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Negotiated Curriculum and Integration in Further Education ESOL: A Qualitative Study of Co-Designed Schemes of Work

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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of
Sunderland for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

October 2026

Abstract

This study examines the role of negotiated curriculum (NC), operationalised through the co-design of Schemes of Work (SOW), in enhancing adult ESOL learners' linguistic development and sociocultural participation within the UK Further Education (FE) context. While ESOL provision is often structured around standardised curricula and assessment-driven outcomes, such approaches can marginalise learners' lived experiences and limit opportunities for meaningful language use beyond the classroom. This study addresses a critical gap by investigating how learner involvement in curriculum design can support autonomy, motivation, and social integration.

Situated within an interpretivist paradigm, the research adopts a qualitative practitioner inquiry approach. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, focus groups, and additional learner-contributed accounts. The study explores how learners participate in shaping SOW content and examines the impact of this process on their engagement with language learning and sociocultural practices.

The findings indicate that participants associated negotiated SOW with increased motivation, agency, and independent learning practices. Participants reported enhanced confidence in applying language skills in real-life contexts and developed a deeper awareness of sociocultural norms, supporting more effective participation in everyday life. However, the study also identifies structural constraints, including institutional requirements, assessment pressures, and uneven levels of learner participation, which mediate the extent of curriculum negotiation.

This research contributes to ESOL pedagogy by providing an empirically grounded account of NC in practice. It reconceptualises the SOW as a dynamic, dialogic, and context-responsive pedagogical tool, demonstrating its potential to bridge the gap between institutional demands and learners' socio-cultural realities. In doing so, the study advances understanding of how curriculum co-construction can support both language development and purposeful social integration within FE ESOL contexts.

Key words:

ESOL; Schemes of Work; negotiated curriculum; curriculum design; pedagogy; sociocultural integration; independent learning; motivation; autonomy

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my colleague Elizabeth Hulford-Wood who began her PhD one year before me with Sunderland University. Were it not for her encouragement, it is very likely that I wouldn't have embarked on this academic venture. Her belief in me gave me the confidence to apply to Sunderland University to seek a place on the PhD course. Subsequently, she willingly shared her experience with me which gave me a valuable insight in what I could expect and what was expected of me.

As with most people, I would not have been able to see this through to the end without the help and support of my husband, Allan Ernest Copley. This help and support were not just related to day-to-day family duties but also by acting as a soundboard whereby he was able to give me feedback relating to the complexity of the language.

I also must express my gratitude to Dr Marcin Lewandowski my advisor and Director of Studies. His role as an advisor was particularly valuable in providing me with constructive feedback and where appropriate constructive criticism. There is no doubt that I was able to make valuable improvements as a result of his role and involvement.

I also wish to add my sincere appreciation to the ESOL learners for their enthusiasm and cooperation.

Preamble

Probably more than in any other situations, it is in ESOL classes that students try to adapt to the new country they moved to no matter how slow or quick the process is. English For Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes can be a sanctuary for students. It's important that there is NO judgment for being slow learners, for speaking with broken accent or for using basic vocabulary to convey a message, an idea or to say: "I know that, but I can't explain". Anxiety exists at every step of their learning, so, let's not trigger it further. When we see beyond merely the academic, we become more empathetic towards our students' realities and recognise their needs.

Within a social context, language anxiety may be caused by external stimuli (Schwartz, 1972; cited in Scovel, 1991) and could include diverse social and cultural settings, predominantly situations where second language (L2) and foreign language (FL) learning take place.

My reflections:

Equipping my learners with essential skills to succeed as learners in their studies, as professionals in their jobs and most importantly in their lives as active members in society.

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Abbreviation /Full Form	
AE	Adult Education
AOC	Association of Colleges
ASSMT	Assessment
CELTA	Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults
COMP	Compound
CONT	Content
CA	Contributed Account
CV	Core Values
DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
DEC	December
DFEE	Department for Education and Employment
E3	Entry 3
EAL	English as an Additional Language
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELT	English Language Teaching
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
F	Female
FE	Further Education
FEB	February
FG	Focus Group
FGA	Focus Group/April
FL	First language
GLH	Guided Learning Hours
HF	High Frequency
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IJ	Interviews/January
ILP	Individual Learning Plan
Irr&Reg	Irregular and Regular
L.OBJ	Learning Objectives

L1	First language / Language 1
L2	Second language / Language 2
L1/2	Level 1 and 2
L1, 2, 3...	Learner 1, 2, 3...
M	Male
MA	Master of Arts
N	Numeracy
NC	Negotiated Curriculum
NATECLA	National Association for Teaching English and Community Languages to Adults
NHS	National Health Service
OB	Observation
OS	Observation/September
PH	Phase
PW	Pair Work
R	Reading
Q1, 2, 3	Questions 1, 2, 3
Q&A	Questions and Answers
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
S/L	Speaking and Listening
S,NO&D	Session number and Date
SOW	Schemes of Work
STS	Sentences
T&L.MTH	Teaching and Learning Methods
UK	United Kingdom
VOL	Volume
W	Writing
W1, 2, 3	Week 1, 2, 3

Chapter 1

Epiphanies from dissatisfied ESOL learners

Pear: When I get anxious trying to speak English to English people, I often start laughing. I can't help it and I get very embarrassed.

Orange: When I speak English with people from my own country, I speak with confidence. But when my work colleagues speak to me, I struggle.

Apple: When I was with my friends in Pakistan, I was relaxed and spoke English quite well. In this country, I feel nervous and this affects how well I speak English

Can you help?
What should I do?
How can I be more confident?
Can we have more classes?

Banana: I thought I was getting quite good at speaking English but when someone made fun of my accent, I lost all my confidence.

Peach: I was asked so often to repeat what I have said that I became reluctant to ever say anything in English.

Grape: When I am thinking about English in my mind, I understand the language. But when I try to speak I get so nervous that sometimes I am close to tears.

Introduction

1.1 Background and Problem

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision within Further Education (FE) plays a central role in supporting migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers to develop English language proficiency and participate fully in society. Beyond linguistic competence, ESOL is expected to facilitate access to employment, education, and social integration. However, in practice, ESOL curricula are largely shaped by institutional requirements,

assessment frameworks, and funding priorities, which prioritise standardisation, measurable outcomes, and progression targets.

This emphasis on standardisation creates a fundamental tension between policy-driven curriculum design and the complex, lived realities of ESOL learners. While learner-centred pedagogies advocate for the inclusion of learners' voices, experiences, and goals, opportunities for substantial participation in curriculum design remain limited within FE contexts. As a result, there is often a disconnect between what is taught in the classroom and the communicative demands learners face in everyday social, cultural, and professional settings. Learners may develop knowledge of grammatical structures and perform successfully in assessments, yet remain underprepared for real-life interaction, where meaning is shaped by context, culture, and social norms.

Within this context, Schemes of Work (SOW) are typically constructed as fixed and pre-determined planning documents aligned with qualification specifications. While this ensures consistency and accountability, it can also constrain pedagogical flexibility and limit responsiveness to learners' immediate and evolving needs. Consequently, the curriculum may fail to reflect learners' lived experiences or address the socio-cultural dimensions of language use that are essential for civic engagement.

This study positions this gap between standardised curriculum structures and learners' socio-cultural realities as a central problem within FE ESOL provision. It argues that addressing this tension requires a shift from viewing the SOW as a static, compliance-driven document towards understanding it as a dynamic and negotiable pedagogical tool.

In response, this research explores the potential of negotiated curriculum (NC), operationalised through the co-design and ongoing adaptation of SOW, as an approach that can bridge this gap. By involving learners in shaping curriculum content, NC offers a way to align language learning with learners' lived experiences, communicative needs, and socio-cultural contexts, while still operating within institutional and assessment constraints.

This thesis therefore argues that NC, enacted through the co-construction of SOW in FE ESOL, can enhance not only learners' linguistic development but also their capacity for social participation and integration. In doing so, it seeks to contribute to a more responsive and contextually grounded approach to ESOL provision within the FE sector.

1.2 Research Gap

While NC has been explored across broader educational contexts, there remains limited research examining how it can be systematically implemented within FE ESOL through the co-design and adaptation of SOW. Existing studies tend to focus on learner-centred pedagogy at the level of classroom interaction, materials, or task design, with comparatively little attention given to curriculum planning as a structured and negotiable process.

Furthermore, although ESOL literature consistently highlights the importance of learner integration, autonomy, and engagement, there is a lack of empirical evidence demonstrating how these outcomes can be operationalised through curriculum negotiation within the constraints of FE institutions. In particular, the relationship between NC and institutional frameworks, such as assessment requirements, guided learning hours (GLH), and funding structures remains underexplored.

This study addresses a gap that is both institutional and pedagogical.

Schemes of Work (SOW) are typically constructed as fixed and pre-determined planning documents aligned with qualification specifications and institutional accountability requirements. While such approaches may support consistency and accountability, they may also limit opportunities for adaptive and responsive curriculum design. Time constraints associated with GLH requirements, alongside limited opportunities for collaborative planning, can further restrict the implementation of dialogic and participatory teaching practices.

In addition, long-term reductions in ESOL funding, estimated to have declined significantly since 2008 in real terms, have contributed to larger class sizes and increased pressure on teachers to prioritise measurable outcomes. These conditions may reduce the scope for sustained dialogue, negotiation, and learner involvement in shaping the curriculum, despite their recognised importance in language learning.

From a pedagogical perspective, a further gap exists between learners' formal language development and their ability to use English relevantly and purposefully in social contexts. Many ESOL learners, particularly those engaged in low-skilled employment, have limited opportunities to practise English beyond the classroom. This can reinforce patterns of social and linguistic isolation, even among learners who demonstrate competence in assessed tasks. As a result, language learning may remain confined to the classroom, with limited transfer to real-world communication and participation.

This study positions the gap between standardised curriculum structures and learners' socio-cultural realities as a central problem within FE ESOL provision. It explores how the ESOL classroom can be re-positioned as a space where language learning supports not only assessment outcomes but also social agency, participation, and integration.

1.3 Research Aim, Objectives and Questions

The aim of this study is to investigate how negotiated curriculum (NC), operationalised through the co-design and ongoing adaptation of Schemes of Work (SOW), can enhance adult ESOL learners' cultural awareness, motivation, autonomy, and social participation within the FE context.

Within this setting, ESOL provision increasingly responds not only to general language development but also to what may be described as “survival English,” where learners require immediate communicative competence to navigate institutions such as the Home Office, the NHS, and local employment systems. In order to:

- To explore how learners' contributions to the design of SOW promote their cultural and social awareness.
- To identify the pedagogical considerations required to support learner participation in curriculum design and enhance motivation and autonomy.
- To examine the extent to which embedding socio-cultural content within SOW supports learners' engagement, participation, and integration beyond the classroom, the study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: How do learners' contributions to the design of Schemes of Work influence their cultural and social awareness?

RQ2: What pedagogical considerations arise when learners participate in designing Schemes of Work?

RQ3: How does embedding socio-cultural content within Schemes of Work influence learners' engagement and participation beyond the classroom?

1.4 Context and Scope

This study is situated within an adult learning centre in a diverse town in Southeast England, with a population of approximately 226,973. The local demographic landscape has evolved significantly in recent years, shifting from long-established South Asian communities to a more complex and urgent linguistic context shaped by the arrival of refugees from Ukraine, Afghanistan, and Syria. Within this setting, ESOL provision increasingly responds not only to general language development, but to what may be described as “survival English,” where learners require immediate communicative competence to navigate institutions such as the Home Office, the NHS, and local employment systems.

The research is located within the Further Education (FE) ESOL sector, characterised by adult learners with diverse linguistic, educational, and socio-cultural backgrounds. Many learners experience limited exposure to English

beyond the classroom, alongside competing life responsibilities such as childcare, employment, and resettlement challenges. These factors are compounded by institutional pressures related to assessment, progression, and funding, which shape both curriculum design and pedagogical practices.

Demographically, ESOL provision within this context reflects significant gendered and educational disparities. For example, in 2018/19, 86% of ESOL learners enrolled were women, many of whom had experienced limited or interrupted formal education in their countries of origin. As a result, issues of literacy, combined with restricted opportunities to practise English outside the classroom, contribute to persistent barriers to employment, social participation, and integration. In some cases, these challenges intersect with broader wellbeing concerns, including anxiety and social isolation. Consequently, progression through ESOL levels, particularly from Entry levels to Level 1 and Level 2, remains limited, with many learners returning year after year without achieving sustained advancement.

This challenge is further reflected in achievement patterns, where success rates at Level 1 and Level 2 are significantly lower than at Entry levels. As a result, provision at higher levels is often restricted, limiting opportunities for learners to progress. While learners at these levels are typically expected to demonstrate familiarity with cultural norms, idiomatic language, and social interaction, the current curriculum remains predominantly focused on grammatical structures and examination preparation. This creates a disconnect between learners' formal language knowledge and their ability to engage effectively in real-life social and cultural contexts.

National data further reinforces this gap. According to Office for National Statistics (2021), approximately 1,040,000 adults in England and Wales reported that they could not speak English well or at all. However, beyond this, there exists a less visible group of learners who, despite demonstrating grammatical competence, struggle with socio-cultural communication, understanding implied meaning, tone, and context in everyday interactions. This aligns with Casey (2016), who argues that linguistic fluency alone does

not equate to successful integration, particularly in navigating the complexities of British social and cultural life.

This gap is evident in professional contexts such as the NHS, where migrant staff may possess the linguistic ability to communicate information but encounter challenges in conveying meaning appropriately within culturally nuanced interactions (Baker, 2021). Such examples highlight the limitations of a curriculum that prioritises formal language structures over socio-cultural competence.

Within this context, ESOL provision is shaped by accountability frameworks, funding mechanisms, and qualification requirements, which promote standardisation and measurable outcomes. While these structures provide consistency, they may also constrain opportunities for flexible, learner-responsive curriculum development. This study responds to these tensions by exploring how negotiated SOW can create space for learners to influence curriculum content in ways that reflect their lived experiences and communicative needs.

The scope of this study focuses specifically on adult ESOL learners aged 27–59 within this FE setting. It examines how negotiated SOW can be implemented within existing institutional constraints, and how such practices may support learners' motivation, autonomy, and socio-cultural integration. The study does not seek to generalise across all ESOL contexts; rather, it offers an in-depth, contextually grounded exploration of curriculum negotiation in practice.

It is therefore argued that enabling learners to negotiate topics of relevance, particularly those related to immediate social interaction, cultural understanding, and everyday communication, can address the limitations of a grammar-dominated curriculum. Through ongoing dialogue, evaluation, and adaptation of the SOW, learners may develop not only linguistic competence but also the ability to interpret meaning, engage in social contexts, and participate more fully in society.

1.5 Theoretical and Methodological Orientation

This study is situated within an interpretivist paradigm, recognising that learning is socially constructed and shaped by interaction, context, and individual experience. Such an approach is particularly appropriate for investigating how ESOL learners negotiate meaning, identity, and participation within both classroom and broader socio-cultural contexts. In alignment with the study's focus on negotiating the SOW, knowledge is understood not as fixed or transmitted, but as co-constructed through dialogue and shared experience.

Central to this study is the reconceptualisation of the SOW. Traditionally positioned as a static and bureaucratic document used for planning and accountability, this research reframes the SOW as a “living document” that evolves in response to learners' voices, needs, and lived realities. This reconceptualisation aligns with principles of dialogic learning, as discussed by Meddings and Thornbury (2009), where language is viewed as emerging through interaction rather than being pre-determined. Within this framework, negotiation is enacted through the continuous adaptation of the SOW, for example, shifting lesson content from abstract grammatical structures to socially meaningful topics such as communicating with landlords, employers, or public services. In this way, the classroom becomes a space not only for language development but also for engaging with cultural and social norms, reflecting the study's emphasis on integration and real-world participation.

The study is further informed by a range of theoretical perspectives that foreground the social, dialogic, and transformative nature of learning. The work of Freire (1970) is central, particularly his critique of the “banking model” of education and his advocacy for dialogic, problem-posing pedagogy. Freire's concept of co-intentional learning strongly underpins the idea of NC, where teachers and learners collaboratively construct knowledge. Similarly, Vygotsky (1978) emphasises the role of social interaction and cultural tools in mediating learning, supporting the view that curriculum content should be grounded in learners' lived experiences and social realities. The

transformative dimension of learning is further developed through Mezirow (1991; 2000), whose work highlights the role of critical reflection in reshaping learners' perspectives and enabling greater agency.

Additionally, dialogism, as conceptualised by Bakhtin (1981), provides a lens through which classroom discourse can be understood as inherently interactive, dynamic, and co-constructed. Extending these perspectives, this study also draws on Wenger (1998), whose theory of communities of practice offers a contemporary understanding of learning as participation in social contexts. This is particularly relevant to ESOL learners, whose language development is closely tied to their ability to engage with and navigate social and cultural communities. Furthermore, Bernstein (2000) provides a critical framework for examining how institutional structures shape curriculum design, knowledge distribution, and pedagogic control within the FE sector.

Methodologically, this research adopts a qualitative practitioner inquiry approach, enabling an in-depth exploration of learners' experiences, perspectives, and engagement with NC processes. This approach reflects the dual role of the researcher as both practitioner and researcher, allowing for a situated and reflexive understanding of classroom practices. Through methods such as interviews, observations, and two further participants generated accounts, the study examines how learners actively contribute to the design and adaptation of the SOW, and how this participation influences their motivation, autonomy, and engagement both in and beyond the classroom.

This theoretical and methodological orientation supports the central premise of the study: that negotiating the SOW considering cultural and social norms can serve as a purposeful pedagogical approach to enhancing learners' integration, agency, and contribution in society. A detailed account of the research design, data collection, and analytical procedures is provided in Chapter 3.

1.6 Significance and Contribution

This study contributes to ESOL pedagogy by offering an empirically grounded and theoretically informed account of NC in practice. In doing so, it directly addresses the study's research questions by exploring whether learner involvement in curriculum design promotes socio-cultural understanding (RQ1), identifying the pedagogical conditions required to support such involvement (RQ2), and evaluating the impact of embedding socio-cultural content within ESOL provision (RQ3). These contributions are further synthesised in Chapter 6, where their broader implications are critically reflected upon.

From a practice perspective, the study contributes to the development of more responsive and inclusive ESOL pedagogy by demonstrating the value of moving beyond fixed, standardised curricula towards a negotiated and dialogic approach. Informed by Freire (1970) and Rogers (1969), the findings show that when learners actively contribute to shaping the SOW, they develop a stronger sense of ownership, engagement, and purpose in their learning (RQ2). The study provides practical insights into how teachers can embed learners' lived experiences, cultural backgrounds, and real-life communicative needs into classroom practice. This includes preparing learners for authentic social interactions, workplace communication, and participation in wider community encounters, thereby addressing RQ3. As further discussed in the conclusion chapter, such practices extend learning beyond linguistic competence towards practical and authentic social participation and integration.

In relation to theory, this research contributes to the reconceptualisation of NC within ESOL by situating it in an interpretivist and sociocultural framework. Drawing on Vygotsky (1978), and Bakhtin (1981), the study conceptualises learning as a socially mediated and dialogic process, where meaning is co-constructed through interaction. Importantly, the study extends these classical perspectives by engaging with Wenger's (1998) theory of communities of practice, which emphasises learning as participation in social contexts and the

development of identity through engagement in shared practices. This contemporary lens strengthens the argument that ESOL learners' involvement in negotiating the SOW supports not only language acquisition but also their legitimate participation in social and cultural communities. The study further engages with Bernstein (1971) to critically examine how institutional structures regulate knowledge, control, and curriculum boundaries within the FE context. Through this lens, the study offers a nuanced understanding of how negotiated SOW can both operate within and challenge existing educational frameworks. This theoretical positioning, revisited in Chapter 6, strengthens the argument that learner participation in curriculum design is not merely a pedagogical choice but a socially situated and transformative practice (RQ1).

At the policy level, the study contributes to ongoing debates surrounding ESOL provision in the UK, particularly in relation to the tensions between accountability, employability, and integration agendas. While recognising the importance of measurable outcomes, the findings highlight the limitations of policy approaches that prioritise standardisation at the expense of learner voice and contextual relevance. By evidencing the impact of NC on learner engagement and integration (RQ3), the study advocates for more flexible and inclusive policy frameworks that support dialogic, learner-centred practices. As emphasised in the conclusion, this requires a rebalancing of priorities, where educational success is understood not only in terms of assessment outcomes but also in relation to learners' ability to navigate and participate in society.

In summary, this research bridges theory, practice, and policy by positioning negotiated SOW as a transformative approach to ESOL education. It contributes to the development of more equitable, context-sensitive, and socially responsive educational practices, with implications that extend beyond the classroom into broader discussions of integration and lifelong learning.

1.7 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is organised into six chapters.

Chapter 1 introduces the study, outlining its background, research problem, aims, objectives, and significance, with particular emphasis on the role of negotiated NC within ESOL in FE.

Chapter 2 presents a critical review of the literature, examining key themes related to ESOL provision, NC, learner autonomy, and socio-cultural integration, while identifying gaps that this study seeks to address.

Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology, including the interpretivist paradigm, research design, data collection methods, and ethical considerations. It also explains the analytical framework used to interpret the data in relation to the research questions.

Chapter 4 presents the research findings, drawing on empirical data and situating them within the study's theoretical framework.

Chapter 5 provides a critical discussion of the findings, linking them to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and addressing the research questions.

