 1 yet. Often aimed at children or assumption that the learner can speak the L2 well There is a huge dearth in phonics resources for adult esol learners. They are not used at S******* College, I have not used them. It helps understand a starting point. It will also help measure small steps in progress. I have no idea as before - to which assessment tools are you referring? Once again it depends on the nature of the assessment tasks [although I feel phonological tasks are more useful than written tasks]. We do this individually and so a thorough assessment can take place with all learners. We look at onset and rime with the beginner readers and then up to word and sentence level with those who have more knowledge. As per previous. Phonics are meaningful if known.
Validity	It depends how much the student is able to complete independently and what literacy skills are valued in the assessment in comparison to the literacy skills that are relevant and valuable to the student.

	Which assessment tools? It is difficult to create materials that would be entirely appropriate for these learners but I do believe that they would be valid and suitable for them. More thought may need to be taken into the context of their use and how they are used with the learners. Perhaps giving learners more autonomy and voice as well in applying and accessing these tools. it depends on the assessment. I'd prefer to be asked this question about a particular assessment. Not fully aware of range of these tools As much as any of our assessments are valid because the progress that low-literate learners do is not traceable in the test results. But could be improved Not used here, teachers have to come up with their own assessment Again, if the assessment tools start 'low' enough, then yes. It depends on what assessment tool is used As has been implied, learners with low literacy have often migrated from environments where access to education is limited, making assessments quite tricky. However, the cultural capital needed to complete assessments can also blur successful completion of tasks (rather than literacy difficulties). As you don't include examples of the tools used, it is difficult to tell well they are valid - also, what do you mean by valid? I nearly answered 'strongly disagree' but I am in a good mood today. I am fairly certain that reading assessment tools at this level have significant problems with most aspects of validity in many instances [especially in relation to the L1] and in relation to the TOR method. I do not know any tool that truly overcomes this problem [most seem to be predicated on L1 instruments anyway]. I assume you are referring to a particular test but I am not sure which so cannot answer this question.
Reliability	It depends, but rare that you find materials that understand what is and is not accessible for these learners, so additional support compromises the insight of the assessment. See comment above. To give a general over-view of their levels I think the reading assessment tools are reliable; they cannot provide in-depth information as there are so many factors that come into play when using them. But if you work with that understanding

	that it is an over-all picture rather then specific then they would serve their purpose. it depends on the assessment. I'd prefer to be asked this question about a particular assessment. Am not familiar with assessment tools at this level It depends on the tool. I use my own. As much as any assessment is reliable because learners can have different results if tests are repeated to them using different material, marking grid or simpler instructions. But could be improved - more info needed on learner's education history etc What I make to use is reliable but not from a formal source Again, depends on the quality of the assessment and how it is carried out. In my experience doing any assessments there is always room for unreliability as above At this level, the learners are highly individual and any single RAT will inevitably produce problems with reliability.
Rubric does not show small steps of progress	I do not have much experience with this rubric See comment above. Although there would be some differences between the two levels, I would think that the rubric can still be applied as a general standard to evaluate against. There is no basis to start from. Reading assessment is objective. Often the tools are multiple choice or rely on writing skills rather than reading skills If they are worded accurately to clearly detail the steps being taken I don't think enough detail is recorded to show this. I think the rubric can show the progress of educated learners because it is very general. low-literate's progress is very small and it needs more detailed rubric to show their small progress I don't use it There is useful assessment used by Trinity and Ascentis at Pre-entry. City and Guilds which most FE colleges use do not have any assessment at PE. Not used If the assessment tool is well designed, then yes. In my experience of E1 City and Guilds assessments I don;t think so but I know some other exam boards (Ascentis) do have qualifications to reflect smaller steps

	The rubric may help identify small steps of progress but equally may miss other steps. It will also be unreliable in doing so when applied to an individual LLL. Same answer. However, it is worth pointing out here that some AOs, for example C+G, allow interlocuters to read the rubric out so as not to disadvantage those with limited literacy skills.
Additional Comments	S********* College uses a very old and repetitive assessment; I feel it does not meet the requirements to fulfil an accurate assessment. Perhaps speak to women in community centres too as a lot of Pre-entry learners can't access mainstream education. Input of language with support of visual images helps but again none formal assessments exist that is based on research. We can have reading assessment in all students levels on the condition of having and using the right and reliable material . I think you may be displaying mistaken priorities in putting so much emphasis on assessment SYSTEMS in ESOL courses fpr LLL rather than considering HOW LLLs actually learn Many providers use their own tests, and there are also a variety that can be bought as a package. There is no homogeneous approach/materials for pre-A1 learners. There is a need for more materials, including assessments, for low literacy learners. What about whether the teacher can speak the language of the learner - what impact would that have? Assessment is highly problematic with this level. Yes, progress needs to be measured and can be motivational. However, it is incredibly difficult in a way that offers real insight into learner progress in a way that is meaningful for both the student and the institution.