Chapter 6 concludes the study by summarising the key findings, highlighting the study's contributions to theory, practice, and policy, acknowledging its limitations, and offering recommendations for future research and practice.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision plays a significant role in supporting learners to navigate linguistic, social, and institutional demands within the United Kingdom (Rolffe, 1988). Like the indigenous population, ESOL learners are required to navigate key social systems and services, including employment, education, healthcare, housing, and civic participation. However, they often do so while encountering additional linguistic, cultural, and institutional barriers. While some learners appear to adapt relatively quickly, others experience persistent and multi-layered challenges that shape their trajectories within Further Education pathways (Welply, 2022). These challenges are not solely linguistic but are also bureaucratic, social, and psychological in nature.

Existing literature highlights that ESOL learners are frequently required to engage with complex systems, such as welfare provision, job application processes, and healthcare communication, all under conditions of limited linguistic proficiency. While some learners successfully establish connections between their prior cultural experiences and the expectations of British society, others encounter ongoing difficulties, which may contribute to forms of social marginalisation or restricted access to opportunities. However, the extent to which ESOL provision adequately supports such transitions remains contested within the literature.

A recurring concern within the FE sector is the phenomenon of learners remaining enrolled at the same ESOL level over years (Al Shamsi, 2020). While this has often been interpreted as an issue of learner progression, alternative explanations suggest a more complex interaction between curriculum design, assessment structures, and learner needs. For instance, some studies point to potential mismatches between standardised ESOL curricula and the diverse, situated communicative demands learners encounter in their day-to-day life. Others emphasise structural constraints

within FE systems, including accountability measures and qualification frameworks, which may limit pedagogical flexibility. Consequently, the persistence of learners within the same level cannot be understood solely as a shortfall in learner ability, but rather as a reflection of broader tensions within ESOL provision.

These tensions raise important questions regarding how ESOL curricula are organised, what forms of knowledge and language are prioritised, and whose needs are ultimately being served. While some strands of literature advocate for more flexible and learner-responsive approaches, including NC models, such approaches remain debated in terms of their feasibility, consistency, and equity in practice. This suggests a need for closer examination of how curriculum design might better respond to learners' lived realities while operating within the constraints of FE systems.

This chapter reviews the scholarship underpinning the study and develops the conceptual framework guiding the research. It draws on four interrelated perspectives: critical pedagogy, adult learning theory, dialogic approaches, and transformative learning, to examine how learner participation in curriculum design has been theorised and enacted. Rather than assuming the inherent value of NC, the chapter critically explores its potential, limitations, and conditions of enactment within ESOL contexts.

The chapter then situates NC within the UK policy and pedagogical landscape, with particular attention to accountability structures and institutional constraints. It further examines the relationship between curriculum, language learning, and socio-cultural participation, before considering pedagogical and assessment implications. The chapter concludes by identifying key gaps in the literature, which inform the revised research questions guiding this study.

2.2 ESOL in the UK Context

The development of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision in the United Kingdom is closely linked to post-war migration

patterns, evolving government policies, and broader socio-political shifts. From the mid-twentieth century onwards, the arrival of migrants from Commonwealth countries generated increasing demand for English language education (Baynham, 2006). Early provision was largely informal and community-based, often delivered by voluntary organisations and local initiatives (Cooke & Simpson, 2008). Over time, ESOL became progressively institutionalised within FE, particularly from the late 1990s onwards, as it became subject to formal funding mechanisms, professional standards, and inspection systems.

A key moment in this process was the introduction of the Skills for Life Strategy (DfES, 2001), which positioned ESOL within a national skills agenda. While this policy framework expanded access and visibility, it has been widely critiqued for prioritising functional language skills and employability outcomes over broader educational aims (Hamilton & Hillier, 2009; Roberts, 2010). This has led to an enduring tension within ESOL provision between economic imperatives and more expansive goals related to identity, participation, and social belonging. Rather than representing a neutral policy orientation, the emphasis on employability can be understood as reflecting broader ideological shifts towards neoliberal governance within FE systems.

Contemporary ESOL provision in England is shaped by a range of accountability mechanisms, including guided learning hours (GLH), qualification frameworks, funding criteria, and inspection systems. These structures influence not only what is taught, but also how teaching is organised and evaluated. Research suggests that such conditions may constrain pedagogical flexibility and limit opportunities for responsive, learner-centred approaches (Baynham & Simpson, 2010). However, the extent to which these constraints are uniformly experienced remains debated, with some studies highlighting pockets of teacher discretion within institutional boundaries.

Importantly, ESOL provision across the UK is not uniform, with devolved administrations in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland adopting distinct

policy approaches. For example, Scotland has emphasised community-based provision and social inclusion agendas, while Wales has developed integration-oriented ESOL strategies linked to wider language and cohesion policies. Northern Ireland presents a different configuration, shaped by its own migration patterns and community relations context. While these systems vary in terms of funding structures, policy priorities, and pedagogical approaches, they collectively illustrate how ESOL provision is mediated by local governance arrangements rather than operating as a single, unified model.

These variations raise important analytical questions regarding the extent to which ESOL policy frameworks enable or constrain pedagogical innovation, including NC approaches. Differences in funding models, accountability pressures, and institutional expectations may shape the degree of teacher autonomy and learner participation within classroom practice. This suggests that any consideration of NC must be situated within the specific policy and governance conditions in which it is enacted.

Collectively, the literature indicates that ESOL provision in the UK is shaped by a complex interaction between policy, ideology, and practice. While there is growing interest in learner-centred and participatory approaches, including NC, their implementation remains contingent upon the structural conditions of FE systems. This highlights the need to examine how such approaches operate within, rather than outside of, existing institutional constraints.

2.3 Negotiated Curriculum in ESOL

2.3.1 Origins, Definitions, and Conceptual Boundaries

The concept of NC emerges from progressive and humanistic traditions in education, where learner participation and autonomy are foregrounded (Graves, 1996; Breen & Littlejohn, 2000). Broadly defined, NC refers to processes through which aspects of the curriculum are shaped through interaction between teachers and learners, rather than being wholly predetermined.

A key limitation in existing scholarship is the tendency to conflate related but distinct concepts, including negotiated syllabus, negotiated curriculum (NC), and negotiated SOW. These operate at different levels of pedagogical design and institutional control. A negotiated syllabus typically refers to the selection and sequencing of content within a course, often at classroom level. NC may extend beyond this to include broader questions of purpose, pedagogy, and sometimes assessment. In contrast, the SOW, which forms the focus of this study, represents a meso-level planning tool situated between institutional requirements and classroom practice. It is within this space that limited but significant negotiation may be possible in FE contexts.

Importantly, not all elements of the curriculum are equally negotiable. In UK FE settings, assessment frameworks, qualification requirements, and guided learning hours are largely fixed, reflecting external accountability structures. By contrast, areas such as topic selection, sequencing of content, classroom activities, and the incorporation of learners' lived experiences may allow for varying degrees of negotiation.

Within ESOL contexts, NC has been argued to hold relevance given the diverse linguistic, cultural, and experiential backgrounds of adult learners (Cooke & Simpson, 2008). However, while some literature positions NC as a means of recognising learners as active participants in their education, other studies caution that such participation may be uneven, constrained, or selectively enacted in practice. This suggests that NC should not be treated as inherently emancipatory, but rather as a pedagogical approach whose outcomes depend on context, implementation, and power relations in the classroom.

This study therefore focuses specifically on the negotiation and sharing of SOW in adult ESOL, examining how this more bounded form of curriculum negotiation operates within the structural conditions of FE.

However, rather than assuming its effectiveness, the study explores the extent to which such practices may support, or fail to support learner motivation, autonomy, and social participation.

2.3.2 Theoretical Underpinnings

The theoretical foundations of NC are commonly associated with critical pedagogy, adult learning theory, dialogic approaches, and transformative learning. While these frameworks emphasise learner participation and meaning construction, they conceptualise these processes in different ways and with varying degrees of attention to structural constraint.

From a critical pedagogical perspective, learning is framed as a dialogic process in which knowledge is co-constructed rather than transmitted. However, critiques of this perspective note that its emphasis on emancipation may underplay the institutional conditions that shape what is pedagogically possible. Similarly, adult learning theory foregrounds learner autonomy and prior experience, yet has been criticised for assuming a level of readiness for self-direction that may not be uniformly present across diverse ESOL cohorts.

Dialogic approaches emphasise interaction and the co-construction of meaning, while transformative learning theory highlights the potential for shifts in learners' perspectives. However, empirical studies suggest that such transformations are not guaranteed and may depend on factors such as learner confidence, linguistic proficiency, and classroom dynamics.

Bernstein's (1971) distinction between classification and framing offers a useful lens for understanding these tensions. While NC may be associated with weaker framing and more integrated forms of knowledge, FE systems often maintain strong classification and control through assessment structures and institutional requirements. As such, NC in practice may represent a negotiated balance between pedagogical aspiration and structural constraint, rather than a wholesale shift towards learner control.

2.3.3 Potential Benefits of Negotiated Curriculum in ESOL

A range of studies suggest that NC may offer pedagogical benefits in ESOL contexts, although these are neither universal nor uncontested. One frequently cited advantage is increased learner motivation, particularly where

curriculum content aligns with learners' immediate communicative needs (Nunan, 1999). Similarly, the incorporation of real-life tasks and learner-relevant topics has been associated with greater perceived relevance and engagement (Cooke et al., 2015).

NC has also been linked to enhanced learner voice and participation, with some studies suggesting that it may help to redistribute classroom power relations (Auerbach, 1992). In addition, engagement with socio-cultural topics has been argued to support forms of social participation and intercultural awareness.

However, it is important to note that much of this evidence is drawn from small-scale or context-specific studies, often involving motivated learners and supportive teaching environments. As such, the extent to which these benefits can be generalised to broader FE contexts remains uncertain. Furthermore, some studies suggest that increased flexibility may introduce challenges related to coherence, coverage, and alignment with assessment requirements.

2.3.4 Challenges, Limitations, and Critiques

Despite its potential, NC presents several well-documented challenges within ESOL FE contexts. Institutional constraints, including standardised curricula, assessment requirements, and funding structures, may limit the scope for substantive negotiation (Baynham & Simpson, 2010). In such contexts, negotiation may be restricted to relatively minor aspects of content rather than substantive shifts in curriculum design.

There is also evidence that NC may result in tokenistic practices, where learners are given limited choices without corresponding shifts in decision-making power (Clarke, 2015). Additionally, learner participation in negotiation is often uneven. More confident or linguistically proficient learners may dominate discussions, while others, particularly those with lower proficiency or educational confidence, may be marginalised.

Learner expectations also play a role. Some adult learners may prefer structured, teacher-led approaches, particularly where previous educational experiences have emphasised authority and clarity (Benson, 2013). For teachers, implementing NC can require significant pedagogical skill, flexibility, and time, which may not be fully supported within FE professional contexts.

These challenges suggest that NC is not a universally applicable or inherently equitable approach, but one that requires careful consideration of context, learner diversity, and institutional constraints.

2.3.5 UK FE Realities: Constraint, Enactment, and Possibility

ESOL provision in UK FE operates within a broader context of audit culture, accountability, and performance measurement, often associated with New Public Management (NPM) approaches. Inspection frameworks, such as those of Ofsted, alongside funding mechanisms and qualification requirements, shape both curriculum design and pedagogical practice.

These conditions may encourage standardisation and a focus on measurable outcomes, potentially limiting opportunities for more flexible or participatory approaches. However, rather than framing this solely as a constraint, it is more analytically productive to consider how teachers navigate and enact these conditions in practice.

Research suggests that teachers may exercise forms of bounded autonomy, creating limited spaces for adaptation within institutional frameworks. In this sense, NC may not function as a form of outright resistance, but rather as a pragmatic negotiation between pedagogical values and organisational requirements. The notion of “pockets of negotiation” reflects this dynamic, where elements of learner participation are incorporated without fundamentally disrupting institutional expectations.

This perspective allows NC to be understood not as an idealised alternative to existing systems, but as a situated practice shaped by the interplay between policy, institutional structures, and classroom realities.

2.3.6 International Perspectives and Analytical Comparison

International research on NC in adult language education highlights both its potential and its variability across contexts. Studies from countries such as Canada and Australia suggest that learner-centred approaches may support engagement and participation, particularly those linked to settlement and integration policies. However, these approaches are typically embedded within specific policy frameworks that shape their implementation.

Comparative research indicates that differences in funding models, governance structures, and policy priorities influence the extent to which negotiation is feasible. For example, systems that prioritise social inclusion may provide greater scope for learner participation, whereas those emphasising standardised outcomes may restrict it.

Importantly, the purpose of international comparison in this study is not to identify “best practice,” but to highlight how NC is mediated by context. This reinforces the argument that the potential of negotiated SOW in UK ESOL cannot be understood in isolation from its institutional and policy environment.

2.4 Theoretical Frameworks

2.4.1 Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy, most closely associated with Freire, provides a central theoretical lens for this study. Freire’s critique of the “banking model” of education challenges transmissive approaches in which learners are positioned as passive recipients of knowledge. In contrast, he proposes a dialogic, problem-posing model in which knowledge is co-constructed through interaction, reflection, and action (Freire, 1970).

While Freire’s concepts such as dialogue, praxis, and conscientization have been widely applied across educational contexts, their relevance to ESOL requires careful consideration. In particular, the emphasis on dialogue and generative themes aligns with the idea of embedding learners’ lived experiences into curriculum design. However, the assumption that learners

are equally positioned to engage in critical dialogue may not hold in linguistically diverse ESOL classrooms, where differences in proficiency, confidence, and educational background can shape participation.

Moreover, Freire's work has been critiqued for under-theorising institutional constraint. In FE contexts, where curricula are shaped by assessment frameworks, funding requirements, and inspection regimes, opportunities for dialogic and emancipatory practice may be limited. As such, while critical pedagogy offers a powerful normative framework, its enactment in ESOL settings is necessarily partial and conveyed by structural conditions.

Within this study, Freirean concepts are not adopted uncritically but are used to frame negotiation as a situated pedagogical practice rather than a guaranteed pathway to empowerment. The negotiation of SOW can be understood as one possible mechanism through which elements of dialogue and learner participation are introduced into otherwise structured environments. However, such practices remain contingent upon both institutional constraints and classroom dynamics.

Recent discussions in adult education (2020–2026) continue to revisit Freire's relevance in increasingly regulated and data-driven educational systems, highlighting tensions between emancipatory pedagogy and performative accountability. This reinforces the need to examine how, rather than whether, Freirean principles can be adapted within contemporary ESOL provision.

2.4.2 Adult Learning Theory

Adult learning theory, particularly as articulated by Knowles (1984), emphasises learner autonomy, prior experience, and problem-centred learning. These principles have been widely applied in ESOL contexts, where learners are typically adults navigating complex social, economic, and cultural transitions (Merriam, 2001).

The alignment between andragogical principles and NC is frequently noted in the literature. Allowing learners to influence content and learning processes

may enhance engagement and perceived relevance (Cooke et al., 2015). However, this alignment should not be overstated. Critiques of andragogy point out that assumptions of self-direction and readiness to learn may not apply uniformly, particularly among learners with interrupted educational histories or limited confidence in formal learning environments.

Furthermore, in institutional contexts such as FE, the extent to which adult learning principles can be enacted is shaped by structural constraints. Standardised curricula and assessment requirements may limit opportunities for genuine learner input, resulting in tensions between pedagogical ideals and practical implementation.

Recent literature (2020–2026) has increasingly problematised universalist assumptions within adult learning theory, emphasising the need to account for diversity in learner trajectories, migration experiences, and socio-economic positioning. This perspective supports a more cautious and context-sensitive application of andragogy within ESOL.

2.4.3 Dialogic Perspectives

Dialogic theories, particularly those influenced by Bakhtin (1981), conceptualise learning as a process emerging through interaction between multiple voices. In ESOL contexts, this perspective is particularly relevant, as classrooms bring together learners with and from diverse linguistic, cultural, and experiential backgrounds.

Dialogic pedagogy has been associated with the development of critical thinking, reasoning, and collaborative knowledge construction (Mercer & Littleton, 2007). In ESOL settings, it also supports the negotiation of identity and belonging, as learners engage with both familiar and unfamiliar cultural perspectives (Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004).

However, dialogic approaches are not without limitations. The assumption of an even participation may be challenged by differences in language proficiency and confidence, which can lead to unequal contributions.

Additionally, dialogic teaching requires time, flexibility, and pedagogical skill, which may be constrained within exam-driven FE contexts.

The concept of the classroom as a “third space” (Kramsch, 1993) further highlights the potential of ESOL learning environments as sites of intercultural negotiation. Within negotiated SOW, this may manifest through the inclusion of learner-selected topics that reflect diverse cultural perspectives. However, such practices must be understood as negotiated within, rather than independent of, institutional constraints.

Recent developments in dialogic pedagogy (2020–2026) emphasise its role in fostering inclusive participation, while also acknowledging the challenges of sustaining dialogic practices within high-accountability systems. This reinforces the need to examine how dialogic principles can be operationalised within structured ESOL provision.

2.4.4 Transformative Learning

Transformative learning theory, as developed by Mezirow (1991), focuses on the potential for critical reflection to reshape learners’ assumptions and perspectives. In ESOL contexts, this framework is particularly relevant given that migration itself can act as a disorienting experience, prompting individuals to reassess their identities, roles, and relationships.

Studies suggest that language learning can function as a site of such transformation, particularly when learners engage with socio-cultural themes related to work, family, and community (Illeris, 2014; Taylor, 2008). NC approaches may support this process by allowing learners to engage with topics that are personally and socially purposeful and relevant to their needs.

However, critiques of transformative learning caution against if all learners seek or benefit from deep critical reflection (Brookfield, 2000). In ESOL contexts, some learners may prioritise functional language acquisition over broader identity exploration. As such, the potential for transformation should be understood as variable rather than universal.

Recent scholarship has further problematised linear models of transformation, suggesting that learning processes are often fragmented, non-linear, and shaped by external constraints. This perspective aligns with the view that negotiated SOW may create opportunities for reflection and change but cannot guarantee transformative outcomes.

2.5 ESOL Sociocultural Participation, and Identity

Adult learning theory and sociocultural perspectives provide important lenses for understanding how ESOL provision intersects with learners' experiences beyond the classroom. While andragogical principles emphasise autonomy and relevance, sociocultural theory foregrounds the role of interaction and context in shaping learning. However, rather than if these frameworks translate straightforwardly into practice, it is necessary to consider how they operate within the constraints of FE systems.

From an andragogical perspective, adult learners are often characterised as self-directed, experienced, and oriented towards problem-solving (Knowles, 1975). These assumptions have been used to justify learner-centred approaches, including elements of curriculum negotiation. However, such claims require qualification. Not all ESOL learners enter the classroom with equal confidence, educational experience, or readiness for self-direction. As such, while negotiated SOW may align with andragogical principles, their effectiveness is likely to vary across learner groups.

Similarly, sociocultural theory, as developed by Vygotsky, conceptualises learning as a socially mediated process. Interaction, dialogue, and scaffolding are central to this perspective, with learning occurring through engagement with others within specific contexts. In ESOL classrooms, negotiation around SOW may create opportunities for such interaction, allowing learners to articulate needs and co-construct aspects of the curriculum. However, participation in these processes is not evenly distributed. Differences in language proficiency, confidence, and familiarity with educational norms may shape whose voices are heard and whose are marginalised.

Taken together, these frameworks suggest that ESOL classrooms can function as spaces where language learning intersects with broader processes of participation and identity negotiation. However, these outcomes should not be assumed as automatic, but rather understood as contingent upon pedagogical practice, learner diversity, and institutional context.

2.5.1 ESOL as a Site of Participation and Belonging

Language learning is frequently positioned within policy and research as a key mechanism through which migrants access employment, education, and civic life. However, the concept of “integration” is often used in broad and ambiguous ways. The Council of Europe (2001) defines integration as a two-way process involving mutual adaptation between migrants and host societies. While this framing acknowledges complexity, in practice ESOL provision in the UK has often prioritised functional language outcomes linked to employability and policy objectives.

Scholars have argued that reducing ESOL to functional language acquisition risks overlooking broader dimensions of participation, including access to services, social interaction, and a sense of belonging (Simpson & Whiteside, 2015). In this sense, language learning can be understood not only as skill acquisition but also as a process through which learners negotiate their position within new social and cultural contexts.

At the same time, participation is shaped by structural and social factors beyond the classroom. Some studies note that learners may experience tensions between maintaining aspects of their cultural identity and engaging with dominant social norms (Lew, Gul & Pecore, 2021). This highlights that participation is not simply a matter of language proficiency, but involves complex negotiations of identity, values, and power.

Within this context, ESOL classrooms may provide opportunities for learners to engage with socio-cultural themes, such as navigating institutions, understanding workplace practices, or discussing cultural expectations.

However, the extent to which such engagement leads to broader forms of participation also remains uneven and context dependent.

The notion of the classroom as a “third space” (Kramsch, 1993) is useful here. It conceptualises the ESOL classroom as an environment where learners can explore meanings between home and host cultures. From a dialogic perspective, informed by Bakhtin (1981), this space is characterised by multiple voices and perspectives. However, creating and sustaining such dialogic environments requires time, pedagogical skill, and institutional support, which may not always be available in FE contexts.

Negotiated SOW may contribute to this process by enabling learners to influence the selection of topics and themes. This can create opportunities for more relevant and purposeful engagement. However, such practices should be understood as partial and situated, rather than as comprehensive solutions to broader issues of participation and belonging.

In this respect, recent discussions have increasingly emphasised the need to move beyond narrow policy-driven notions of integration, highlighting instead the importance of access, participation, and relational belonging in adult language education.

2.5.2 Identity and Language Learning

The relationship between language and identity has been widely explored within applied linguistics (Norton Peirce, 1995; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). Identity is understood not as fixed, but as constructed and negotiated through social interaction. For ESOL learners, acquiring a new language often involves repositioning oneself within new social, cultural, and institutional contexts.

Norton (2013) introduces the concept of “investment” to explain how learners engage with language learning in relation to their aspirations for access to symbolic and material resources. This perspective shifts the focus from

individual motivation to broader social and economic conditions that shape learning.

In FE contexts, ESOL learners often navigate multiple and shifting identities, including roles as students, parents, workers, and community members. Classroom practices that acknowledge and engage with these diverse identities may support learners' sense of belonging. However, there is also a risk that curricula which fail to recognise such diversity may reinforce marginalisation.

While some studies suggest that learner involvement in curriculum design can enhance motivation and identity investment (Cooke, 2006; Norton, 2013), evidence remains limited, particularly within UK ESOL contexts. This reflects a broader gap in the literature, where much of the research on negotiated approaches has been conducted in ESL rather than ESOL settings. It is also important to recognise that identity negotiation is not always a linear or positive process. Learners may experience tensions, resistance, or ambivalence as they navigate new linguistic and cultural environments. As such, the role of ESOL provision in shaping identity should be understood as complex and context dependent.

Negotiated SOW may provide a framework through which aspects of learners' identities are incorporated into classroom practice. However, its impact is likely to vary depending on how negotiation is enacted, the degree of learner participation, and the constraints of the institutional setting.

2.6 The Practicality of Negotiated Curriculum

NC, and more specifically the negotiation of SOW, has been presented in the literature as a potential means of connecting language learning with learners' lived experiences. By incorporating learner-generated themes, such as employment, parenting, or access to services, NC may support both language development and forms of identity negotiation (Wall & Kelly, 2017). However, rather than assuming a direct relationship between negotiation and improved

outcomes, it is necessary to examine the conditions under which such practices are feasible within ESOL provision.

Within the UK ESOL context, curriculum design is shaped by the ESOL core curriculum, which outlines linguistic competencies across levels. While this framework provides structure and consistency, it has been critiqued for limited responsiveness to learners' diverse and situated needs. Some scholars argue that the emphasis on predefined outcomes and limited GLH may restrict opportunities for extended practice and contextualised learning (Nation & Macalister, 2010). As a result, the extent to which classroom learning translates into participation beyond the classroom remains uncertain. Therefore, negotiated SOW has been proposed as one way of introducing flexibility within these constraints. By allowing learners to contribute to topic selection, sequencing, and classroom activities, it may be possible to align learning more closely with learners' immediate communicative contexts. However, such negotiation operates within clearly bounded parameters. Assessment requirements, institutional expectations, and time constraints remain largely non-negotiable, limiting the scope of curriculum adaptation.

Critiques of ESOL provision further highlight concerns regarding standardisation and the potential disconnect between curriculum content and learners' lived realities (Somyurek, 2015). At the same time, arguments for greater responsiveness must be balanced against the need for coherence, progression, and alignment with qualification frameworks. This suggests that the question is not whether negotiation should replace existing structures, but how it can be integrated within them.

Needs analysis on the other hand, has been identified as a key mechanism for informing curriculum design (Richards, 2001). While initial and diagnostic assessments are widely used in ESOL provision, they are often limited in scope and may not fully capture the complexity of learners' goals, experiences, and constraints. Scholars such as Nunan (1988) emphasise the importance of ongoing needs analysis, incorporating learners' perspectives throughout the course. However, as Benesch (2001) argues, needs analysis

is not a neutral process; it is shaped by institutional priorities, power relations, and assumptions about what constitutes legitimate knowledge. Essentially, learners may not always be able to articulate their needs fully, particularly in the early stages of language learning or where confidence is limited (Benesch, 1996). This highlights the continued role of the teacher as mediator and curriculum designer, responsible for interpreting learner input while ensuring alignment with broader educational goals. In this sense, negotiated SOW involves not a transfer of control, but a reconfiguration of roles within existing structures.

Recent studies suggest that while learner involvement in curriculum planning is often discussed in principle, there remains limited empirical evidence of co-constructed curricula at the planning stage in UK ESOL contexts (De Los Rio & Trent, 2020). Much of the existing research focuses on classroom-level adaptation rather than shared decision-making in curriculum design. *This represents a key gap in the literature.* This study responds to this gap by examining how adult ESOL learners can participate in the co-construction of SOW within FE settings, and how such participation is shaped by both pedagogical intentions and institutional constraints. In doing so, it explores the extent to which negotiated SOW may support forms of learner engagement, participation, and identity negotiation.

At the level of curriculum design, scholars such as Dubin and Olshtain (1986) and Nation and Macalister (2010) emphasise the need to translate broad educational goals into structured learning experiences. While learner input may inform topic selection and classroom activities, curriculum design remains a process of professional judgement (Richards, 2001). This reinforces the need to balance learner contribution with pedagogical coherence and institutional requirements.

Furthermore, learner contributions may not always align with socio-cultural or critical themes. Some learners may prioritise functional language skills, such as grammar, vocabulary, or everyday communication. This diversity of

expectations highlights the need for negotiation to remain flexible and responsive, while avoiding assumptions about what learners “should” value.

The relationship between syllabus, curriculum, and SOW further illustrates these complexities. As Breen (2001) argues, the syllabus can be understood as a plan of learning, but its enactment in practice is dynamic and subject to adaptation. Within this continuum, SOW may offer a space where elements of negotiation can be incorporated, allowing for responsiveness without abandoning structure.

In summary, the literature suggests that while negotiated SOW may provide opportunities for more contextually relevant and participatory learning, its implementation is necessarily partial, situated, and shaped by multiple constraints. Rather than representing a comprehensive alternative to existing ESOL provision, it is more appropriately understood as a bounded pedagogical strategy operating within institutional frameworks.

2.7 Autonomy and Participation through Negotiated Schemes of Work

Learner autonomy is frequently defined as the ability to take responsibility for one’s own learning (Holec, 1981; Little, 1991). In ESOL contexts, this extends beyond goal setting within the classroom to the application of language skills in everyday situations. However, autonomy should not be understood as the absence of structure, but rather as a capacity that develops within supportive and bounded learning environments. Negotiated SOW may provide one such mechanism for fostering autonomy within structured educational contexts. Rather than transferring full responsibility to learners, negotiated SOW allow for selective participation in curriculum design, including the prioritisation of topics, sequencing of content, and engagement with relevant communicative tasks. This is consistent with research showing that meaningful learner choice can support autonomy and engagement when it is pedagogically guided (Evans and Boucher, 2015).

Research suggests that autonomy can be facilitated through environments that support decision-making while maintaining clear expectations (Jang, Reeve & Deci, 2010). However, the extent to which such environments can be sustained in ESOL provision is shaped by institutional constraints, including assessment requirements and time limitations. As such, negotiated SOW should be understood as enabling partial forms of autonomy rather than complete learner control.

Extending autonomy beyond the classroom remains a key consideration in ESOL learning, as language use is inherently situated within social contexts. Studies indicate that task-based and interactional approaches may support the transfer of learning into real-world settings (Pica, 1987; Crookes & Gass, 1993). However, the relationship between classroom practices and broader participation is neither linear nor guaranteed.

Digital and blended learning environments have further expanded opportunities for independent engagement (Godwin-Jones, 2020). These may complement negotiated SOW by enabling learners to continue personalised learning outside the classroom. Nevertheless, digital participation is uneven, with access, confidence, and skills varying across learner groups. This reinforces the need to consider autonomy as context-dependent rather than universally achievable.

2.7.1 From Idealism to Practice: Conceptualising Structured Autonomy

The concept of autonomy in language education has often been associated with ideals of self-direction and learner independence (Dickinson, 1995). However, such perspectives may not fully account for the realities of ESOL provision, where learners operate within structured programmes and institutional expectations.

Contemporary research suggests that autonomy and structure are not mutually exclusive. Rather, autonomy can emerge within environments that provide guidance, scaffolding, and clearly defined boundaries (Jang, Reeve &

Deci, 2010). This reframes autonomy not as complete freedom, but as the capacity to make deliberate choices within given constraints. In ESOL contexts, this raises important questions about the feasibility of autonomy for diverse learner groups. As noted by Lewandowski (2022), early expectations of autonomy may be counterproductive, particularly where learners have limited prior educational experience or lack confidence in formal learning environments. This is further complicated by external pressures, such as assessment requirements and attendance expectations linked to employment or welfare systems.

Motivation also varies significantly across ESOL cohorts. Some learners engage with language learning as a means of accessing employment or services, while others may attend due to institutional requirements, such as Job Centre referral. This diversity challenges assumptions that all learners are equally positioned to take ownership of their learning. Studies suggest that offering multiple pathways for engagement, including guided and negotiated approaches, may better accommodate this variation (Nazdarin, 2002). At the same time, the role of the teacher remains central. Rather than relinquishing control, teachers act as mediators who interpret learner input, balance competing priorities, and ensure alignment with curriculum requirements. This reflects a shift from teacher-centred to negotiated practice, rather than a complete transfer of authority.

The relationship between autonomy and social participation is of a complex one. While increased learner involvement in curriculum design may support confidence and engagement, broader outcomes such as access to employment or social inclusion, are shaped by structural factors beyond the classroom. Concepts such as cultural and social capital, associated with Pierre Bourdieu (1986), highlight that language learning alone does not guarantee access to opportunities.

Furthermore, autonomy develops unevenly. Learners with prior educational experience or familiarity with independent learning may adapt more readily, while others may require sustained support. Evidence from online and

blended learning contexts illustrates that learner autonomy develops unevenly, with some learners adapting more readily to independent learning than others. Within this context, negotiated SOW can be understood as a mechanism for supporting incremental development of autonomy. By involving learners in aspects of curriculum planning, it may encourage engagement, reflection, and awareness of learning processes. However, its impact depends on how negotiation is enacted, the degree of learner participation, and the broader institutional environment.

Conclusively, the literature suggests that autonomy in ESOL is best understood as a situated and evolving capacity, shaped by interactions between learners, teachers, and institutional structures. Negotiated SOW may contribute to this process but should not be assumed to produce uniform or transformative outcomes.

2.8 Teacher Motivation, Demotivation, and Implications for Negotiated Practice

Within ESOL provision in FE, teachers frequently undertake roles that extend beyond classroom instruction. These may include administrative responsibilities, pastoral support, and mediation between learners and external institutions. While such roles reflect the complex needs of ESOL learners, they also contribute to an expanded workload that can affect teachers' capacity to engage in pedagogical innovation. Research indicates that FE lecturers often experience high teaching loads alongside significant administrative demands. For example, Duckworth and Smith (2019) report that many lecturers teach over 24 hours per week, in addition to responsibilities such as planning, assessment, and learner support. These pressures have been associated with challenges in maintaining work-life balance and may contribute to fatigue and reduced professional motivation. Broader sector analyses suggest that teacher retention in FE is influenced by factors including workload, management practices, and institutional support. Department for Education workforce research identifies workload, working conditions and institutional factors as important considerations in FE staff

retention (Department for Education, 2020). Within ESOL contexts, these challenges may be intensified by the need to address linguistic diversity, cultural differences, and varied learner needs, often within resource-constrained environments.

Funding constraints have also been identified as a significant factor shaping FE provision. Reductions in per-student funding have been linked to larger class sizes, limited resources, and reduced access to specialist support (Sibieta et al., 2021). Such conditions may indirectly affect teacher motivation by increasing workload while limiting opportunities for differentiated or responsive teaching.

Employment conditions further contribute to these dynamics. ESOL teaching in FE is often characterised by part-time or hourly-paid contracts, which may offer limited job security and restricted access to professional development opportunities. This has been associated with perceptions of fragmented career progression and reduced professional recognition (Smith & Husband, 2024). In addition, the perceived status of FE teaching, particularly in ESOL, may influence teacher motivation and retention, especially where specialist expertise is undervalued (Tully, 2024).

At an institutional level, managerial approaches informed by performance measurement and accountability frameworks may shape teachers' experiences of their work. Studies suggest that environments emphasising efficiency and measurable outcomes can contribute to perceptions of reduced professional autonomy (Gregson et al., 2020). Inspection regimes, including those conducted by Ofsted, are intended to support quality assurance but may also generate pressures associated with performativity and compliance (Muñoz-Chereau et al., 2024). In such contexts, teachers may prioritise standardised outcomes over more flexible or learner-responsive approaches. These conditions have implications for the feasibility of NC practices. While NC and negotiated SOW are often associated with increased learner participation, their implementation requires time, planning, and pedagogical flexibility. Where teachers experience high workload, limited autonomy, or

institutional pressure, opportunities for purposeful negotiation may be constrained.

From a theoretical perspective, Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital highlights the role of educators in mediating between institutional knowledge and learners' lived experiences. However, this mediation requires both professional capacity and institutional support. Where such support is limited, the effort required to adapt curricula and incorporate diverse learner perspectives may become difficult to sustain.

Research also suggests that teacher motivation is closely linked to pedagogical practice. Approaches that involve relationship-building, contextualised learning, and purposeful engagement have been associated with positive learner outcomes (Alba & Fraumeni, 2019). Conversely, where teachers experience demotivation, the consistency and quality of such practices may be affected, with potential implications for learner engagement (Smith & Duckworth, 2019). Significantly, the relationship between teacher motivation and learner outcomes is reciprocal. Where learners disengage due to misalignment between curriculum and their needs, this may further impact teacher motivation, creating a cycle of reduced engagement on both sides. This highlights the need to consider both learner and teacher perspectives in discussions of ESOL provision.

Overall, the literature suggests that teacher motivation is a significant, yet often underexplored, factor in the implementation of NC approaches. While NC may offer opportunities for increased learner participation, its feasibility is shaped by the working conditions, professional status, and institutional environments in which teachers operate. This indicates a gap in the literature concerning the relationship between teacher motivation and the enactment of negotiated SOW in ESOL contexts.

2.9 ESOL Learners' Knowledge and Teacher Assumptions

Assumptions regarding learners' linguistic and cultural knowledge have been identified as a recurring issue within ESOL provision. A commonly observed perspective is that sustained participation in ESOL programmes equates to comprehensive understanding of both language and socio-cultural norms. However, such assumptions risk overlooking the complexity of language acquisition and the contextual nature of understanding.

Changes in the demographic composition of the United Kingdom, shaped by successive waves of migration, have contributed to increasingly multilingual and multicultural communicative environments (Melchers & Shaw, 2003; Nault, 2006). English is now frequently used in diverse social contexts where meaning is negotiated across linguistic and cultural differences. While this diversity enriches communication, it also introduces challenges, particularly where language use includes idiomatic expressions, regional variation, or culturally embedded references.

Scholars argue that ESOL learners may possess significant linguistic and cultural resources yet still encounter difficulties when engaging with context-specific forms of language (Davison, 2006). Despite this, there is evidence that some institutional and pedagogical assumptions position learners as more linguistically and culturally competent than they may be in practice (Doiz, Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2011).

Such assumptions can lead to mismatches between teaching, communication practices, and learners' actual needs.

Illustrative classroom-based observations suggest that comprehension difficulties may arise not solely from lack of vocabulary, but from unfamiliarity with contextualised language use, including idiomatic expressions, pace of speech, and culturally specific references. In contrast, when learners are

provided with opportunities to engage with relevant topics in advance, including preparation of key language and concepts, their participation and understanding may improve. These observations align with research emphasising the importance of contextualisation and scaffolding in language learning. From a sociocultural perspective, associated with Vygotsky (1978), learning is mediated through interaction and supported participation. Without appropriate scaffolding, learners may struggle to engage with authentic communicative situations, even where they have prior knowledge of the topic.

This has implications for curriculum design. Where ESOL provision assumes that learners will acquire contextual language implicitly, gaps in understanding may persist. By contrast, negotiated approaches, such as incorporating relevant topics into the SOW, may provide opportunities to prepare learners for real-world interactions. This includes exposure to varied registers, culturally embedded language, and communicative strategies. However, this does not suggest that all content should be fully anticipated or controlled. Rather, it highlights the need for greater alignment between curriculum design, learner preparation, and the communicative demands learners encounter beyond the classroom. In this sense, negotiated SOW may serve as a mechanism to identify and address potential gaps between assumed and actual learner knowledge. Therefore, the literature suggests that teacher assumptions regarding learner competence represent an underexamined area within ESOL research. While attention has been given to learner needs and curriculum design, less focus has been placed on how assumptions about learners shape pedagogical decisions. This shows a gap in understanding how NC practices may help to mediate between institutional expectations and learners' situated knowledge.

2.10 Pedagogical Considerations in ESOL FE

2.10.1 Foundations in Established Approaches

Pedagogy in ESOL is shaped by both linguistic objectives and broader socio-cultural considerations. Traditional approaches, such as grammar-translation,

have been widely critiqued for their limited focus on communicative competence. In contrast, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and task-based learning (TBL) emphasise authentic language use and substantial interaction (Ellis, 2003). NC builds upon these approaches by extending the focus on relevance and participation. Rather than positioning learners solely as recipients of pre-determined content, NC introduces opportunities for learners to influence aspects of curriculum design. This may include the selection of themes, engagement with real-world issues, and participation in extended tasks that integrate language learning with lived experience. Such approaches often involve project-based learning, problem-posing tasks, and structured dialogic activities. These pedagogical strategies align with the principles of critical and dialogic education, where language is used not only for communication but also for reflection and engagement with social realities. However, while these approaches may enhance relevance and participation, their implementation requires careful alignment with institutional expectations and learning outcomes.

2.10.2 Balancing Flexibility and Mandated Outcomes

A central gap in ESOL provision within FE is balancing flexibility with the requirement to meet prescribed assessment criteria and qualification standards. While NC promotes responsiveness to learner needs, ESOL programmes are shaped by externally defined outcomes that remain largely non-negotiable.

One key pedagogical strategy involves mapping learner-generated themes onto assessment descriptors. For example, a topic such as navigating healthcare services may be aligned with language functions such as requesting information or expressing opinions. This enables teachers to maintain curriculum relevance while ensuring compliance with assessment frameworks. The concept of “controlled spontaneity” captures this balance. While the content of learning may be influenced by learners’ interests, the structure and outcomes remain guided by institutional requirements. Viewed in this way, flexibility operates within clearly defined boundaries.

However, such practices place significant demands on teachers, requiring both pedagogical expertise and the ability to mediate between learner priorities and formal expectations. This reinforces the importance of teacher agency in shaping how negotiated approaches are enacted in practice.

2.10.3 Pedagogical Contributions and Limitations

The incorporation of socio-cultural themes within ESOL pedagogy has been associated with increased learner engagement and a stronger sense of relevance (Simpson, 2016; Motha, 2014). By drawing on learners' cultural knowledge and experiences, classroom practices may become more inclusive and responsive. Research suggests that integrating learners' backgrounds into teaching can support both language development and forms of participation and belonging (Tai & Dai, 2023; Lew, Lew, Gul & Pecore, 2021). However, such approaches are not without challenges. Teachers may lack familiarity with learners' cultural contexts, and there may be limited availability of appropriate materials that reflect diverse experiences (Valdez & Park, 2021). These challenges highlight the importance of avoiding assumptions about learners' cultural knowledge or needs. Instead, pedagogical approaches should remain exploratory and responsive, allowing for the emergence of learner perspectives while maintaining sensitivity to diversity within ESOL classrooms.

At the same time, it is important to recognise that not all learners may wish to engage with socio-cultural or identity-focused content. Some may prioritise functional language development. This reinforces the need for flexibility within pedagogical design, ensuring that multiple forms of engagement are possible.

2.10.4 Learner Contribution and the Shaping of Pedagogy

Given the diversity of ESOL learners' backgrounds, involving learners in aspects of curriculum design may support greater engagement and participation. Negotiated SOW may provide a mechanism through which learners can contribute to the selection of topics and learning priorities. Studies suggest that information sharing and collaborative learning can

support learners in navigating new environments and developing understanding of social contexts (Qayyum et al., 2014). However, learner engagement with socio-cultural content is not uniform. Some learners may experience tensions between their existing beliefs and new social norms, which may influence their participation. This highlights the need for pedagogical approaches that are both inclusive and critically aware. Rather than assuming that exposure to socio-cultural content leads to acceptance or adaptation, it is more appropriate to view such engagement as a process of negotiation.

From a curriculum perspective, scholars such as Richards (2001) emphasise that effective design involves more than syllabus content. It includes consideration of learner needs, teaching methods, assessment strategies, and contextual factors. Within this broader framework, negotiated SOW may offer a way of incorporating learner perspectives while maintaining coherence and structure. However, the extent to which such approaches are implemented in practice remains limited. Existing research suggests that learner involvement in ESOL curriculum design is often confined to feedback mechanisms rather than genuine co-construction (de los Rios & Trent, 2020). *This represents a significant gap in the literature.*

This study addresses this gap by exploring how adult ESOL learners can participate in the co-construction of SOW within FE contexts, and how such participation relates to language development, engagement, and broader forms of participation.

While negotiated approaches align with contemporary pedagogical theories and may enhance relevance and learner engagement, their implementation is shaped by institutional constraints, teacher capacity, and learner diversity. As such, NC should be understood as a situated pedagogical strategy rather than a universally applicable model.

2.11 Extending ESOL Learning Beyond the Classroom

The literature reviewed in this chapter highlights the limitations of classroom-based ESOL provision in addressing the full range of learners' linguistic and socio-cultural needs. Restricted GLH, alongside curriculum and assessment constraints, may limit opportunities for sustained practice and contextualised language use. This has led to increased recognition of the importance of extending learning beyond the classroom.

One potential approach involves the use of negotiated SOW as a bridge between classroom learning and independent practice. By sharing and co-constructing SOW with learners, it may be possible to provide a structured framework that supports continued engagement outside formal teaching hours. This approach can be complemented by blended learning strategies and digital resources, which have been identified as valuable tools in supporting language development beyond the classroom (Godwin-Jones, 2020; Hulford, 2023).

However, access to and engagement with digital tools varies across ESOL learners. Factors such as digital literacy, access to technology, and prior educational experience may influence participation. In this context, alternative approaches, such as providing learners with accessible, clearly structured SOW, may offer a more inclusive means of supporting independent learning.