Appendix 7 LASLLIAM Language & Print Awareness Descriptor

4.1.1. Language and Print Awareness

	Descriptor
4	Knows that cohesive devices are important for understanding texts (e.g. "he"; "then").
3	Can synthesise phonemes into a word with a complex syllabic structure (e.g. "d-r-i-n-k" into "drink").
	Can analyse words with a complex syllabic structure (e.g. "plant" into "p-l-a-n-t").
	Can synthesise spoken words into short and simple sentences.
	Knows that the word order of the sentences in different languages can differ (e.g. place of the verb).
	Can analyse short and simple spoken sentences into words (e.g. "This-is-my-house").
2	Knows that a phoneme corresponds to a grapheme.
	Can analyse words with a simple syllabic structure into phonemes (e.g. "map" into "m-a-p").
	Can identify the order of phonemes (e.g. initial and final) in words with a simple syllabic structure.
	Can identify rhyming words in the target language (e.g. "book-cook, late-plate").
	Knows that some phonemes in the target language can differ from phonemes in the first language (e.g. the number of vowels; p-b for Arabic speakers).
	Can synthesise phonemes into words with a simple syllabic structure (e.g. "c-a-t" into "cat").
1	Can show the direction of the script in the language they are learning (e.g. from left to right and top to bottom for Latin and Greek script).
	Can distinguish linguistic signs (like written words) from non-linguistic signs (like icons or symbols).
	Can identify some initial phonemes of a spoken word (e.g. the initial phoneme of their own name).

Appendix 8 LASLLIAM Reading Descriptor

4.1.2. Reading

	Descriptor
4	Can read fluently words with a complex syllabic structure (e.g. "shirts").
	Can read short and simple phrases fluently by using automated reading processes.
	Can read, phrase by phrase, a short, simple text.
	Can read frequent maths symbols (+, %, comma) in simple texts (like advertisements).
	Can use punctuation marks as an aid to understand a text.
3	Can read simple two-clause sentences with an unknown word.
	Can read short and simple sentences, if the words are orthographically simple.
	Can recognise frequently used punctuation marks (e.g. full stop, question mark).
	Can read words with frequent combinations of graphemes and frequent (bound) morphemes fluently (e.g. str-; -rk, plural s).
	Can read short and simple texts, if the sentences are few and have a simple syntactic structure.
	Can read frequent words fluently by using automated reading processes.
	Can read with some effort orthographically complex words (e.g. multisyllabic words, words with consonant clusters, or words with irregular spelling).
2	Can read practised words and new short words with a simple or highly frequent syllabic structure by applying the grapheme–phoneme correspondence (e.g. "son", "sera").
	Can relate a grapheme to the corresponding phoneme in orthographically simple words (e.g. "hat"; "book").
	Can read practised words by recognising highly frequent combinations of graphemes.
	Can read single practised words with a simple syllabic structure by synthesising syllables (e.g. "ora", "doctor").
	Can recognise most graphemes in a word, including visually confusing graphemes (e.g. b and d or f and t in Latin, φ and φ in Greek or Л and П in Cyrillic).
	Can recognise graphemes in different frequently used fonts and printed formats (e.g. italic).
	Can identify and read their own writing.
1	Can distinguish upper- and lower-case letters in practised words.
	Can read numerals up to 10 in digits.
	Can recognise numerals in personally relevant texts like an address.
	Can recognise practised sight words (e.g. days of the week).
	Can recognise some graphemes in practised words (e.g. initial letters in own name).

Information Sheet

<u>Student Name</u>: Rim Day

<u>Supervisor's Name</u>: Rola Naeb

<u>Course of Study</u>: PhD in Humanities and Art at the University of Northumbria

<u>Title of Project</u>: Reading Assessment System in Pre-A1 ESOL Courses in England for LESLLA Learners.

This information sheet illustrates the aim of the study and invites you to take part. Please read the following information if you are interested in taking part in the study and feel free to ask any question.