In addition, the literature suggests that initial and ongoing needs analysis plays a critical role in informing curriculum design. A more comprehensive understanding of learners' linguistic, cultural, and social needs may enable teachers to design learning experiences that extend beyond immediate classroom objectives. This includes recognising the role of cultural knowledge in language comprehension. Studies indicate that unfamiliarity with cultural references may hinder understanding, particularly where language use is embedded in specific social contexts (Alptekin, 1993; Adaskou, Britten & Fahsi, 1990).

In this regard, the suggested negotiated approaches may support more contextualised learning by allowing learners to engage with topics that reflect their lived experiences and communicative needs. However, such practices should be understood as supporting, rather than replacing, structured language instruction.

2.11.1 Personalisation and Relevance in Schemes Of Work Design

The personalisation of learning content has been widely associated with increased engagement and perceived relevance. In ESOL contexts, involving learners in the selection of socio-cultural topics may support more substantive interaction with language (Simpson, 2016; Motha, 2014). This aligns with constructivist perspectives, where learning is shaped by prior knowledge and experience. If so, negotiated SOW may facilitate this process by enabling learners to contribute to the selection of themes and materials, including the use of digital resources. However, the extent to which such personalisation can be achieved is shaped by both pedagogical and institutional factors. Teachers may face challenges in identifying and responding to diverse cultural backgrounds, particularly where knowledge of learners' experiences is limited (Valdez & Park, 2021).

In addition, broader structural factors, such as workload, resource availability, and professional support, may influence teachers' capacity to implement responsive approaches. Research on FE contexts suggests that teacher motivation and working conditions play a significant role in shaping pedagogical practice (Bowser-Angermann & Draper, 2022). As such, personalisation should be understood as an aspirational goal that requires both individual and institutional support.

2.11.2 Learner Engagement and Adaptation to Negotiated Approaches

The adoption of negotiated approaches also raises questions regarding

learner readiness and engagement. While learner participation in curriculum design may support autonomy and motivation, not all learners may be equally prepared or willing to engage in such processes.

Theoretical perspectives on learning suggest that more participatory and reflective approaches may require adjustment for both teachers and learners. As noted by Piaget (1969), more complex forms of learning may also be more demanding. In ESOL contexts, this is further shaped by differences in educational background, language proficiency, and confidence.

Practitioner inquiry and reflective practice have been identified as important mechanisms for supporting pedagogical adaptation (Stenhouse, 1975; Burns, 2010; Wall, 2018). These approaches enable teachers to experiment with negotiated practices within existing constraints, generating context-specific insights. Similarly, Schön (1983) highlights the importance of ongoing reflection in adapting teaching practices to complex and evolving contexts. Coinciding with, it is important to recognise that negotiated approaches may not be equally suitable across all ESOL contexts. Learners with limited literacy, digital skills, or prior educational experience may require additional support to engage with such models. This reinforces the need for flexible and differentiated pedagogical strategies, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

Extending learning beyond the classroom and incorporating negotiated elements within SOW may provide opportunities for increased engagement and relevance. However, these approaches must be carefully adapted to the diverse needs of learners and the structural realities of ESOL provision.

2.12 Chapter Summary and Identified Research Gaps

This chapter has critically examined the theoretical and contextual foundations underpinning NC in ESOL within FE sector. Drawing on perspectives from critical pedagogy, adult learning theory, dialogic approaches, and transformative learning, the review has established a

conceptual basis for understanding NC as a pedagogical orientation that foregrounds learner participation, relevance, and interaction.

Alongside this, the chapter has situated ESOL provision within the UK FE context, characterised by accountability frameworks, funding constraints, and standardised assessment structures. These conditions shape, and in some cases limit, the extent to which negotiated approaches can be enacted in practice. As such, NC has been conceptualised not as a universal solution, but as a situated practice that operates within institutional and pedagogical constraints.

Across the literature, several recurring tensions have been identified, including the balance between learner agency and curriculum control, the relationship between linguistic and socio-cultural learning, and the role of teachers in mediating between institutional requirements and learner needs. While existing studies highlight the potential benefits of learner-centred approaches, the review also demonstrates that their implementation remains uneven and context-dependent.

Despite a substantial body of work on ESOL pedagogy and learner-centred education, the analysis reveals a number of key gaps in the literature:

- Limited empirical research on negotiated SOW in ESOL FE contexts:
While curriculum negotiation has been explored conceptually, there is a lack of empirical research examining how SOW are negotiated in practice within UK FE ESOL classrooms.
- Underexplored relationship between SOW negotiation and socio-cultural participation:
There is limited evidence examining how negotiated SOW may influence learners' participation and engagement beyond the classroom.
- Insufficient attention to learner perspectives in curriculum co-construction:

Few studies capture learners' experiences of participating in curriculum design.

- Unclear mechanisms linking negotiation to motivation, autonomy, and confidence:

The processes through which these outcomes are developed remain under-specified.

- The role of teachers in enabling or constraining negotiation:

Limited attention has been given to teacher motivation and institutional constraints.

Taken together, these gaps indicate a need for contextually grounded, empirical research that examines how negotiated SOW operates in practice.

In response, this study adopts an interpretivist approach to explore the co-construction of SOW with adult ESOL learners in FE.

The following chapter outlines the methodological framework and research design employed to investigate these questions.

Chapter 3 Methodology

Research Questions

RQ1: How do learners' contributions to the design of Schemes of Work influence their cultural and social awareness?

RQ2: What pedagogical considerations arise when learners participate in designing Schemes of Work?

RQ3: How does embedding socio-cultural content within Schemes of Work influence learners' engagement and participation beyond the classroom?

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological and research design framework underpinning the study. It establishes the philosophical foundations of the research, justifies the methodological choices, and explains the procedures through which data were collected and analysed. Grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, the study seeks to understand how meaning is constructed through learners' lived experiences and interactions within ESOL contexts.

Attention is given to the relationship between ontology, epistemology, methodology, methods, and analysis, ensuring conceptual coherence and methodological rigour. The chapter further addresses issues of trustworthiness and ethical practice, both of which are central to qualitative practitioner research.

3.2 Philosophical Framework: Ontology and Epistemology

Research methodologies are underpinned by assumptions about the nature of reality (ontology) and the nature of knowledge (epistemology). Ontologically, this study adopts a relativist position, recognising that reality is not singular or fixed but socially constructed through interaction and experience. In the

context of ESOL education, learners' realities are shaped by diverse cultural, linguistic, and social trajectories.

Epistemologically, the study is grounded in interpretivism, which assumes that knowledge is co-constructed through dialogue between the researcher and participants. Rather than seeking objective, generalisable truths, an interpretivist approach aims to understand how individuals make sense of their experiences within specific social and cultural contexts (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018).

This perspective is particularly relevant to this study, where learners' engagement with negotiated SOW cannot be reduced to observable behaviours alone but must be understood through the meanings learners attach to their experiences.

3.3 Interpretivism, Practitioner Enquiry and Researcher Positionality

This study is situated within the researcher's own teaching practice and is therefore aligned with practitioner enquiry. While the research involved reflective adaptation of teaching approaches, it does not follow the structured cyclical model associated with action research (e.g. plan–act–observe–reflect). Instead, it seeks to interpret and understand learners' experiences of NC through qualitative inquiry.

The researcher occupies a dual role as both ESOL teacher and researcher. This insider position provides valuable access to participants and supports the development of trust, which is particularly important when exploring learners' social and cultural experiences. However, this positioning also introduces challenges, including potential bias, power imbalances, and the influence of pre-existing relationships on data collection and interpretation.

As noted by Brannick and Coghlan (2007), insider researchers must remain critically aware of "preunderstanding," which may lead to assumptions that limit deeper inquiry. Recognising the influence of my dual role as teacher and researcher, reflexivity was maintained throughout the study to critically

examine assumptions, minimise bias, and ensure that interpretations remained grounded in participants' perspectives.

3.4 Research Design and Justification

This study adopts a qualitative practitioner inquiry design situated within an interpretivist paradigm. The choice of a qualitative approach is aligned with the study's aim to explore learners' experiences, perspectives, and participation in the co-construction of SOW within a real-world ESOL classroom context.

Practitioner inquiry is particularly appropriate for this research as it enables a situated and reflexive exploration of pedagogical practices from within the classroom. As both teacher and researcher, I occupy an insider position, which allows for an in-depth understanding of learners' interactions, contributions, and evolving engagement with the negotiated curriculum (NC). This dual role facilitates access to naturally occurring data and supports a nuanced interpretation of learners' lived experiences.

The practitioner inquiry approach therefore allows for a flexible and context-sensitive investigation of how negotiated SOW operates in practice, while maintaining methodological coherence with the study's interpretivist epistemological stance. Unlike interpretivism, the positivism philosophy is centred on the ontological belief that reality is measurable and encompasses only what one can directly observe, as argued by Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Tashakkori et al., (2021). It tends to believe that research can and should be without value judgments, thereby emphasising researcher objectivity as argued by Alharahsheh., (2020). This value centres researcher as the one with power in the study (as opposed to the participants or others), Hesse-Biber, (2017).

This interpretivist positioning informs the methodological choices of the study. Given the focus on understanding learners' experiences and participation in

the co-construction of SOW, a qualitative practitioner inquiry approach was adopted to ensure alignment between epistemology, methodology, and research design.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

This study employs multiple qualitative methods to explore learners' experiences of negotiated SOW. The use of multiple methods supports triangulation and enables a more comprehensive understanding of the research phenomenon.

3.5.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used to explore learners' perspectives in depth, allowing participants to express their experiences and reflections in their own words (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). This method was particularly effective in capturing learners' interpretations of NC and their experiences beyond the classroom, Adams, W.C (2015).

3.5.2 Focus Groups

Focus groups enable the exploration of shared understandings and collective interpretations. They provide insight into how learners negotiate meaning collaboratively and respond to socio-cultural content within the classroom context.

3.5.3 Classroom Observations

Classroom observations are conducted within natural learning environments to capture interactional dynamics, participation patterns, and engagement. Observations provide insight into how NC practices are enacted in real time (Angrosino, 2007).

3.5.4 Participant-Generated Accounts

Participant-generated accounts are included to capture the perspectives of learners who are less inclined to engage in interviews or group discussions. These accounts provide valuable insight into individual learner experiences and contribute to a more inclusive and representative dataset.

3.6 Analytical Overview

Data were analysed through an inductive thematic approach within the study's interpretivist framework. The analysis involved repeated familiarisation with the dataset, inductive coding, development and refinement of themes, and interpretation in relation to the research questions. The full analytical procedure, including cross-group comparison, treatment of participant-generated accounts, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations, is documented in Section 3.14.

3.7 Critiques and Limitations of the Methodological Approach

Interpretivist and qualitative approaches are subject to critiques, particularly regarding subjectivity and limited generalisability. The researcher's role as an interpretive instrument introduces potential bias, which must be managed through reflexivity and transparency.

These limitations are acknowledged within the study and addressed through methodological strategies, including triangulation, reflexive practice, and detailed documentation of the research process. The use of multiple data collection methods enable methodological triangulation, enhancing the credibility and depth of the findings.

3.8 Trustworthiness

The study adopts Yvonna Lincoln and Egon Guba's framework of trustworthiness, encompassing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Guba and Lincoln (1981, p.67) argue that within the scientific paradigms, in the 'struggle between rigor and relevance in the field of evaluation, relevance

has run a distant second.’ Indeed, in determining the quality of research, ‘the scientific inquirer relies almost exclusively on criteria of rigor’ (*ibid*, p.66). Rigor encompasses external validity, reliability, and objectivity, amongst other measures. However, this reliance on the tools borrowed from physical sciences to ascertain research quality has sometimes led to some absurd situations. For example, in the field of developmental psychology, Bronfenbrenner (1977, quoted in *ibid*, p.66) notes the peculiar situation where much of the research is ‘the science of strange behaviour of children in strange situations with strange adults for the briefest possible periods of time.’ Being enamoured with laboratory-bound experimentations as the basis of quality, surely positivists have ‘lost their sense of the human problem, that generalisation to the authentic significance of the person in the real environment has been sacrificed to the quest for certainty in our knowledge’ (Gibbs, 1979 quoted in *ibid*, p.66).

Quantitative (often employed by positivists) research has a very specific and established understanding of both validity and reliability. Within this tradition, most measures of validity look at whether an ‘instrument in fact measures what it intends, purports or claims to measure...’ (Cohen *et al*, 2018, p.245). More specifically, validity is conceived as being faithful to the following core features: ‘controllability, replicability, consistency, predictability and observability...’ (Cohen *et al*, *ibid*).

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, qualitative researchers, many grounded in the interpretivist framework, often argue that such measures of validity are unworkable for their research tradition (Brink, 1993). Indeed, situating their research in naturalistic settings, many qualitative researchers would argue that controllability is not only difficult, but also undesirable in most situations (Golafshani, 2003; Bryman and Bell, 2019). The fundamental point of this research, after all, is to elicit understandings from the participants, and not to put them in absurd clinical situations designed by scientists to test some limited constructs. Moreover, since humans are in essence different from each other, replicability is impossible; qualitative researchers would argue instead that the focus should instead be on uniqueness of situations and findings (Cohen *et al*, 2018, p.249.).

Reliability, as conceived by quantitative researchers, is also a challenge for qualitative researchers. Reliability within quantitative research is concerned with the 'consistency, stability and repeatability...' (Brink, 1993, p.35) or as Golafshani (2003, p.599) states, 'whether the result is replicable.' Therefore, reliability, as understood, cannot be applicable to interpretivist qualitative research as individuals and groups constantly change their minds and often have opinions that are contradictory to each other. Difference of interpretation and views is the starting point, and expecting consistency in views, or even stability in views is not only beyond reality, but it is also a search for 'unhuman-like' behaviour.

In the face of the above critiques of validity and reliability, some qualitative researchers have avoided these concepts altogether (Brink, 1993), whilst others have looked for ways to keep the essence but disposed of the positivists' residues (Bryman and Bell, 2019). Indeed, Bryman and Bell (*ibid*, p.204) adopt Guba and Lincoln's (1994, in *ibid*) concept of trustworthiness as the key criteria for assessing qualitative research and argue that trustworthiness can be achieved through establishing four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Shenton (2004, p.64) notes that these concepts correspond to the criteria used by positivist researchers in the following manner:

- credibility is used in preference to internal validity;
- transferability is used in preference to generalisability;
- dependability is used in preference to reliability; and
- confirmability is used in preference to objectivity.

In the following paragraphs, I clarify how these concepts are the bedrock of my research design's undertaken for quality.

3.8.1 Credibility

The concept of credibility is concerned with whether the interpretations presented in a research study correlates with what people said or thought, or as Bryman and Bell (2019, p.204-205) mention, whether the 'study rings true to the people observed.' In essence, credibility is 'how congruent are the findings with reality?' (Merriam, 1998, quoted in Shenton, 2004). There are various ways of achieving credibility constructs. One way of achieving this is

to submit our findings to the people in the study so that they can confirm if it accords with the way they understand and interpret the world. Whilst I find this general idea intriguing, I am concerned that this is putting an unnecessary disproportionate obligation on the participants, especially on those who are reluctant to speaking by nature. Indeed, this could lead to some kind of reticence as we/they might not be comfortable with sharing our findings with others. Justifiably, it is sounder for this study that I provide my participants with a summary of my findings before submission and ask them to point out what might have been misunderstood. This is known as respondent validation (Bryman and Bell, 2019, p.205).

Shenton (2004) further argues that 'prolonged engagement' with the organisation studied leads to greater familiarity with the culture, as well as establishing a relationship based on trust between the parties. Given that I work for the organisation I am studying, and I have done so for almost two decades, this means that such a level of understanding is present in my research. I have also used multiple methods, including semi-structured interviews, observations and supplemented two further participants-generated accounts from two participants who were reluctant to take part at the start of the research, help to triangulate the data collected. The limitations inherent in each data collection method (discussed in detail within their respective sections below) are mitigated using multiple methods, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of the research phenomenon. This methodological triangulation strengthens the overall research by drawing on diverse sources of data. In addition, triangulation is achieved by examining the research problem from both teachers' and participants' perspectives, thereby addressing potential positional biases and offering a more balanced interpretation.

Furthermore, throughout the research process, regular debriefing sessions were conducted with a fellow researcher from Tunisia. These discussions contributed to refining the analytical process and expanding my interpretive lens, as my understanding was "widened as others bring to bear their experiences and perceptions" (ibid., p.67).

3.8.2 Transferability

Within an interpretivist paradigm, the concern is not with the generalisability of findings across time and space in the positivist sense. Rather, findings are understood as being grounded in the specific and contextual conditions that shape a particular research setting. As such, whether these findings “hold in some other context, or even in the same context at another time, is an empirical issue” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p.316, cited in Shenton, *ibid.*), that is, a concern more aligned with positivist traditions.

To address this, qualitative researchers emphasise the provision of thick description, as conceptualised by Geertz (1973). Thick description enables readers to make informed judgements about the potential applicability of findings to their own contexts. In this study, a detailed account of the research setting has been provided, including institutional context, such as assessments’ outcomes, as well as background information on learner cohorts (data collection section). In addition, the number of participants, data collection methods, and the duration of the study have been clearly outlined, in line with the recommendations of Shenton (2004). By offering a rich and contextualised account of the research environment and processes, this study supports readers in determining the extent to which the findings may or may not be transferable to their own settings.

3.8.3 Dependability

Dependability refers to the stability and consistency of the research process over time. Lincoln and Guba (quoted in Bryman and Bell, 2019, p.205) suggest that this can be enhanced through an audit trail, whereby the research process is documented in a systematic and transparent manner. In practice, this involves maintaining detailed records of all stages of the study, including participant selection, interview transcripts, observation notes, and approaches to data analysis.

While the notion of a formal external audit may be theoretically desirable, it is not always feasible in practice due to the demands it places on additional researchers. As a pragmatic alternative, this study ensures transparency by retaining and, where appropriate, making available key research materials,

such as anonymised interview transcripts, research notes and the participants' ILP's comments, for potential scrutiny by future researchers. This approach supports the dependability of the study by demonstrating that systematic and appropriate procedures have been followed throughout the research process.

3.8.4 Confirmability

In qualitative research, complete objectivity is neither attainable nor necessarily desirable, as the researcher is inherently involved in the process of data generation and interpretation. Instead, the focus shifts to confirmability, which seeks to ensure that the findings are grounded in the participants' experiences rather than shaped by researcher bias. As noted by Bryman and Bell (2019, p.206), confirmability is concerned with establishing that the researcher has acted in good faith, while Shenton (2004, p.72) emphasises the importance of ensuring that findings reflect the perspectives of participants rather than the preferences of the researcher.

In this study, confirmability is addressed through sustained reflexivity. An extensive positionality section, critically reflects on my role as a practitioner-researcher, making explicit the beliefs, values, and assumptions that may influence the research process. This reflexive stance is complemented by ongoing consultation with more experienced researchers, which has supported the identification and mitigation of potential biases, particularly those arising from professional positioning and research inexperience. Through these measures, efforts have been made to ensure that the findings remain closely aligned with participants' accounts and experiences.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are central to this study, particularly given its qualitative and interpretivist nature, which involves close participation of the participants' lived experiences and perspectives. The study is situated within an ESOL FE context, where learners may be positioned as potentially vulnerable due to language barriers, migration histories, and differing levels of confidence in

institutional settings. As such, ethical sensitivity extends beyond procedural compliance to include relational and context-responsive practice.

The study adheres to the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (2018) and the British Association for Applied Linguistics (2021), ensuring that all procedures uphold the principles of respect, confidentiality, transparency, and participant wellbeing. Ethical approval for the study was granted on 16/11/2022 (Reference: 015111).

3.9.1 Informed Consent

Participants were provided with clear and accessible information about the purpose of the study, its methods, and its potential implications. Given the ESOL context, particular attention was paid to ensuring that information was communicated in linguistically appropriate ways, avoiding overly complex terminology that might hinder understanding.

Informed consent was obtained prior to participation, with participants explicitly reminded of their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. This was especially important considering the dual role of the researcher as both teacher and researcher, where perceived authority could unintentionally influence participation. Ongoing consent was also considered, with participants given opportunities to reaffirm or withdraw their involvement throughout the research process.

3.9.2 Confidentiality and Anonymity

All participant data have been anonymised using pseudonyms and the removal or modification of identifying details. Care has been taken in reporting findings, especially when drawing on classroom interactions or individual narratives, to ensure that participants cannot be recognised within their institutional context.

Given the relatively small and bounded nature of the ESOL classroom setting, anonymity cannot be considered absolute. Therefore, ethical responsibility extends to careful representation, ensuring that participants' voices are preserved without exposing them to risk. Data are presented in a way that

maintains the integrity of participants' contributions while safeguarding their identities.

3.9.3 Data Storage and GDPR Compliance

All data are stored securely in accordance with UK data protection regulations, including the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Digital data are encrypted and stored on password-protected devices, with access restricted solely to the researcher. Any physical documents are stored in secure locations.

Data will be retained only for the duration necessary for the completion and examination of the study and will be securely disposed of thereafter.

Supporting materials, including analytical tables, coding frameworks, and selected extracts, are presented in Appendices, ensuring transparency in the research process while maintaining participant confidentiality.

3.9.4 Insider Researcher Considerations

As a teacher-researcher working within my own professional context, this study acknowledges the complexities associated with insider research. While this positioning offers valuable insights into classroom dynamics and learner experiences, it also introduces potential ethical challenges, particularly in relation to power imbalances and role duality.