This research aims to focus on the assessment of low-literate language learners. The study will be focusing on the opinions of all stakeholders involved in the assessment process, namely learners, teachers and managers. The study will also analyse the materials used in assessing learners and explore how effective they are in assessing the progress of learners. By doing so, the study will investigate how valid and reliable the assessment criteria used in pre-entry ESOL classes with low-literate learners are and then generate agreed assessment criteria for pre-entry level that will help ESOL teachers to assess their low-literate learners prior and post the course. It is worth mentioning that the focus will be on the reading skill in the UK context, although we will be collecting data on the overall practices and policies in the UK in relation to assessment.

You are invited to take part in this study because you are one of the stakeholders in ESOL courses in the UK (either a teacher or manager in ESOL institutions in the UK) and my research seeks to explore the views of the ESOL stakeholders in the UK. Your participation is not obligatory but taking part in this study will enrich the data about assessment in Pre-A1 level in ESOL classes in the UK. For teachers and managers in ESOL institutions around the UK: you will be invited to take part in a questionnaire that will investigate the validity and reliability of the assessment in Pre-A1 level for low-literate learners.

Your name will be anonymous in this study and the name of institutions will not be mentioned in this study. The information collected will be treated confidentially and the

data will be saved in the university servers (U-drivers) and it will be deleted by the end of the study. The names of participants will be replaced by pseudonyms for the feasibility of data analysis. If you wish to withdraw from the study, you can do that at any stage by contacting the researcher on the email below. The data collected from you will be deleted and not used in this study. If you agree to take part in this study, a consent form will be given to you to sign and confirm your consent to take part in this study.

If you have any further inquiries, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor on:

My email: rim.day@northumbria.ac.uk

My supervisor's contact details:

Dr. Rola Naeb, PhD

BA, PGDIP (Linguistics), PGDIP (Translation), MA

Senior Lecturer in Applied Linguistics and TESOL

Programme Leader, MA Applied Linguistics For TESOL

email: rola.naeb@northumbria.ac.uk

Thank you very much for your time.

Consent Form

Consent to participate in research

Title of Project: Reading Assessment System in Pre-A1 ESOL Courses in England for LESLLA Learners.

Researcher:

Name: Rim Day

Email Address: rim.day@northumbria.ac.uk

The University Institutional Review Board has given approval for this research project. For information on your rights as a research subject, contact the coordinator of the Institutional Review Board office at this email: phillip.wallage@northumbria.ac.uk

please tick or initial
where applicable

I have carefully read and understood the Participant Information Sheet. ☐

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study and I have received satisfactory answers. ☐

I understand I am free to withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason for withdrawing, and without prejudice. ☐

I agree to take part in this study. ☐

I also consent to the retention of this data under the condition that any subsequent use also be restricted to research projects that have gained ethical approval from Northumbria University.

I agree to the University of Northumbria at Newcastle recording and processing this information about me. I understand that this information will be used only for the purpose(s) set out in the information sheet supplied to me, and my consent is conditional upon the University complying with its duties and obligations under the Data Protection Act 2018 which incorporates General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).You can find out more about how we use your information here - [Privacy Notices](#) ☐

Signature of participant... Date .....……………..

(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS) ....………………….

Signature of researcher... Date ...….…………..

(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS) ....

Appendix 10: Information Sheet and Consent Form in Arabic

<div dir="rtl">

ورقة معلومات

اسم الطالب: ريم ضاي

اسم المشرف: رولا نايب

مسار الدراسة: دكتوراه في العلوم الإنسانية والفنون في جامعة نورثمبريا

عنوان المشروع: نظام تقييم القراءة في دورات اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية في إنجلترا لمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية.

توضح ورقة المعلومات هذه هدف الدراسة وتدعوك للمشاركة. يرجى قراءة المعلومات التالية إذا كنت مهتمًا بالمشاركة في الدراسة ولا تتردد في طرح أي سؤال.

يهدف هذا البحث إلى التركيز على تقييم متعلمي اللغة من ذوي الإعاقات اللغوية. ستركز الدراسة على آراء جميع أصحاب المصلحة المشاركين في عملية التقييم، أي المتعلمين والمعلمين والمديرين. ستحلل الدراسة أيضًا المواد المستخدمة في تقييم المتعلمين وتستكشف مدى فعاليتها في تقييم تقدم المتعلمين. من خلال القيام بذلك، ستبحث الدراسة في مدى صحة وموثوقية معايير التقييم المستخدمة في فصول تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية قبل الالتحاق بالمتعلمين من ذوي الإلمام المنخفض بالقراءة والكتابة، ثم تولد معايير تقييم متفق عليها لمستوى ما قبل الالتحاق والتي ستساعد معلمي تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية على تقييم المتعلمين من ذوي الإلمام المنخفض بالقراءة والكتابة قبل وبعد الدورة. ومن الجدير بالذكر أن التركيز سيكون على مهارة القراءة في سياق المملكة المتحدة، على الرغم من أننا سنجمع البيانات حول الممارسات والسياسات العامة في المملكة المتحدة فيما يتعلق بالتقييم.

أنت مدعو للمشاركة في هذه الدراسة لأنك أحد أصحاب المصلحة في دورات تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية في المملكة المتحدة (إما مدرس أو مدير في مؤسسات تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية في المملكة المتحدة) ويسعى بحثي إلى استكشاف آراء أصحاب المصلحة في تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية في المملكة المتحدة. مشاركتك ليست إلزامية ولكن المشاركة في هذه الدراسة ستثري البيانات حول التقييم في مستوى ما قبل A1 في فصول تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية في المملكة المتحدة. للمعلمين والمديرين في مؤسسات تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية في جميع أنحاء المملكة المتحدة: سيتم دعوتك للمشاركة في استبيان سيبحث في مدى صحة وموثوقية التقييم في مستوى ما قبل A1 للمتعلمين من ذوي الإلمام المنخفض بالقراءة والكتابة.

</div>

259

سيكون اسمك مجهولاً في هذه الدراسة ولن يتم ذكر اسم المؤسسات في هذه الدراسة. سيتم التعامل مع المعلومات التي تم جمعها بسرية وسيتم حفظ البيانات في خوادم الجامعة (U-drivers) وسيتم حذفها بحلول نهاية الدراسة. سيتم استبدال أسماء المشاركين بأسماء مستعارة لإمكانية تحليل البيانات. إذا كنت ترغب في الانسحاب من الدراسة، يمكنك القيام بذلك في أي مرحلة عن طريق الاتصال بالباحث على البريد الإلكتروني أدناه. سيتم حذف البيانات التي تم جمعها منك ولن يتم استخدامها في هذه الدراسة. إذا وافقت على المشاركة في هذه الدراسة، فسيتم إعطاؤك نموذج موافقة للتوقيع عليه وتأكيد موافقتك على المشاركة في هذه الدراسة.

إذا كان لديك أي استفسارات أخرى، فلا تتردد في الاتصال بي أو بمشرفي على:

rim.day@northumbria.ac.uk

rola.naeb@northumbria.ac.uk

شكرا جزيلا على وقتك

نموذج الموافقة

الموافقة على المشاركة في البحث

عنوان المشروع: نظام تقييم القراءة في دورات اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية في إنجلترا لمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية.

أعطت لجنة مراجعة المؤسسات الجامعية موافقتها على هذا المشروع البحثي. للحصول على معلومات حول حقوقك كموضوع بحث، اتصل بمنسق مكتب لجنة مراجعة المؤسسات على هذا البريد الإلكتروني:
phillip.wallage@northumbria.ac.uk

يرجى وضع علامة أو وضع الأحرف الأولى من المربع حيثما ينطبق ذلك

☐ لقد قرأت وفهمت بعناية ورقة معلومات المشارك.

☐ لقد أتيحت لي الفرصة لطرح الأسئلة ومناقشة هذه الدراسة وقد تلقيت إجابات مرضية.

☐ أفهم أنني حر في الانسحاب من الدراسة في أي وقت، دون الحاجة إلى إبداء سبب للانسحاب، ودون تحيز.

☐ أوافق على المشاركة في هذه الدراسة.

أوافق أيضًا على الاحتفاظ بهذه البيانات بشرط أن يقتصر أي استخدام لاحق أيضًا على مشاريع البحث التي حصلت على موافقة أخلاقية من جامعة نورثمبريا .

أوافق على قيام جامعة نورثمبريا في نيوكاسل بتسجيل ومعالجة هذه المعلومات عني. أفهم أن هذه المعلومات لن تُستخدم إلا للأغراض المنصوص عليها في ورقة المعلومات المقدمة لي، وموافقتي مشروطة بالتزام الجامعة

بواجباتها والتزاماتها بموجب قانون حماية البيانات لعام 2018 الذي يتضمن اللائحة العامة لحماية البيانات يمكنك معرفة المزيد حول كيفية استخدامنا لمعلوماتك هنا - إشعارات الخصوصية. (GDPR).

توقيع المشارك............................... التاريخ ....

(الاسم بأحرف كبيرة) ....

توقيع الباحث............................... التاريخ ....

(الاسم بأحرف كبيرة) ....