Participants may perceive the researcher as both educator and evaluator, which could influence their willingness to participate or shape their responses. To mitigate this, participation was strictly voluntary, and it was emphasised that non-participation would have no impact on learners' educational experiences or assessment outcomes. Efforts were also made to create a supportive and non-judgemental environment in which participants felt able to express their views openly.

3.9.5 Minimising Harm

The study was designed to minimise any potential psychological or emotional discomfort. While the research did not explicitly seek sensitive personal

disclosures, discussions of learners' experiences, particularly in relation to cultural integration or social interaction, could evoke personal reflections.

To address this, participants were reminded that they were not required to answer any questions that could or would make them feel uncomfortable. Interviews and classroom interactions were conducted with sensitivity, allowing participants to guide the depth and direction of their responses. Where necessary, emotional cues were acknowledged, and conversations were redirected to ensure participant wellbeing remained the priority.

3.9.6 Reflexive Ethical Practice

Ethical practice in this study is understood as ongoing and reflexive rather than fixed or procedural. As a practitioner-researcher, I continuously reflected on my role, my interactions with participants, and the potential influence of my positionality on both data collection and interpretation.

This reflexive stance is particularly important in a study that explores NC and learner voice, as it requires a careful balance between facilitating participation and avoiding undue influence. Regular reflection, alongside discussions with more experienced researchers, supported the identification and management of ethical tensions as they arose. In this way, ethical integrity is closely intertwined with methodological rigour, reinforcing the credibility and trustworthiness of the study.

3.10 Summary

This chapter has outlined the methodological and research design framework guiding the study. Grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, the research adopts a qualitative practitioner enquiry approach to explore learners' experiences of NC in ESOL.

Multiple data collection methods were employed to capture diverse perspectives, and a systematic approach to data analysis was adopted to identify patterns and themes across the dataset. The chapter has also addressed issues of trustworthiness and ethical practice, ensuring the credibility and integrity of the research.

The following section details the data collection procedures and analytical processes employed in this study, outlining how data were collected, organised, and systematically analysed.

This distinction is important in maintaining conceptual clarity, ensuring that the study is positioned as a practitioner inquiry rather than a formal action research project, while still recognising the value of reflective practice in informing pedagogical development.

3.11 Data Collection

3.11.1 Introduction to Data Collection

This section outlines the data collection procedures employed in the study and explains how the methodological principles established earlier in this chapter were translated into practice. Grounded in an interpretivist and qualitative practitioner enquiry framework, the study sought to investigate how ESOL learners experienced the negotiation and sharing of SOW, particularly in relation to cultural awareness, social participation, motivation, autonomy, and learning beyond the classroom.

The data collection process evolved in response to classroom realities, learner voices, and the emerging direction of the research. Rather than following a rigidly predetermined route, the research developed iteratively, shaped by what learners identified as significant in their own lives and by how they responded to the opportunity to scrutinise, negotiate, and contribute to their learning programme.

In this respect, data collection was not simply a technical stage in the research process but part of a wider dialogic engagement with learners' lived experiences, aspirations, and educational needs.

The rationale for the qualitative approach was closely connected to the nature of the research questions which is supported by Kumar's (2011) claim, that qualitative inquiry is concerned with understanding and clarifying human experiences, perceptions, values, and feelings. Similarly, Berg (2009) notes that qualitative research seeks answers by examining social settings and the

people who inhabit them. In the present study, these perspectives were particularly relevant because the purpose was not to measure isolated variables but to understand how learners interpreted their participation in a NC and how this shaped their language practices within and beyond the classroom. In this respect, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) further claim that qualitative research gives voice to participants and enables the exploration of issues beneath the surface of visible behaviours. This is especially important in an ESOL context, where learners' everyday challenges, motivations, and anxieties are often only fully expressed through sustained conversation, trust, and reflection.

At the same time, qualitative research presents limitations. Its findings are not easily reproducible, and the interpretive role of the researcher creates the possibility of bias. However, in a study such as this, these are not reasons to reject qualitative inquiry; rather, they reinforce the need for transparency, reflexivity, and systematic organisation of data. The present study therefore adopted multiple qualitative methods to build depth, enable triangulation, and generate a fuller picture of how learners engaged with the co-construction of the SOW.

3.11.2 The Research Journey and the Emergence of the Data Collection Focus

The research journey began with a pedagogical concern that emerged directly from teaching practice. Many learners expressed confusion when encountering unfamiliar British idioms, expressions, and forms of social language. They also voiced frustration about not knowing lesson topics in advance and about being unable to prepare sufficiently before class.

Questions such as:

- "What are we learning today?",
- "If only I could prepare the lesson before I attend class so I can engage easily", and
- "I can't learn all this in two hours; I need more time" ,

signalled more than classroom curiosity. They revealed a deeper concern with preparedness, confidence, and the relationship between classroom learning and the demands of life beyond the classroom.

Initial informal conversations and semi-structured interviews suggested that learners were not asking simply for more language input, but for more relevant and purposeful language learning. They wanted support with communication in workplaces, communities, public services, family life, and wider society. Some wanted to understand how to help their children, others wanted to prepare for job interviews, and others sought confidence in navigating culturally unfamiliar situations.

These early responses suggested that language learning should not be isolated from social and cultural understanding, and that the curriculum itself might need to be reshaped in response to learner needs.

This realisation gradually shifted the focus of the study. The original concern with embedding social and cultural practice in ESOL developed into a more specific interest in negotiating and sharing the SOW with learners. Through this shift, the research began to ask not only which topics mattered to learners, but how learners' contributions to the design of the SOW might influence their awareness, motivation, and participation.

In this sense, the data collection process grew organically out of practice and became increasingly focused on the role of learner voice in shaping curriculum content and learning behaviours.

3.11.3 Participants and Context

Participants in the study were adult learners enrolled on ESOL for work courses. The criteria for participation were threefold. First, they were learners for whom English was neither a first language nor a comfortably established language for academic and social functioning. Second, they had been attending ESOL classes after being granted the right to reside in the UK. Third, they were pursuing ESOL with the intention of progressing into further study, higher education, employment, or vocational training. These criteria meant that the participants were learners for whom English functioned as a necessary means of participation, aspiration, and social mobility.

The study involved two groups: an Entry 3 class of sixteen learners and a Level 1/2 class of eight learners, giving a total of twenty-four participants. Their national backgrounds included Bangladesh, Ukraine, Pakistan, Albania, Poland, Italy, Angola, Turkey, and Kurdistan. Their intended progression routes included teaching, childcare, nursing, catering, hospitality, business, and law. Such diversity enriched the dataset, as participants brought different linguistic repertoires, migration experiences, educational backgrounds, and social concerns to the learning environment. **This is also well detailed in appendix 7-Table 4**

A significant contextual factor was that many of the participants were already known to me from previous cohorts. This continuity helped establish rapport and mutual trust, making learners more willing to speak openly about their needs and experiences. It also made it easier to observe patterns over time. However, this familiarity required reflexive awareness, since close knowledge of participants could also risk assumption or over-interpretation. Nevertheless, within the interpretivist framework of the study, this sustained pedagogical relationship formed an important part of the research setting rather than an external complication.

3.11.4 Course Organisation and Guided Learning Hours

The structure of the ESOL provision shaped both the opportunities and the constraints of data collection. The organisation of the courses across the academic year influenced when and how learners engaged in classroom activities, self-study, digital search practices, and data-collection interactions such as interviews and focus groups. Guided learning hours were supplemented by varying amounts of independent study, and in some phases additional Zoom sessions were used, particularly before examinations.

Table 3.11 Course Organisation and Guided Learning Hours (Academic Year 2023)

Phase	Cohort	Weekly guided learning hours	Independent study
Phase 1 (June-Sept 2023)	Level 1 Reading; Entry 3 Speaking and Listening	L1 Reading = 5 hours; E3 S/L = 7 hours	L1 =4-6 hours; E3 = 5-8 hours, with an additional 4 Zoom hours before exams
Phase 2 (Sept-Jan 2023/24)	Level 1 Speaking and Listening; Entry 3 Writing	L1 S/L = 7 hours; E3 Writing = 7 hours	L1 = varied by learner plus 6 additional Zoom hours; E3 = 4-6 hours

This organisation is important analytically because it shows that the negotiated SOW did not exist in isolation from the broader structure of teaching, assessment, and independent learning. Learners' engagement with the SOW was shaped not only by classroom practice but by how much time they had to prepare, search, revise, and continue learning beyond timetabled contact hours.

3.11.5 Phases of Data Collection

Data collection took place in three main phases across the 2023–2024 academic cycle. Each phase had a different knowledge focus and drew on different but overlapping methods. This phased design enabled the study to capture changes in learner attitudes, practices, and perceptions over time.

Table 3.12 Phases of Data Collection, Knowledge Focus and Methods

Phase	Period	Knowledge focus	Methods
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Phase 1	April-July 2023	Techniques of using the SOW; studying beyond the classroom; embedding learner-selected topics; motivation to prepare at home; use of digital technology; comparison of sharing and not sharing the SOW; initial evaluation of pre-class use of the SOW	Interviews; observation in research diary; comments on ILP
Phase 2	September-December 2023	Attitudes and experiences of six interventions to increase study time and motivation: preferences for study, ownership of the SOW, mobile phones, translation apps, YouTube, search engines	Interviews; observation in research diary; focus groups; two participant-generated accounts; comments on ILP
Phase 3	December 2023-February 2024	Comparison of learning before and after sharing the SOW; evaluation of digital technology in supporting learning; evaluation of current practice against previous learning routines; development of new learning habits; continued learning during holidays or teacher absence	Interviews; focus groups; participant-generated accounts; observation in research diary; comments on ILP

This phased design allowed the study to move from initial exploration towards more structured reflection and comparison. It also made it possible to examine not only learners' immediate reactions to the negotiated SOW, but how their practices and perceptions developed over time.

3.11.6 Data Collection Methods

The study employed a range of interrelated qualitative methods: interviews, focus groups, observations, participant-generated accounts, research diary notes, comments on ILPs, and documentary evidence in the form of co-constructed SOW materials. These methods were not used as isolated tools, but as complementary routes through which learners' experiences could be understood from different angles.

3.11.6.1 *Semi-Structured Interviews*

Interviews formed one of the central methods of data collection. The first interviews took place in the final week of Term 1 in 2023 and were arranged after class. This timing suited both my full-time teaching commitments and the learners' availability, and it provided a relaxed environment in which participants were not rushed. The absence of strict time pressure enabled learners to speak at length and in depth, and some participants even chose to take part in paired interviews. This contributed to a sense of openness and ease and enabled participants to elaborate their accounts in greater depth.

Following analysis of the first interviews, a second phase of semi-structured interviews was conducted with a different group in the final week of Term 2. These interviews explored learners' perceptions of negotiating ownership of the SOW and embedding topics of personal, cultural, and practical importance. The interview schedule was informed by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), but in practice the interviews remained flexible and often developed into discussion (**appendix 10-term 1**). In an ESOL context, this flexibility was essential. Questions sometimes needed to be simplified or rephrased because participants did not always understand terms such as scheme or curriculum. At one point, some learners misunderstood the notion of "sharing the SOW" and thought it meant a shift from face-to-face teaching to online learning. This misunderstanding made clear that linguistic accessibility had to be built into the interview process itself.

To support comprehension and reduce anxiety, the interview questions were emailed to participants in advance. This allowed them to think about the questions, prepare possible answers, and translate unfamiliar vocabulary if needed. It also helped avoid embarrassment and emotional discomfort,

especially given that the research was conducted with learners for whom English was still developing. The decision to use simplified language was not a methodological weakness but a necessary adaptation to the research context, and it enabled richer and more realistic responses.

Table 3.13 Sample Interview and Focus Group Prompts

Method	Sample prompt	Analytical purpose	Linked RQ
Initial interview	Would it help you if you knew the topic of the lesson before class?	Explore preparedness and readiness for learning	RQ2, RQ3
Initial interview	What stops you communicating in English once you leave your class?	Explore barriers beyond the classroom	RQ1, RQ3
Initial interview	Are there any topics you want to explore in class in English?	Identify learner priorities and curricular interests	RQ1, RQ2
Focus group	Do you wish to contribute to the scheme of work?	Explore ownership and learner agency	RQ2
Focus group	How will you use the SOW at home?	Explore learning beyond class and autonomy	RQ3
Focus group	What do you think of searching and preparing your own lessons before class?	Explore independent learning and motivation	

Because I was known to the learners, they were comfortable with interviews being recorded. To protect identity, the camera was directed at me, while participants' responses remained clearly audible. This approach respected confidentiality while preserving a reliable record of the interaction.

3.11.6.2 Focus Groups

Focus groups provided a different form of data from individual or paired interviews. While interviews encouraged personal reflection, focus groups enabled learners to interact with one another, compare experiences, and negotiate meaning collectively. Barbour and Kitzinger (1999) argue that focus groups are particularly useful for exploring interaction and knowledge construction rather than simply collecting individual opinions. This was highly relevant in the present study, because the research itself concerned negotiation, shared decision-making, and learner participation in curriculum design.

The focus groups were especially productive since many participants were already familiar with one another. This familiarity generated discussion, mutual support, and more spontaneous sharing of ideas. Learners debated topics they wished to include in the SOW, compared their needs, and reflected on the role of English in their lives. In the Entry 3 group, learners were enthusiastic about topics such as mental health, safeguarding, and social communication. In the Level 1/2 group, participants proposed topics such as the queuing system, climate change, parenting autistic children, politics, self-esteem, and employment-related issues. These preferences were not random; they reflected the learners' efforts to link classroom learning to real social participation, further study, and employment.

However, focus groups also brought challenges. More fluent learners sometimes dominated discussion, and some participants were initially reluctant. This required careful facilitation to ensure fairness and to create space for quieter voices. Nevertheless, the focus groups remained one of the richest sources of data because they captured collective meaning-making and showed how learners negotiated priorities with one another rather than only with the teacher. **(Appendix 11)**

3.11.6.3 Observation

Observation became increasingly important once the research focus shifted from embedding cultural themes in the SOW to the negotiation of the SOW itself. Observation allowed me to see how learners responded to the new pedagogical practice in real time and how their engagement, interaction, and confidence developed both in class and, where visible, beyond it. Because teaching, assessment, and exam preparation created time pressures, it was not always possible to take extensive notes during the lesson itself. For this reason, video and audio recordings became particularly valuable, allowing me to revisit classroom events later and reflect on them in the research diary.

Observation focused on broad but significant questions: how learners interacted with the negotiated SOW, how they prepared for lessons, how they used digital tools, how they engaged with topics they had selected themselves, and how classroom participation changed when learning became more personalised. Brief notes were also supplemented by learners' comments on ILPs and by follow-up discussions. Although the ILP was not naturally popular with learners, selective use of it as a supporting source helped capture reflections without forcing the study into a quantitative mode.

The observation process revealed that many learners were increasingly engaged in activities such as searching online, discussing their chosen topics, and comparing classroom work with real-life needs. Some described the learning process itself as beginning to feel like research, which was a striking indication of the reflective and participatory shift created by SOW negotiation.

3.11.6.4 Participant-Generated Accounts

Participant-generated accounts emerged as a particularly valuable method for including learners who were reluctant to engage fully in interviews or focus groups. Two participants, one from Entry 3 and one from Level 1, volunteered to share fuller personal accounts through Zoom sessions arranged in the evenings and at weekends. Although this required extra organisation and formal approval, these sessions became a rich source of data because they

allowed learners to speak in their own way, without the pressure of peers or the immediacy of the classroom.

One participant, an Entry 3 learner and single mother, explained her frustration at having passed ESOL exams while still feeling unprepared for job interviews and employment-related communication. She described wanting “environment learning,” by which she meant English connected to daily life and real-world needs rather than classroom-only practice. The second participant, a Level 1 learner, linked his participation in the NC to a lifelong ambition of becoming an accountant. His account demonstrated how learner-selected topics such as accountancy and the queuing system were not superficial preferences but part of a larger effort to reposition himself within society and pursue a postponed aspiration.

These additional accounts were particularly valuable because they provided thick, individualised data that might have been lost in larger group-based methods. They also contributed to the credibility of the study by ensuring that less vocal participants were not excluded from the research narrative, Al Balushi, K. (2016). **(Appendix 15- and appendix 16)**

3.12 Documentary and Curriculum Evidence

Although this study did not employ formal document analysis as a primary method, the co-constructed SOWs themselves served as important supporting evidence. The trial and negotiated SOWs demonstrated the practical outcomes of learner participation. They provided visible evidence of which topics were prioritised, how course aims were reshaped, and how learners’ input influenced curriculum organisation.

For example, the Entry 3 trial SOW included aims related to confidence in communication, support for discussions beyond the classroom, mental health, safeguarding, and contemporary issues.

The Level 1/2 co-constructed SOW showed learner-led priorities such as social situations, sustainability, employment, mental health, accountancy-related aspirations, and independent website search skills.

These materials supported the interview and focus group data by showing that learner voice was not confined to talk but was concretely reflected in the design of the learning programme. (**Appendices 12,13 and 14**)

3.13 Practicalities and Challenges in Data Collection

Although the relationships built with participants supported the research, data collection was still shaped by practical challenges. Teaching full time while researching meant that interviews, observations, marking, exam preparation, and note organisation, all had to be balanced carefully. Some sessions had to be arranged after class, in the evening, and at weekends via zoom. Some learners were highly engaged and articulate, while others were hesitant, dominant, or inconsistent in participation. The differing language repertoires and confidence levels across Entry 3 and Level 1/2 also meant that one method could not simply be applied in the same way to all participants.

The month-long bereavement-related absence (researcher) also disrupted the original research plan. However, rather than weakening the study, this disruption became analytically important. It showed that learners could continue engaging with the SOW and with self-directed learning even in the teacher's absence, particularly through Padlet, mobile phones, and other digital means. This period ultimately strengthened the study by making learner autonomy more visible.

Overall, the data collection process was time-consuming but productive. Its richness lay in its combination of methods, its sustained engagement over time, and its grounding in authentic classroom practice.

3.14 Data Analysis

3.14.1 Introduction to Data Analysis

This section explains how the collected data were analysed. The analysis was inductive, interpretive, and thematic. It drew on the principles of thematic content analysis while remaining firmly grounded in the interpretivist assumptions of the study. Data were analysed using an inductive thematic approach, involving repeated engagement with the data, initial coding,

identification of patterns, and the development of themes in relation to the research questions.

The dataset included semi-structured interview recordings and transcripts, focus group discussions, observation notes, research diary entries, ILP comments, participant-generated accounts, and supporting curriculum artefacts such as the co-constructed SOWs. Because these data were varied in form and depth, the analytical process had to be systematic while remaining flexible enough to accommodate multiple forms of meaning. The analysis therefore involved repeated engagement with the data, coding, categorisation, comparison across sources, and the development of themes that could illuminate learners' experiences of ownership, cultural awareness, motivation, autonomy, and learning beyond the classroom.

3.14.2 Familiarisation with the Data

The first stage of analysis involved extensive familiarisation with the dataset. All audio recordings were listened to repeatedly, interview material was transcribed, observation notes were re-read and rewritten where necessary, and research diary entries were reviewed alongside the original data. This process was more than administrative; it enabled sustained immersion in participants' voices, responses, hesitations, questions, and emotional emphases. Repeated listening and re-reading also helped bring some order to early notes that had been made quickly during busy teaching and exam periods.

This stage was especially important because the research involved multiple methods collected over time. Familiarisation made it possible to trace recurring issues and notice when similar concerns emerged in different contexts. It also supported reflexive awareness by allowing me to revisit the data slowly rather than relying on immediate impressions.

The familiarisation stage was also where early analytical ideas began to emerge. As Braun and Clarke (2006), note it is often helpful to begin taking notes about possible coding and patterns while reading and listening. In this study, those early notes included repeated references to preparation,

confidence, culture, integration, employment, digital search, and ownership of the SOW.

3.14.3 Coding the Data

Coding moved from an initial informal stage into a more systematic one. Earlier in the research process, I had already begun noting recurring utterances and ideas without yet formalising them as analytic codes. Later, after reading Miles and Huberman, I came to recognise this process more clearly as coding: attaching key words or tags to clearer segments of text so that they could be retrieved, compared, and interpreted.

Because of time pressures, screen fatigue, and glaucoma-related concerns (researcher's disability), I chose not to use software such as NVivo. Instead, coding was carried out manually using paper-based analytical sheets. This involved writing extracts from interviews, discussions, and notes onto A3 and A4 sheets, highlighting recurring expressions, colour-coding ideas, and grouping utterances according to shared concepts. While labour-intensive, this approach kept me close to the data and allowed constant movement between raw extract, provisional code, and research question.

One of the central challenges at this stage was deciding which recurring ideas were analytically significant and which were less relevant to the aims of the study. Frequency alone was not enough. Some ideas mattered because they appeared repeatedly; others mattered because they carried emotional or pedagogical weight. Thus, coding in this study attended both to recurrence and to significance.

Table 3.14 Extract from Thematic Coding

Research question 3	Participant response	Code	Theme
How does embedding socio-cultural content within Schemes of Work influence learners' engagement and participation beyond the classroom?	The teacher's main objective is to make the lesson personal to us.	Motivation is at the heart of a personalised lesson	The relationship between learners' motivation and culture
Same	Discussing cultural matters motivates us in class. Otherwise, it becomes boring.	Avoiding boredom and demotivation in the learning atmosphere	The relationship between learners' motivation and culture
Same	We feel happy when the teacher gives us the opportunity to discuss culture.	Pleasant and joyful learning experience	The relationship between learners' motivation and culture
Same	We love sharing our cultures and background with others. It makes us feel we are important.	Pride and joy in discussions	The relationship between learners' motivation and culture

Same	We enjoy doing presentations about special events in our countries.	Motivating and autonomous personalised tasks	The relationship between learners' motivation and culture
Same	It is of great benefit to learn about British culture and compare it to our own culture.	Purposeful learning is encouraging	The relationship between learners' motivation and culture
Same	Because we speak from the heart about our culture, we communicate better.	Strengthening student engagement	The relationship between learners' motivation and culture

This table shows that the analysis did not simply identify isolated comments but traced how individual utterances clustered into conceptual patterns. In this case, the repeated links between personalised learning, cultural discussion, enjoyment, and relevance contributed to the theme concerning the relationship between motivation and culture.

3.14.4 Analytical Categories and Theme Development

After initial coding, the next stage involved grouping related codes into broader categories and then into themes. This was an iterative process requiring repeated movement between the data, the codes, the research questions, and the emerging conceptual structure of the study. Some codes were merged, others were refined, and some were discarded when they did not connect sufficiently to the research focus.

The themes were shaped not only by what learners said, but by how those comments related to one another across methods and over time. For instance, codes linked to personalised lessons, enjoyment, pride in sharing culture, learner-selected topics, and reduced boredom came together under a broader theme concerning motivation and cultural relevance. Codes linked to pre-class preparation, use of mobile phones, YouTube, search engines, and independent vocabulary building contributed to a theme around autonomy and learning beyond the classroom. Comments about work, job interviews, public interaction, confidence, and social participation contributed to a theme relating to integration and real-life application.

Table 3.15 Example of Category and Theme Development

Repeated responses and patterns	Analytical category	Emerging theme
Lessons feel personal; learners choose topics; learning becomes less boring	Personalisation of learning	Motivation through negotiated and culturally relevant curriculum
Learners search before class; use Google, YouTube and translation apps; prepare independently	Digital search and readiness	Autonomy and learning beyond the classroom
Learners want English for jobs, interviews, services, parenting and public interaction	Practical communication needs	Curriculum relevance for integration and social participation
Learners enjoy sharing cultures and comparing British and home cultures	Cultural voice and exchange	Cultural awareness through co-constructed curriculum

Learners feel stronger, more confident and more involved when using the negotiated SOW	Ownership and engagement	Learner agency through SOW co-construction
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This stage of analysis was interpretive rather than mechanical. The themes were not treated as objectively hidden truths waiting to be uncovered, but as analytically constructed patterns grounded in participants' accounts and supported across the dataset.

3.14.5 Cross-Group Comparison and Pattern Identification

An important part of the analysis involved comparing patterns across the Entry 3 and Level 1/2 groups. This did not mean treating the groups as directly equivalent but rather examining how similar concerns appeared differently according to level, confidence, and life circumstances. The tables from the group discussions were particularly useful in this regard.

In the Level 1/2 discussion data, many learners reported frequent use of English on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays' classes, often with customers, children, neighbours, agencies, doctors, or job coaches. They also reported using translation apps, websites, subtitles, Padlet, and other digital resources. Their desired topics frequently included jobs, integration, confidence, self-esteem, and relationships. In the Entry 3 discussion data, similar priorities appeared, though often in less elaborate linguistic form. Learners emphasised integration, confidence, self-esteem, travel, and jobs, while also referring to family members, schools, solicitors, and community interaction.

This cross-group comparison showed that despite differences in level, the overall direction of learner need was remarkably consistent: learners wanted English that connected them more strongly to real life, increased confidence, reduced isolation, and prepared them for social, educational, and vocational participation.

Table 3.16 Cross-Group Patterns in Discussion Data

Area explored	Level 1/2 pattern	Entry 3 pattern	Analytical significance
Use of English beyond class	Frequent use with customers, children, neighbours, agencies, doctors, training contexts	Use with children, teachers, neighbours, solicitors, community contacts	English learning closely linked to daily social functioning
Independent support strategies	Translation apps, websites, subtitles, Padlet, TV, dictionaries	Mobile apps, Google Translate, films, news, friends, family support	Digital and informal resources central to learning beyond the classroom
Desired curriculum topics	Jobs, integration, confidence, self-esteem, relationships, accountancy	Jobs, travel, confidence, self-esteem, cultural awareness, integration	Learner priorities strongly linked to personal and social needs
Perception of own vocabulary search	Helpful, good, excellent, depending on need	Great, helpful, confidence-building, though sometimes difficult to retain	Learners value independent vocabulary generation despite challenges
Wider purpose of English	Connect with others; avoid isolation; get involved in society	Get closer; build a bridge; understand others; keep going	

This comparative stage of analysis strengthened the trustworthiness of the findings by showing that themes were not dependent on a single learner, one isolated class, or one data source.

3.14.6 Interpreting Participant-Generated Accounts and Vignettes

The participant-generated accounts and vignettes contributed depth and texture to the analysis. They provided more extended insight into how the NC connected to learners' real-life experiences and aspirations.

For example, the Entry 3 participant who described struggling as a single mother and feeling unprepared for employment interviews illustrated how passing ESOL exams alone did not meet her practical communicative needs. Her account showed that the desire to embed "employment and job interview questions" in the SOW emerged from a specific social reality rather than an abstract preference. Likewise, the Level 1 participant who linked the NC to a long-standing dream of becoming an accountant demonstrated how learner-selected topics can support dignity, aspiration, and late-life educational ambition.

The observation extracts and vignettes reinforced this pattern. Learners reported greater confidence in calling a GP, speaking to a bus driver, and explaining local festivals to their children. These were not merely anecdotal additions, but examples of how the negotiated SOW could connect language learning to immediate participation in society.

3.14.7 Trustworthiness Within the Analytical Process

Although the broader theoretical discussion of trustworthiness was addressed earlier in the methodology section of this chapter, the analysis itself was also shaped by these principles. Credibility was supported through repeated engagement with the data, prolonged familiarity with participants, cross-checking of extracts, and comparison across methods. Transferability was supported through rich contextual description, allowing readers to judge how far the findings might resonate with similar ESOL settings. Dependability was strengthened by maintaining structured notes, coding frameworks, recordings, and appendices that made the analytical route visible. Confirmability was

pursued through reflexive awareness of my own role, assumptions, and possible biases as a teacher-researcher working with known participants.

The use of multiple data sources also strengthened triangulation. Interviews, focus groups, observations, participant-generated accounts, ILP comments, and co-constructed SOW documents did not always produce the same kind of data, but together they enabled a fuller understanding of the phenomenon and reduced the risk of relying on a single route of interpretation.

3.14.8 Ethical Considerations Within Data Collection and Analysis

Ethical considerations remained central throughout both data collection and analysis. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw, and the way their data would be used. Pseudonyms or coded labels replaced names, and identifying details were removed or generalised. Particular care was taken with participants who might be considered vulnerable, including asylum seekers and women for whom public visibility could create discomfort or personal difficulty.

Because some participants did not wish to appear on camera, audio-based recording strategies were used, and the camera was positioned so that it faced me rather than them. For the participant-generated accounts collected on Zoom, additional safeguards were implemented, including management awareness, attention to appropriate professional conduct, and agreement on visual anonymity. These practices did not merely fulfil procedural ethics; they enabled participants to contribute more comfortably and authentically to the study.

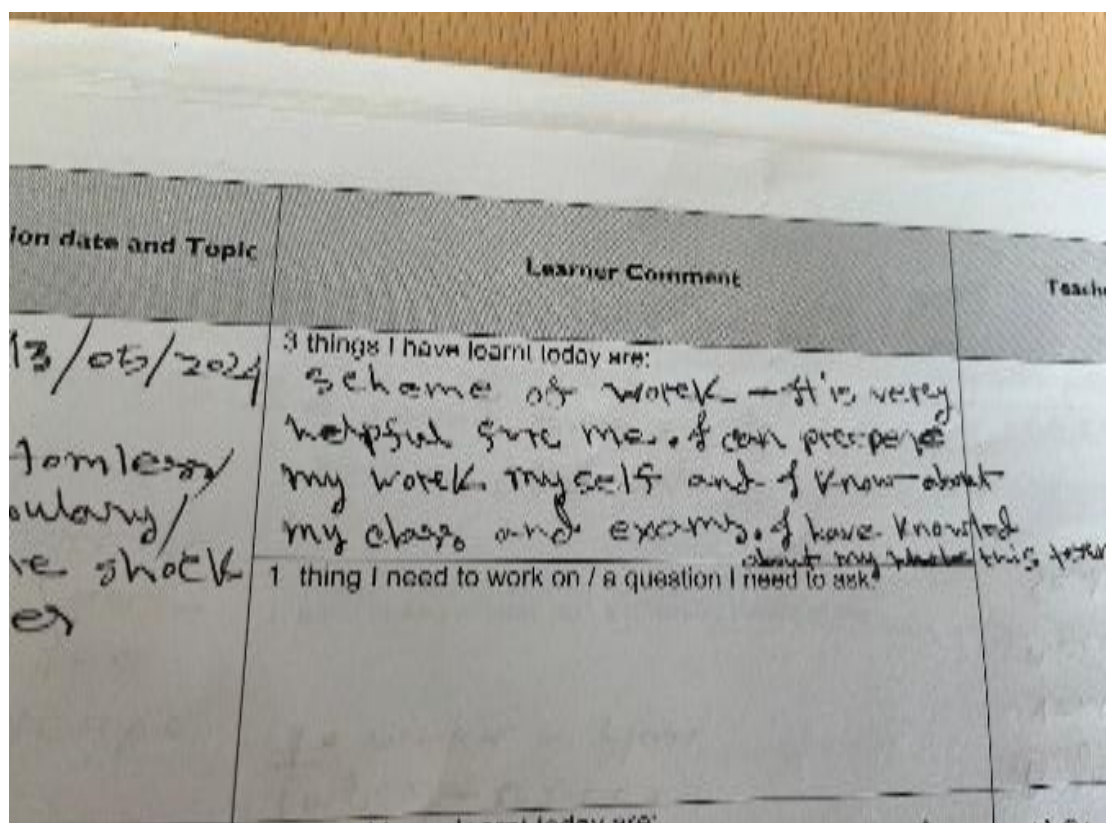
3.14.9 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the systematic and rigorous process of data collection and analysis underpinning this study. Through the use of multiple qualitative methods and an inductive thematic approach, the research has generated a rich and nuanced understanding of learners' experiences within ESOL provision.

The integration of diverse data sources, supported by triangulation and reflexive practice, has ensured the credibility and depth of the findings. The analysis generated themes concerning learner motivation, autonomy, and socio-cultural participation in relation to negotiating and sharing the SOW. These themes provide the basis for the findings and subsequent discussion.

The themes developed in this chapter provide a robust foundation for the subsequent interpretation and discussion of findings, which will further explore the implications of NC practices within ESOL contexts.

Chapter 4 The findings



Lesson date and Topic	Learner Comment	Teacher
13/05/2024 Homless/ ulany/ re shock er	3 things I have learnt today are: Scheme of work - it is very helpful for me. I can prepare my work myself and I know about my class and exams. I have known about my school this term. 1 thing I need to work on / a question I need to ask:	

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study, drawing on data generated and analysed through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, focus group discussions, and participant-generated accounts. In line with the study's interpretivist paradigm and practitioner enquiry approach, the findings are not presented as neutral or purely descriptive accounts, but as interpretations of meaning co-constructed between the researcher and participants within a specific educational context.

The analysis was conducted using a thematic approach, through which recurring patterns were identified across multiple data sources. These patterns were developed into key themes that reflect learners' experiences of engaging with a negotiated curriculum, operationalised through the co-construction of the SOW. Importantly, these themes emerged iteratively through ongoing engagement with the data, allowing for the refinement of categories and the identification of deeper significance.

Triangulation across interviews, observations, focus groups, and participant-generated accounts enhanced the credibility of the findings. Where possible, themes are supported by multiple data sources, ensuring that interpretations are grounded in consistent patterns rather than isolated instances.

The findings are organised in relation to the research questions and are structured around key thematic areas, including:

- learner engagement with negotiated curriculum practices
- the role of socio-cultural content in language learning
- shifts in learner confidence, motivation, and participation
- the evolving role of the teacher within a negotiated learning environment

While Chapter 5 will engage more explicitly with theoretical discussion, this chapter incorporates interpretive commentary to illuminate how meaning was constructed through participants' experiences. Thereby, the chapter reflects the study's commitment to understanding learning as a socially situated and dialogic process.

4.2 Learner Engagement and Curriculum Negotiation

This section presents findings related to learners' experiences of engaging with the negotiation and co-construction of the SOW. Data from Entry 3, Level 1, and Level 2 groups illuminate that involving learners in curriculum design was associated with changes in how they approached learning both inside and outside the classroom.

Across all data sources, learner participation in selecting topics and contributing to lesson content was associated not only with increased engagement, but with a shift in learners' roles, from passive recipients of knowledge to active contributors in the learning process. This shift was evident in classroom observations, where learners demonstrated greater willingness to participate, and in interviews, where they articulated a stronger sense of ownership over their learning.

This shift towards learner participation reflects a move away from transmissive models of education towards a dialogic approach, where knowledge is co-constructed through interaction. In this sense, learners' contributions to the SOW is understood as aligning with the principles of Paulo Freire, who emphasises the importance of learner voice and problem-posing education in challenging passive learning structures.

4.2.1 Research Question 1

How do learners' contributions to the design of Schemes of Work influence their cultural and social awareness?

Data from interviews, observations, and participant-generated accounts consistently evidence that learner involvement in SOW design supported deeper engagement with socio-cultural topics relevant to everyday life. This engagement extended beyond surface-level language acquisition to include interpretation of social norms, workplace expectations, and cultural practices.

One learner explained:

"Practising beyond the classroom was challenging... but positive because we choose topics and do research before class."

This response reflects not only increased effort, but a reorientation towards learning as an active and self-directed process, where learners begin to see themselves as responsible for their own development.

Theme 1: Learner Voice, Relevance and Curriculum Negotiation

Subtheme 1.1: Social Needs as Drivers of Curriculum Content

Participants consistently indicated that their choice of topics was shaped by immediate social and professional needs. This pattern was evident across interviews and supported by observational data, where learners prioritised discussions related to workplace communication and real-life interaction.

For example, one learner stated:

"I not wanna learn about food and parties... I wanna learn idioms, proverbs and answer difficult questions from my English bosses at warehouse work."

This demonstrates a clear tension between pre-determined curriculum content and learners' lived realities, demonstrating that traditional ESOL curricula may not fully address the communicative demands faced by adult learners. The negotiated SOW enabled learners to foreground these needs, thereby making learning more relevant and purposeful.

From an interpretive perspective, this finding evidences a shift towards functional and contextually embedded language learning, where meaning is constructed in relation to learners' immediate environments rather than abstract linguistic goals.

This emphasis on real-life communicative needs reflects a sociocultural understanding of language learning, where meaning is shaped through context and interaction, echoing the work of Lev Vygotsky, who positions learning as inherently social and mediated by lived experience.

Subtheme 1.2: Need for Understanding Social Norms

Learners systematically described difficulties interpreting social interactions, particularly in workplace and informal settings. This was consistently reported across interviews and reinforced through classroom discussions.

One participant explained:

“At break lunch I go smoke because I don't know when they joke and laugh... I can't involve- what maybe I don't understand jokes.”

This comment intensely claims that challenges exist beyond vocabulary to include pragmatic competence and socio-cultural awareness, particularly in understanding humour, tone, and implicit meanings.

While one participant initially acknowledged familiarity with such aspects, this view was not widely shared, recognising variation in prior experiences.

However, the overall pattern recognises that learners experienced a form of social exclusion linked to linguistic and cultural misunderstanding, reinforcing the importance of embedding tailored socio-cultural content into the curriculum.

The difficulties acknowledged by learners highlight the importance of pragmatic competence, supporting the view that language learning extends beyond grammatical knowledge to include socially situated construction of meaning. This resonates with Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, where meaning emerges through interaction and interpretation within specific social milieu.

Subtheme 1.3: Challenges in Engaging with Curriculum Design

Participants reported initial difficulties in understanding and engaging with the structure of the SOW. These challenges were particularly evident among Entry 3 learners and were observed during early classroom sessions.

Difficulties included:

- unfamiliar terminology
- challenges interpreting SOW formats
- uncertainty about identifying appropriate resources

These findings corroborate that while NC broadly promotes autonomy, it also requires careful scaffolding. The introduction of simplified SOW versions streamlines an adaptive pedagogical response, enabling learners to gradually engage with the process of negotiation and co-construction of the SOW.

This evidences that autonomy is not an immediate release but develops over time through supported participation, aligning with the concept of gradual structured process.

The need for scaffolding in engaging with curriculum design reinforces the idea that autonomy must be supported rather than assuming its natural existence, reflecting the concept of structured autonomy, where guidance and independence operate in balance.

Subtheme 1.4: Role of Digital Tools in Learning

Data confirm that digital tools played a significant role in supporting learner engagement. This theme emerged consistently across interviews and participant-generated accounts.

Participants reported using:

- Google
- YouTube
- online platforms

to support vocabulary development, topic exploration, independent learning and to practise the skills in using information communication technology.

One learner stated:

“I find sites for videos and quiz words for my topic... I can send you if you can’t find.”

This reflects not only increased engagement with digital resources but also a shift towards collaborative knowledge sharing, where learners contribute to the learning process.

Another participant commented:

“Now I can check... what my son is doing... (laughter).”

This illustrates how digital engagement extended beyond academic purposes, contributing to learners’ confidence and agency in broader social contexts, including family life.

Subtheme 1.5: Emerging Independent Learning Practices

Learners reported increased involvement in preparing for lessons independently. This pattern was evidenced through observation across all groups and supported by multiple data sources when participants in both Entry 3 and level1/2 designed their SOW.

One participant explained:

“I search before class... I watch videos... so when we learn, I understand more.”

This provides evidence that a shift towards anticipatory learning, where learners actively prepare for lessons, enhancing comprehension and participation was constantly occurring.

Another learner described:

“I watched a movie with my daughter... with subtitles... we shared time together.”

This example expounds how language learning became embedded within everyday life, reinforcing the idea that learning extended beyond the classroom and into family and social contexts.

These emerging practices demonstrate a shift towards self-regulated learning, where learners actively construct knowledge through engagement with authentic materials and experiences.

Subtheme 1.6: Responding to Diverse and Changing Needs

Participants focused on the importance of addressing diverse linguistic and socio-cultural needs. This was evident across interviews and classroom interactions.

One learner noted:

“I would benefit if I can tell you what I want to learn.”

This evidence that a desire for personalised learning experiences, where learners’ voices are central to curriculum design endure despite the existing linguistic and social challenges. It also underscores the dynamic nature of learner needs, which evolve over time and require ongoing responsiveness.

Section Summary

The findings in this section demonstrate that learner involvement in SOW design significantly influenced both engagement and socio-cultural awareness. Learners’ topic choices were closely aligned with their lived experiences, particularly in relation to work and social interaction.

While initial challenges were evident, particularly among lower-level learners, these were mitigated through scaffolding and adaptive teaching strategies. Overall, the data confirm that NC fosters active participation, contextualised learning, and increased learner agency, while also highlighting the importance of structured support.

4.3 Pedagogical Conditions Supporting Independent Learning

Findings demonstrate that autonomy does not emerge spontaneously, but it is facilitated through pedagogical structures that enable learners to gradually gain control over their learning processes.

This section presents findings related to the pedagogical conditions that supported learners' development of independent learning practices.

Addressing Research Question 2, the findings draw on triangulated data from interviews, focus groups, classroom observations, and participant-generated accounts.

Across all data sources, a consistent pattern emerged: independent learning did not develop in isolation but was enabled through carefully structured pedagogical conditions. These included advance knowledge of lesson content, opportunities for collaboration, access to digital resources, and the teacher's responsive facilitation.

4.3.1 Research Question 2

What pedagogical considerations arise when learners participate in designing Schemes of Work?

Theme 2: Structured Autonomy, Collaboration and Teacher Mediation

Subtheme 2.1: Development of Independent Study Habits

Participants reported noticeable changes in their study habits following the introduction of the negotiated SOW. This pattern was evident across interviews and reinforced through participant-generated accounts.

One learner stated:

“I can do homework now because I know the topic of next class... I am ready for next class.”

This evidences that transparency in curriculum planning enabled learners to anticipate learning content and prepare accordingly. Rather than reacting to teacher-led instruction, learners engaged in proactive learning behaviours, reflecting a shift towards autonomy.

Another participant commented:

“I feel no pressure when I come to lesson because I prepare before.”

This response is key findings to the relationship between preparation and reduced anxiety, demonstrating that independent learning practices also contributed to affective dimensions of learning, including confidence and reduced stress.

From an interpretive perspective, this finding establishes that providing learners with visibility over curriculum content can transform their engagement from (dare I say) the familiar passive reception of knowledge to active participation and preparedness.

This transition supports a movement towards learner self-regulation, where planning, preparation, and reflection become integral components of the learning process.

Subtheme 2.2: Peer Collaboration as a Learning Resource

Participants consistently described peer collaboration as an important component of their learning. This theme emerged across interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations.

Examples of collaboration included:

- sharing resources
- discussing vocabulary
- preparing topics together

One learner explained:

“We talk on WhatsApp... we prepare vocabulary... sometimes we teach each other.”

This strengthens the argument that the emergence of a collaborative learning culture, where knowledge is co-constructed rather than transmitted solely by the teacher, is significant and significantly occurring. For some participants, particularly those who had previously been reluctant to speak, peer interaction provided a supportive and less intimidating space for language practice.

Observational data further confirmed that learners increasingly relied on each other for clarification and support, revealing a shift towards distributed expertise within the classroom. The collaborative practices observed agreement with sociocultural perspectives on learning, where knowledge is co-constructed through interaction, further reinforcing Vygotsky’s (1978) emphasis on the social nature of cognitive development.

Subtheme 2.3: Sustained Engagement Beyond the Classroom

Participants reported continuing their learning activities independently outside the classroom. This pattern was evident across multiple data sources and included:

- searching for information online
- preparing presentations
- practising language skills in real-life contexts

One learner stated:

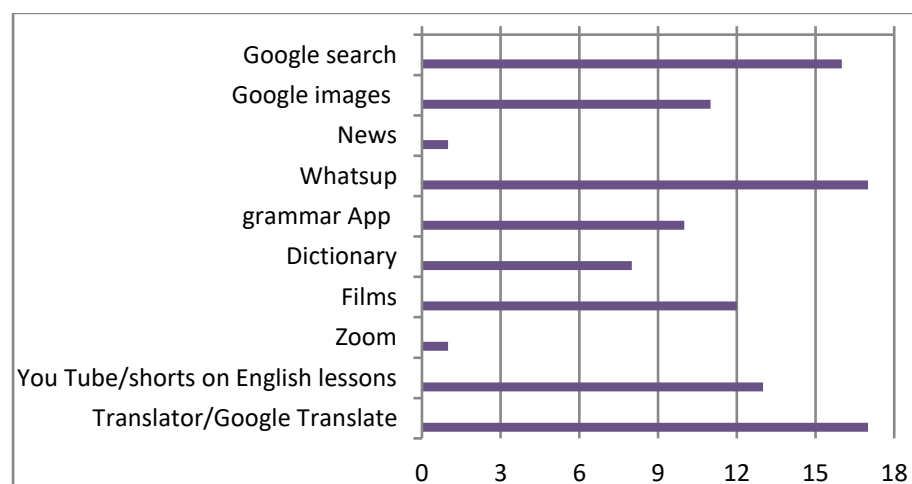
“I want to be in control of my study and active not spoon-fed.”

This response illustrates a significant shift in learners’ perceptions of their role, from passive recipients to self-directed learners. Importantly, this shift was not limited to the ESOL classroom but extended to other areas of learning and daily life.

These findings align with patterns identified in initial interviews, where learners expressed a desire for greater control over their learning. The negotiated SOW prove to have provided a framework through which this aspiration is realised.

This shift in learner identity from dependent to self-directed, can be interpreted through Mezirow's (1991) concept of perspective transformation, where individuals reconceptualise their roles and assumptions about learning.

Figure 1: Learner-Reported Independent Learning Behaviours Following Negotiated SOW



The data represented in Figure 1 displays key behaviours reported by participants, including:

- ☐ increased use of online resources (e.g. Google, YouTube)
- ☐ preparation before lessons
- ☐ engagement with homework tasks
- ☐ communication with peers outside class
- ☐ application of learning in home and community contexts

These behaviours were observed across both Entry 3 and Level 1 and 2 groups, although the extent of engagement varied. This variation manifests

that while the approach facilitated independent learning, individual circumstances and learner readiness influenced the degree of participation.

Subtheme 2.4: Importance of Teacher Awareness

The findings clearly demonstrates that teacher awareness of learners' linguistic, cultural, and social backgrounds played a crucial role in supporting learning.

Participants' responses revealed that:

- learners' needs were diverse and evolving
- assumptions about learners' abilities were not always accurate
- relevance of topics significantly influenced engagement

One participant noted:

“When I searched... I discovered I needed to practise more... I learned new vocabulary.”

This evidences that exposure to self-selected content prompted metacognitive reflection, enabling learners to identify their own strengths and areas for development.

From an interpretive perspective, this finding highlights the importance of the teacher's role as a facilitator and mediator, rather than a transmitter of knowledge. Thus, effective support required ongoing responsiveness to learners' changing needs.

Subtheme 2.5: Balancing Autonomy with Practical Constraints

While many participants responded positively to increased independence, some identified challenges related to time, workload, and personal responsibilities.

For example:

“I have little time to make homework.”

“It is hard... but it is good at the same time.”

These responses exhibit that autonomy was experienced as both empowering and demanding. While learners valued the opportunity to take control of their learning, external factors such as work commitments and family responsibilities influenced their ability to engage consistently.

This calls for the need for flexible and adaptive pedagogical approaches, where autonomy is balanced with realistic expectations and ongoing support. These tensions also uncover that autonomy is context-dependent and must be negotiated within the realities of learners’ personal and professional lives.

Section Summary

The findings in this section evidence that independent learning practices were not incidental but were actively supported through specific pedagogical conditions. These included:

- advance knowledge of lesson topics
- opportunities for peer collaboration
- access to digital resources
- flexible participation structures

However, engagement varied across participants, reflecting differences in personal circumstances and readiness for autonomous learning. Overall, the negotiated SOW facilitated a shift towards learner autonomy and self-directed learning, while also confirming the importance of structured support.

Importantly, learners’ reflections show a transformation in how they perceived learning itself from a teacher-led activity to an ongoing, self-directed process extending beyond the classroom. This shift exhibits deeper changes in learner identity and agency.

4.4 The Impact of Current Learning Practice on Everyday Life

The findings in this section further emphasise that language learning is inseparable from social participation, positioning the ESOL classroom as a space where linguistic and cultural knowledge intersect.

This section addresses Research Question 3:

RQ3: How does embedding socio-cultural content within Schemes of Work influence learners' engagement and participation beyond the classroom?

The findings indicate that learners' involvement in designing their SOW was associated with changes in how they discussed and understood sociocultural participation. Across interviews, observations, and participant-generated accounts, participants consistently highlighted that linguistic competence alone was insufficient for purposeful social participation.

Theme 3: Sociocultural Participation, Belonging and Agency

Subtheme 3.1: Learning Socially Appropriate Language

The findings revealed that several participants were unaware of the social implications of certain language choices, despite being linguistically competent.

An incident during a classroom "culture chest" activity, where a learner used inappropriate language in a social context, prompted collective reflection. The learner, unaware of the connotations, brought into attention that such language should be explicitly addressed within the SOW.

This led to a distinction between experiencing "culture shock" and engaging in a "culture learning experience", where misunderstandings become opportunities for learning.

This finding illustrates how the concept of negotiation of SOW created opportunities for learners to identify and address gaps in socio-cultural knowledge relevant to real-life interactions.

This illustrates how misunderstandings can function as critical learning moments, transforming experiences of exclusion into opportunities for socio-cultural awareness.

Subtheme 3.2: Bridging Cultural Gaps with Idioms

The findings highlighted the challenges posed by idiomatic expressions. One Entry 3 learner described feeling rejected when a neighbour declined a gift using the phrase:

“not my cup of tea”, which she interpreted literally.

This misunderstanding illustrates how cultural meaning is embedded in language, and how lack of familiarity with such expressions can lead to emotional discomfort and misinterpretation.

The integration of idiomatic expressions into the SOW addressed this gap, enabling learners to interpret such phrases more accurately. Participants reported increased confidence in social interactions, confirming that this knowledge contributed to both linguistic competence and emotional well-being.

The emotional impact of such misunderstandings highlights the importance of culturally embedded language knowledge, reinforcing the notion that language learning involves navigating shared meanings within a community.

Subtheme 3.3: The Classroom as a “Community of Practice”

The findings substantiate that the ESOL classroom evolved into a collaborative and supportive environment. Learners actively shared knowledge, experiences, and resources, fostering a sense of belonging.

The interaction below illuminates this:

- A: “Yes, you told me this on the phone.”
- B: “You know me now... I forget sometimes but you laugh with me that’s good.”

- A: “Of course, we are good friends now and we talk about everything.”

This exchange reflects the development of social relationships grounded in mutual understanding and trust. The classroom became more than a site of language instruction. It functioned as a social space where identities were negotiated and relationships formed.

This development reflects the formation of a community of practice, as conceptualised by Lave and Wenger (1991), where learning occurs through participation in shared social practices.

Subtheme 3.4: The Power of Hope and Vision

The findings further revealed the importance of peer modelling in shaping learners’ perceptions of integration.

One participant reflected on an initial assumption:

“I did not know English people can help other people... I thought they were cold.”

This statement proves that learners’ initial perceptions were reshaped through exposure to positive interactions and peer experiences. Observing others’ success contributed to a sense of possibility, reinforcing motivation and engagement.

This establishes that learning environments that facilitate shared experiences and visible progress can foster hope and support learners’ integration journeys.

Subtheme 3.5: Empowering a “Self-Motivated” Attitude

End-of-term feedback and ILP extracts demonstrated the development of a strong “can-do” attitude among learners. Participants reported increased confidence, independence, and willingness to engage in real-life situations.

For example, one Entry 3 learner described confidently seeking help from a police officer. An action she would not have considered previously in her own country.

Another learner reflected on her use of digital tools and self-monitoring strategies to improve pronunciation, demonstrating active engagement with learning processes.

These behaviours were interpreted as indications of development of learner autonomy, confidence, and agency, with participants describing applications of learning beyond the classroom.

These developments clearly display shifts in how some learners perceived their capabilities and participation in educational and social contexts.

Section Summary

The findings demonstrate that embedding socio-cultural content within the ESOL curriculum significantly enhanced learners' ability to participate effectively in society. Through engagement with real-life topics and experiences, learners developed both linguistic competence and socio-cultural understanding.

Importantly, the data indicated that NC facilitated not only language acquisition but also identity transformation, enabling learners to see themselves as active participants in their communities.

4.5 Summary of Findings

This chapter has presented findings from a three-term ESOL course, organised around key emerging themes. The analysis demonstrates that NC, operationalised through the co-construction of SOW, functioned as a transformative pedagogical approach.

Three overarching themes emerged:

- Voice and Agency: Learners valued being heard and actively involved in curriculum design, leading to increased confidence and ownership of learning.

- Bridging Classroom and Community: Learning became connected to real-life contexts, enabling learners to apply language skills beyond the classroom.
- Transformative Identity Development: Learners developed into more confident, autonomous individuals capable of engaging in social and professional atmospheres.

The findings show that negotiated SOW was associated with participants' reported language development, motivation, autonomy, and aspects of sociocultural participation. Learners moved from passive engagement to active participation, demonstrating increased independence and self-efficacy.

From a practitioner perspective, the study also prompted critical reflection on the role of the teacher. Initial concerns regarding loss of control were challenged, as learners' contributions enriched the curriculum in notable ways. This gives strength to what was "yet to be confirmed" of NC, can operate effectively even within structurally constrained educational contexts.

Overall, the findings indicate that NC is not simply an instructional strategy but a pedagogical framework that repositions learners at the centre of the educational process, supporting both linguistic and socio-cultural development.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that NC operates not only as a pedagogical strategy but as a transformative framework that reshapes learner roles, relationships, and identities. The co-construction of the SOW enabled learners to engage more structurally and purposefully with both language and society, reinforcing the view that learning is a socially situated and dialogic process.

Chapter 5 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter interprets the findings presented in Chapter 4 in relation to the wider literature and theoretical frameworks that underpin this study. It examines the significance of NC within ESOL provision in FE, with particular attention to how learners' contributions to the design of SOW are associated with changes in their engagement with learning, their developing sense of autonomy, and their perceptions of sociocultural participation.

Rather than restating the findings, this chapter critically analyses them, situating the empirical data within existing scholarly debates. It seeks to evaluate the extent to which NC practices may contribute to enhancing learners' awareness of social and cultural norms, supporting motivation and independent learning, and shaping learners' experiences of participation within both classroom and broader societal contexts. At the same time, the discussion remains cautious in attributing causality, recognising that observed developments may also be shaped by teacher mediation, peer interaction, and institutional conditions.

The chapter is structured around the three research questions.

Section One addresses the first research question:

RQ1: How do learners' contributions to the design of Schemes of Work influence their cultural and social awareness?

This section examines how the negotiation and sharing of the SOW functioned as a pedagogical strategy through which learners articulated their needs and priorities. It explores how this process was associated with learners' engagement with socially situated language practices, including communication in workplaces, institutions, and community settings. It also considers how such engagement may relate to learners' reported confidence

and participation, while acknowledging the limits of these claims within a short-term educational context.

Section Two addresses the second research question:

RQ2: What pedagogical considerations arise when learners participate in designing Schemes of Work?

This section analyses the pedagogical conditions that supported or constrained learner autonomy. It explores how learner contribution to the SOW interacted with teacher scaffolding, peer collaboration, and access to digital tools. Attention is given to the balance between structure and flexibility, and to the ways in which autonomy in this study was supported rather than fully independent.

Section Three addresses the third research question:

RQ3: How does embedding socio-cultural content within Schemes of Work influence learners' engagement and participation beyond the classroom?

This section considers how embedding socially and culturally relevant topics influenced learners' perceptions of participation and belonging. It explores how learners engaged with issues such as employment, institutional communication, and everyday social interaction, and discusses how these experiences relate to broader concepts of integration. The section also incorporates reflections from ESOL participants to situate the findings within professional practice.

In doing so, this chapter moves beyond description to offer a theoretically informed interpretation of how NC operates within ESOL practice. It argues that while NC does not function as a standalone pedagogical solution, it creates conditions under which learner agency, sociocultural awareness, and engagement can be significantly developed within structurally constrained educational contexts.

5.2 Preamble

The findings presented in Chapter 4 report that learners' engagement with the curriculum was closely linked to their sense of being valued within the learning environment. This section critically explores this relationship, situating it within broader pedagogical principles and examining its relevance to ESOL practice.

Across educational contexts, the relationship between learner engagement and perceived value has been widely acknowledged. Pedagogical approaches that recognise learners' experiences, perspectives, and contributions are often associated with increased participation and more positive learning relationships. In the present study, learners frequently described their involvement in negotiating the SOW as contributing to a greater sense of ownership and recognition. This appeared to be associated with more active participation in classroom activities and, in some cases, increased engagement with learning beyond the classroom.

However, it is important to avoid overstating this relationship. While learners' reported experiences indicate that feeling valued may contribute to motivation, such outcomes are also shaped by a range of other factors, including classroom dynamics, teacher support, and individual learner circumstances. The significance of value and recognition should therefore be understood as one contributing element within a broader pedagogical ecology.

The illustrative examples drawn from school contexts (**vignette 3**), particularly those relating to behaviour management and positive reinforcement, highlight a broader educational principle: that the ways in which learners are positioned within the classroom can influence their engagement. While these examples originate outside ESOL, the underlying principle of recognising and reinforcing participation is relevant. In the context of this study, the act of incorporating learners' contributions into the SOW functioned as a form of pedagogical recognition. Rather than being evaluated solely through performance, learners were positioned as contributors to the learning process itself.

This shift, however, should not be interpreted as a simple transfer of control from teacher to learner. Instead, it reflects a reconfiguration of classroom roles, in which the teacher remains responsible for structuring, guiding, and supporting learning, while learners are given opportunities to influence content and direction. The effectiveness of this approach depends on how these roles are balanced in practice.

To understand the significance of this shift, it is necessary to consider how curriculum is typically conceptualised within ESOL provision. In many Further Education contexts, curriculum and syllabus are closely aligned with national frameworks, assessment requirements, and funding structures. These frameworks provide necessary structure and accountability, but they can also limit flexibility, particularly in relation to responding to learners' immediate needs.

As a result, the SOW often becomes a teacher-designed document that prioritises coverage of examinable content within constrained timeframes. While such an approach ensures alignment with institutional requirements, it may not always reflect the diverse and evolving needs of ESOL learners, particularly those navigating complex social, cultural, and linguistic environments.

The findings of this study report that this tension between structure and responsiveness can lead to a degree of repetition and disengagement, especially among learners who remain in ESOL provision over multiple terms and sometimes years as observed by the researcher. Reports of repeated topics and familiar content indicate that curriculum design may, at times, prioritise continuity over responsiveness.

In this context, the negotiation and sharing of the SOW can be understood as an attempt to introduce greater responsiveness into curriculum design. Drawing on Nation and Macalister's (2010) concept of environmental and situational analysis, this approach foregrounds the importance of aligning curriculum content with learners' contexts, needs, and goals. Similarly,

Richards (2001) emphasises the role of contextual factors in shaping effective language programmes.

In the present study, NC did not replace existing structures but operated within them. Learners' contributions were incorporated alongside institutional requirements, resulting in a hybrid model in which both teacher and learner inputs shaped the SOW. This suggests that NC in ESOL may be most viable not as a complete restructuring of curriculum authority, but as a flexible adaptation within existing frameworks.

Furthermore, the integration of digital tools, social context, and learner experience into the SOW reflects a broader shift towards more situated and practice-oriented language learning. By linking classroom activities to learners' lived realities, the curriculum becomes not only a plan for instruction but also a bridge between learning and use of this learning.

At the same time, this approach places additional demands on teachers, who find themselves navigating the complexities of balancing curriculum requirements, learner needs, and time constraints. The feasibility of NC therefore depends not only on pedagogical intention but also on institutional conditions and available resources.

This preamble establishes the conceptual foundation for the discussion that follows. It positions NC as a contextually situated pedagogical strategy, shaped by both opportunities and constraints, and sets the stage for a more detailed examination of its implications in the sections that follow.

In this sense, NC can be understood not as a transfer of power, but as a reconfiguration of pedagogical authority, where learner voice is legitimised within carefully structured educational boundaries.

5.3 Section One: Learner Contribution and Sociocultural Awareness

This section addresses the first research question:

How do learners' contributions to the design of Schemes of Work influence their cultural and social awareness?

The findings presented in Chapter 4 report that when learners contributed to the design of the SOW, their choices were frequently oriented towards immediate, real-life concerns, including healthcare access, housing, employment, transport, and participation in community life. These priorities indicate that learners did not conceptualise language learning as an abstract or purely academic activity, but rather as a socially situated practice embedded within their everyday experiences.

From an analytical perspective, this supports the argument that NC may function as a mediating space between classroom learning and wider sociocultural participation. Rather than assuming that such a relationship is direct or causal, the data informs that providing learners with opportunities to shape curriculum content creates conditions in which socially relevant language practices can be foregrounded.

This aligns with Freire's (1970) notion of education as a dialogic process in which learners engage in sense-making through reflection on their lived realities. In this study, learners' selection of topics can be interpreted as an attempt to "name" aspects of their social world that they found challenging or unfamiliar. However, it is important to note that such engagement was not solely the result of learner autonomy, but also of structured pedagogical support that enabled these discussions to emerge.

This demonstrates that NC does not simply increase participation but fundamentally reshapes how learners position themselves in relation to knowledge, moving from passive recipients to active meaning-makers within the learning process.

Similarly, the findings can be related to Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital. Learners' engagement with socially situated language, such as workplace discourse or officialdom communication, may be understood as an attempt to acquire forms of knowledge and linguistic competence that are valued within the host society. This is not to say that such acquisition leads directly to integration, rather, the findings indicate that learners perceived these forms of knowledge as useful for navigating social contexts.

In this respect, language learning becomes not only a communicative practice but also a form of social positioning, where access to valued linguistic resources may influence learners' ability to navigate institutional and professional contexts.

The data also reflects the relevance of future-oriented identity in language learning. Drawing on Miyahara (2015), learners' motivations appeared to be shaped not only by immediate needs but also by imagined future selves. Participants' discussions of how they might use English in employment, institutional encounters, or social relationships indicate that their engagement with the SOW was influenced by broader aspirations, which are themselves shaped by social and political contexts.

At the same time, the findings report that these developments were uneven and context dependent. While some learners reported increased confidence in engaging with social situations, these outcomes were not universal, nor can they be attributed solely to the NC approach. Factors such as prior educational background, length of residence in the UK, and personal circumstances appeared to shape how learners engaged with the process of the negotiation of SOW.

A particularly illustrative example is provided by Learner 5, whose engagement with "political English" reflects a highly specific and context-driven learning need. Her focus on language related to Home Office and with her solicitor communication highlights the ways in which language learning intersects with institutional power structures.

Her comment: "...it's what I need for correspond and not try to find politics words when I go to interview..." demonstrates how language is experienced not only as a communicative tool but also as a resource for navigating high-stakes, often stressful institutional encounters.

This example highlights the extent to which ESOL learning is embedded within structures of power, where language functions as both a resource and a barrier in high-stakes institutional interactions.

From an analytical perspective, this example extends existing ESOL literature by highlighting the importance of domain-specific language needs that may not be addressed within standardised curricula. However, it also raises questions about the extent to which ESOL provision can or should accommodate such specialised areas, given institutional constraints and teacher expertise.

Similarly, Learner 3's engagement with political discourse and "special political words" indicates that learners actively attempt to align their language development with perceived social demands. While this may indicate an increased awareness of sociocultural expectations, it also reflects the influence of individual background, prior knowledge, and personal goals. In this regard, the development of sociocultural awareness should be understood as a negotiated and evolving process rather than a uniform outcome.

Significantly, these examples also prompted reflexive considerations regarding the teacher's role. The introduction of topics such as "political language", challenged existing pedagogical boundaries and required the teacher-researcher to reconsider assumptions about appropriate curriculum content. This reinforces the idea that NC is not only a learner-driven process but also one that reshapes teacher practice.

5.3.1 Learning Opportunities: Extending Beyond the Classroom

One of the more unexpected dimensions emerging from the data relates to learners' interpretations of what constitutes language learning beyond the classroom. While the initial intention of embedding learner-selected topics was to encourage independent learning, some participants extended this concept to include physical engagement with social environments.

Learner 5' suggestion of visiting institutions such as job centres, housing offices, or community services illustrates a shift from classroom-based learning to what may be described as situated or experiential learning.

Her statement: "...going to housing or job centre is like preparing for exams to me..." indicates that learners conceptualised real-life interactions as forms of assessment, requiring preparation, practice, and strategic use of formal language.

This aligns with broader perspectives on language learning as a socially embedded practice, where meaning is constructed through interaction in authentic contexts. As Lillis (1997) argues, limited opportunities for engaging with language in real-world settings may constrain learners' ability to achieve their goals.

However, it is important to interpret these findings cautiously. While learners expressed interest in engaging with real-world contexts, practical constraints including time, safeguarding considerations, and institutional limitations, restrict the feasibility of such approaches. Furthermore, the effectiveness of these activities would likely depend on careful scaffolding and preparation.

Nevertheless, the data demonstrate that learners perceive value in extending learning beyond the classroom, particularly in relation to high-stakes social interactions. This highlights how ESOL pedagogy can incorporate more contextually grounded activities, while recognising the challenges associated with their implementation.

These findings reinforce the argument that effective language learning extends beyond formal instruction, requiring engagement with authentic social environments where language is used, interpreted, and negotiated.

5.3.2 Language Use Beyond the Classroom: Patterns of Engagement

To further explore learners' engagement with English beyond the learning environment, a reflective worksheet was introduced at the end of the course. This activity aimed to capture learners' perceptions of how the negotiated SOW influenced their language use in everyday contexts.

The responses revealed that many participants engaged with English beyond classroom hours, often through a combination of independent study, digital tools, and social interaction. Notably, learners frequently reported relying on themselves and digital resources, indicating a degree of developing autonomy. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that this autonomy was often supported by prior classroom input and the teacher's guidance.

The prominence of the term "integration" within participants' responses reflects the centrality of this concept in their learning narratives. For many learners, particularly those from refugee or migrant backgrounds, language learning was closely linked to their ability to navigate new social, cultural, and institutional environments. However, rather than interpreting this as evidence of achieved integration, it is more appropriate to view it as an indication of learners' aspirations and perceived needs.

The data also highlights the role of digital tools in mediating language learning. Participants described using mobile phones, translation applications, and online videos to support vocabulary development, pronunciation, and comprehension. This aligns with recent research, such as Hulford-Wood (2022), which emphasises the accessibility of digital tools even for learners with limited technological experience.

Coincidentally, the findings reveal variability in learners' ability to engage with independent study. While some participants developed consistent study routines, others reported constraints related to time, family responsibilities, or work commitments. This variation underscores the importance of avoiding generalised claims about autonomy and recognising the diverse circumstances shaping learner engagement.

An additional dimension of the data relates to the social aspects of learning:

Participants described forming peer networks, sharing resources, and supporting each other both inside and outside the classroom. These interactions contributed to build a sense of community, which appeared to support both language development and emotional wellbeing.

This resonates with the concept of learning as a socially mediated process, where knowledge is co-constructed through interaction. As noted by Grobkova and Starkey (2002), language learning involves not only the acquisition of linguistic forms but also the development of social relationships that enable communication.

Collectively, these patterns points to the inevitability that autonomy in this study was not characterised by independence from support, but by increasing capacity to mobilise available resources, including digital tools, peer networks, and prior knowledge.

Finally, the findings highlight the interplay between language learning and identity formation. Participants' reflections on pronunciation, accents, and communication revealed a growing awareness of linguistic diversity and a shift away from viewing native-like proficiency as the sole goal. Instead, learners emphasised clarity, intelligibility, and confidence as key indicators of progress as long as they can convey their messages clearly.

5.4 Section Two: Pedagogical Considerations in Learners' Contribution to the Scheme of Work

This section addresses the second research question:

RQ2: What pedagogical considerations arise when learners participate in designing Schemes of Work?

The findings recorded that learners' contribution to the SOW was associated with increased engagement, greater investment in lesson content, and more sustained learning beyond the classroom. However, the data also indicates that these developments did not occur simply because learners were given freedom to choose topics. Rather, they emerged through a pedagogical process in which negotiation, structure, support, and responsiveness worked together. The discussion in this section therefore focuses on the pedagogical conditions under which NC provided confirmation that this process supports motivation and autonomy.

A central issue arising from the findings, however, is the relationship between learner ownership and teacher mediation. While learners frequently described a sense of pride and responsibility in relation to the shared SOW, it did not mean that the teacher's role became less significant. On the contrary, the findings recounted that teacher intervention remained essential in shaping the learning process, particularly in clarifying tasks, simplifying terminology, signposting resources, and helping learners translate broad interests into manageable areas of study. In this respect, learner contribution did not replace pedagogy; it required a more adaptive form of pedagogy.

This tension is usefully interpreted through Bernstein's (1975) distinction between visible and invisible pedagogies. If the learning process became too open, some learners experienced uncertainty and required additional guidance. If, however, the process remained too tightly structured, there was limited space for learners to exercise voice or agency. The findings therefore evidenced that NC worked most effectively when it operated between these

two extremes: learners needed enough freedom to identify priorities that mattered to them, but also enough structure to feel secure and supported in acting on those priorities.

This balance between structure and flexibility is central to understanding the effectiveness of NC, suggesting that autonomy is most productive when it is scaffolded rather than assumed.

From this perspective, the teacher's role is better understood not as a withdrawal of authority but as a reconfiguration of authority. The teacher became less of a content-selector and more of a facilitator and mediator. This aligns with NATECLA's emphasis on responsive and learner-centred ESOL pedagogy, while also demonstrating that responsiveness in practice is not spontaneous but labour-intensive and highly relational.

In this context, the teacher's role becomes pedagogically intensified rather than diminished, requiring ongoing negotiation, responsiveness, and interpretive judgement.

The findings also revealed that ownership of the SOW contributed to learners' sense of purpose. Participants did not simply describe the SOW as a document; they described it as a reference they could use to decide: what they needed to practise, when they needed to practise it, and why it mattered. This is pedagogically significant because it demonstrates a shift from curriculum as content delivered to learners towards curriculum as a source learners can interpret and use. Such a shift may support a stronger alignment between classroom tasks and learners' perceived goals.

Simultaneously, the results indicate that this ownership was not experienced identically by all participants. Some learners embraced the opportunity to prepare independently and to direct aspects of their learning. Others required more prompting, reassurance, or repetition. This variation is important, because it cautions against presenting learner contribution as uniformly

motivating. Rather, the findings indicate that motivation in this study was shaped by the interaction between curriculum relevance, learner confidence, peer support, and teacher scaffolding.

The role of peers was particularly important. The findings uncovered that learners frequently used each other as points of reference, support, and aspiration. In both Entry 3, Level 1 and 2 groups, peers shared strategies, discussed language practice, and modelled possible learning trajectories for one another. This is pedagogically significant because it indicates that autonomy was not purely individual. Instead, learners often became more independent through forms of collective engagement. They observed how others studied, shared materials, prepared for tasks, and responded to challenges. As a result, these observations contributed to shape their own expectations and ambitions.

This can be linked to Caslon's (2013) argument that many ESOL learners begin with an uncertain or underdeveloped sense of what future progress might look like. The findings here uncover that such uncertainty can become more concrete when learners encounter peers whose behaviour makes progress visible. For some learners, this meant seeing that another learner was able to speak confidently, apply for jobs, or balance study with family life was an inspiration. These examples helped to provide practical and motivational models, especially for those who had recently arrived in the UK, and those who lacked prior educational confidence.

This informs us that autonomy is not solely an individual achievement, but a socially mediated process shaped through interaction, observation, and shared practice.

The comment of Learner 13 provides a particularly useful example. Her previous engagement with English learning materials had not translated into what she regarded as "meaningful progress", because the language she encountered in class did not adequately address her most pressing goal of securing employment. The shared SOW created a different pedagogical space in which job interview question preparation could become a central

topic rather than peripherally being informed that a job interview involves questions. By considering this central topic as a central need in most of ESOL learners' lives and embedding it directly into the SOW, the learner was able to focus on a concrete communicative purpose (responding to job interview potential questions). This shift has contributed to greater persistence, more targeted preparation, and stronger engagement with role-play and practice tasks.

This occurrence should however be interpreted carefully. It would be too strong to claim that NC alone led to the participant securing a job. What is more plausible, is that the negotiated SOW created conditions in which her efforts could become more focused, her preparation more relevant, and her confidence better supported. It was the interaction between learner motivation, teacher guidance, resource access, and repeated practice that was productive. This distinction is important because it avoids attributing complex life outcomes solely to curriculum design.

The findings also unveil that pedagogical design was most effective when it connected directly with learners' existing knowledge and immediate concerns. Participants often drew on past experiences, workplace encounters, family responsibilities, and future goals when identifying what they wanted to learn. This supports the view that adult learners do not enter the classroom as blank recipients of knowledge but bring with them socially situated experiences that can be pedagogically valuable. In this study, NC supported to create a stronger bridge between those experiences and formal learning activities.

This process can be read, cautiously, through Mezirow's (1991) theory of transformative learning. Some learners rethought their role in the classroom and their relationship to learning, moving from a more passive understanding of study towards a more active and self-directed one. Yet the evidence here supports a modest application of Mezirow rather than a broad claim of transformation. In most cases, the data demonstrates not radical identity change but the emergence of new habits of preparation, stronger feelings of

responsibility, and more confident participation in selected areas of the learning.

Rather than representing radical transformation, these shifts are better understood as incremental changes in learners' orientations towards learning, characterised by increased responsibility, confidence, and engagement.

There is also a digital dimension to these pedagogical considerations. The findings show that learners increasingly relied on digital tools to support the topics they had chosen. This included using Google, YouTube, subtitles, email, translation tools, and online materials. Such tools enabled learners to search, rehearse, revisit, and compare language outside classroom time. In that respect, the negotiated SOW did not only influence what learners studied; it influenced how they studied. Knowing the topic in advance enabled some learners to engage in purposeful online searching, which in turn supported confidence and preparedness in class.

This point is especially important in relation to participants like Learner 5, whose experience indicates that topic ownership could prompt the development of wider study skills alongside language learning. Her comments about difficulty with links, searching, and translation illustrate that digital participation itself was part of the learning process. The significance of this is not simply technological. It declares that NC can help learners engage with the digital practices increasingly required for language learning, employment, and everyday institutional life.

The findings also highlight the value of culturally and socially responsive pedagogy. Participants came from diverse backgrounds and brought varied linguistic repertoires, educational histories, and social needs. The findings demonstrate that this diversity cannot be adequately addressed through a one-size-fits-all pedagogy. Instead, responsive teaching in ESOL requires sensitivity to learners' immediate circumstances, as well as willingness to adapt content and approach. This is consistent with Gay's (2010) argument that meaningful learning for diverse students depends on classrooms that recognise and respond to social and cultural difference.

Concurrently, the data also demonstrate that such responsiveness is demanding. The diversity of current ESOL provision, especially with increasing numbers of refugees, asylum seekers, and family reunion migrants, places considerable pressure on teachers to address highly differentiated needs. NC may offer one route towards such responsiveness, but it is not a straightforward solution. It requires time, pedagogical judgement, flexibility, and institutional support.

The findings also prompted a more reflexive examination of my own teaching practice. The process of discussing the SOW with learners revealed aspects of need that standard planning had not always captured. It encouraged me to attend more closely to the gap between official curriculum priorities and learners' actual priorities. In this respect, the study did not only generate findings about learners; it also illuminated the extent to which pedagogy itself must remain open to revision.

One of the most significant implications of this section is that pedagogy in ESOL is better understood less as the delivery of predetermined content and more as negotiated mediation between curriculum requirements and learners' situated goals. The pedagogical value of NC lies not merely in increasing learner choice, but in creating a framework through which learner knowledge, teacher guidance, and institutional expectations can be brought into a more productive relationship.

Overall, this section demonstrates that motivation and autonomy developed most strongly when learners were able to see relevance in what they were learning, when they were supported to act on that relevance, and when peer and teacher relationships enabled them to practise with confidence. NC, in this study, did not eliminate the need for pedagogical structure. Rather, it highlighted how essential such structure remains when learner participation is taken seriously.

5.5 Section Three: ESOL Learners and Integration

This section addresses the third research question:

RQ3: How does embedding socio-cultural content within Schemes of Work influence learners' engagement and participation beyond the classroom?

This question is closely connected to the discussion in the previous section because motivation and autonomy, where supported by pedagogy, shaped how learners understood and approached integration. The findings showed that embedding socio-cultural topics within the SOW was associated with increased learner engagement and with opportunities for learners to reflect on how language learning related to participation in everyday life. However, the concept of integration requires a careful consideration. In this study, integration is not understood as a fixed or measurable endpoint, nor as a simple matter of adapting to a host country. Rather, the findings demonstrate that learners understood integration in practical, relational, and linguistic terms: being able to communicate, to access services, to interpret social norms, to build trust, and to participate with greater confidence in daily interactions.

From this perspective, the inclusion of socio-cultural topics in the SOW was associated with more socially purposeful. When learners contributed topics such as healthcare, employment, local institutions, benefits, social etiquette, safeguarding, family life, and cultural customs, they were not simply broadening their vocabulary. They were identifying the social knowledge they felt they needed in order to function more effectively in their new environment. The findings indicate that socio-cultural content in ESOL can support more than language acquisition alone; it can also provide a structure through which learners interpret the expectations, opportunities, and challenges of life in the UK.

This can be interpreted through Bakhtin's (1981) concept of heteroglossia. The classroom in this study became a space in which multiple voices, languages, histories, and social experiences coexisted and interacted.

Learners brought to classroom discussion not only grammatical questions or lexical needs, but also their perceptions of social institutions, their uncertainties about cultural norms, and their experiences of navigating unfamiliar systems. In that regard, the classroom did not operate as a neutral site of language delivery, but as a dialogic space in which learners tested, compared, and negotiated meanings across different cultural and social frames of reference.

This dialogic interaction enabled learners to test and refine their understanding of social meanings, highlighting the classroom as a space where linguistic and cultural knowledge are actively negotiated.

What is significant here is that the learners were not positioned as passive recipients of cultural knowledge. The findings show that they acted as interpreters of experience, drawing connections between what they encountered in society and what they wanted the curriculum to address. This moves the discussion beyond deficit-based narratives of integration, which often frame ESOL learners primarily in terms of lack. Instead, the findings demonstrate that learners were actively engaged in shaping what counted as useful knowledge, and in doing so, contributed to a more reciprocal classroom culture.

In this respect, Stenhouse's (1975) argument that worthwhile educational activity requires active learner roles remains highly relevant. The negotiated SOW provided an opportunity for learners to move beyond passive reception of content and towards more intentional engagement with the curriculum. The findings show that this active role encouraged learners to identify what they needed from English, why they needed it, and how it related to their broader aspirations. This supports Bragg's (2004) argument that learners' socially situated experiences should not be treated as peripheral to skill development. On the contrary, the findings demonstrate that these experiences are central to how adult ESOL learners interpret the value and purpose of language learning.

The classroom, then, can be understood as both a pedagogical and a social environment. Participants repeatedly described the ESOL classroom as a place in which they could share information, compare experiences, and build relationships that extended beyond formal teaching. Comments such as “we help each other, and teachers help, and we become like family” suggest that learners experienced the classroom not simply as a site of instruction, but as a relational space through which they could begin to understand and negotiate life in the UK.

This is important for the discussion of integration because it indicates that the classroom may act as an intermediate social environment between formal education and wider society. Learners did not describe integration solely in terms of speaking English correctly; they also described it in terms of understanding systems, feeling less alone, knowing where to ask questions, and learning how to interpret social situations. In this respect, the findings indicate that the classroom offered a form of belonging that supported participation before broader social confidence had fully developed.

In this sense, integration emerges not as a fixed outcome but as an ongoing process shaped by learners’ ability to interpret, respond to, and participate in diverse social contexts.

Fisher and Naumer (2006) emphasise that shared information in a common environment can support a range of practical and relational outcomes. This was evident in the present study, where learners exchanged knowledge about institutions, life in the UK, and personal strategies for managing unfamiliar systems. Trust emerged as a particularly important factor in these exchanges. Learners often stated that they would not have shared certain experiences in other settings, demonstrating that NC process was partly associated with an atmosphere of interpersonal trust and reciprocity.

This can also be linked to Pica’s (1987) work on negotiation in language learning. While Pica focuses primarily on negotiation as a mechanism for promoting language development, the present study demonstrates that negotiation also has a wider social dimension. Through curriculum

negotiation, learners did not only solve language tasks; they negotiated the relevance of knowledge itself. They asked what needed to be known, what counted as useful language, and how learning could better reflect their social realities. This broader understanding of negotiation is important because it positions curriculum design as part of language learning rather than as something external to it.

The example of learners sharing experiences related to Home Office processes illustrates this clearly. For some participants, especially those with refugee or asylum backgrounds, language learning was inseparable from the need to navigate complex and high-stakes institutional systems. In such examples, shared classroom discussion became a way of collectively interpreting information, comparing experiences, and reducing uncertainty. Qayyum et al. (2014) note that information-sharing is vital for refugees as they seek to orient themselves in unfamiliar environments. Although not all participants in this study were refugees, similar patterns were visible among learners who were negotiating unfamiliar bureaucratic, legal, or cultural systems.

In parallel, this aspect of the findings should be interpreted carefully. The study does not suggest that ESOL provision can resolve the structural difficulties learners face in relation to immigration, housing, benefits, or legal status. What it does demonstrate is that learners perceived socially relevant curriculum topics as supportive in preparing them to engage with these realities. The benefit, then, lies not in solving structural inequalities, but in making language learning more responsive to the contexts in which such inequalities are experienced.

Another important dimension of this section is the relationship between independent learning and integration. The findings show that some socially related tasks were more effectively pursued outside formal class time. Learners described using digital tools to search for vocabulary, practise pronunciation, revisit grammar, and prepare for real-life situations. This did not weaken classroom community. Rather, for many participants it created a

supplementary mode of participation in which home-based study fed back into classroom interaction. The phrase “I can be my own teacher at home” captures this shift clearly. Rather than indicating isolation, it demonstrates an extension of the learning environment beyond the classroom.

This is significant as it shows that autonomy and connectedness are not necessarily opposites. Learners often described working independently while remaining connected to peers, teachers, and classroom goals through WhatsApp, Zoom, shared tasks, and social media communication. One learner’s comment that “I feel connected like in class still”, indicates that independent study was not always experienced as necessary solitary. Instead, the digital and social dimensions of the negotiated SOW maintained learners’ connection with the classroom beyond formal class time.

These findings challenge binary distinctions between independent and collaborative learning, demonstrating that autonomy can coexist with sustained social connection. This connection created continuity between classroom and home.

The findings also showed that socio-cultural learning carried emotional significance. For some learners, particularly those from more monocultural or monolingual backgrounds, adapting to a diverse society involved confusion, vulnerability, and led to anxiety. The data indicates that language learning alone did not remove these feelings, but that socio-cultural discussion within the classroom provided a space in which they could be recognised and shared. Cooke and Simpson (2008) similarly note that integration is emotionally demanding for ESOL migrants, especially where language learning is linked to uncertainty, waiting, dependency, or unfamiliar systems of power.

In the present study, some participants described not knowing their rights, not understanding official language, or not feeling equipped to ask questions in important situations. These examples reinforce the argument that socio-cultural content should not be viewed as peripheral to ESOL pedagogy. For some learners, such knowledge was central to everyday functioning. The

example of a participant being unaware of entitlements following asylum recognition highlights how the absence of socially relevant information can compound vulnerability. In this respect, curriculum negotiation created space for such issues to surface and be addressed.

Participant 11's reflection is particularly significant because it shows how learners themselves became mediators of integration knowledge for others. Her willingness to share negative early experiences in order to support newer learners demonstrates that peer knowledge played an important role in the classroom. This also challenges narrow understandings of integration as something transmitted from institution to learner. In this study, integration-related knowledge often circulated horizontally, from learner to learner, as much as vertically from teacher to learner. The classroom therefore functioned not only as a formal educational site, but also as a community of shared social learning.

However, the discussion also acknowledges the structural constraints within which this work took place. Further Education contexts are shaped by accountability frameworks, exam requirements, GLH, and pressures of completion and progression. These conditions limit the extent to which NC can be implemented. The study therefore does not argue that ESOL provision can be fully implemented around learner-led integration topics. Rather, the findings demonstrate that even within institutional constraints, there is scope for micro-level negotiation through topic selection, project work, discussion prompts, and flexible content emphasis.

This point is important as it prevents the argument from becoming idealised. NC in this study worked within constraints rather than outside them. It was a negotiated balance between learner agency and institutional structure. In this perspective, the study contributes to ESOL literature by showing that curriculum responsiveness is possible even in regulated FE environments, but that it depends on careful teacher mediation and realistic boundaries.

The practitioner dimension of the research further supports this conclusion. Feedback from colleagues indicated that negotiated and shared SOW

practices were viewed positively, especially by teachers working with higher-entry and higher-level learners. These practitioners recognised the pedagogical value of allowing learners to articulate what they needed to learn in order to manage daily life more effectively. At the same time, concerns raised by teachers of lower-entry and literacy groups demonstrate that such approaches are not equally feasible across all ESOL contexts. Limited schooling, low levels of English, and restricted expressive capacity may reduce learners' ability to participate in curriculum negotiation in the ways seen in this study.

However, this does not mean that such learners have no voice; rather it indicates that the methods and expectations of negotiation would need to be adapted considerably for pre-entry and Entry 1 settings. The colleague's reflection included in **Appendix 20** is therefore valuable because it shows both the transferability and the contextual limits of the approach. In this respect, the study supports a differentiated rather than universal model of NC.

The findings demonstrate that embedding socio-cultural topics within the SOW was associated with several interrelated developments: increased relevance of learning, stronger peer relationships, greater confidence in discussing real-life issues, and more explicit links between language learning and everyday participation. It would be too strong to claim that the approach directly produced integration. However, the findings support the more cautious conclusion that negotiated socio-cultural content may create more favourable conditions for learners to understand, discuss, and prepare for the social demands of life in the UK.

In that respect, the contribution of the negotiated SOW lies not only in the topics selected, but in the way those topics enabled learners to connect language learning with social reality. The classroom became a place where linguistic practice, cultural interpretation, emotional support, and practical knowledge were brought into relationship. This, in itself, represents a significant pedagogical contribution within ESOL.

5.6 Summary

The discussion presented across the sections has examined the role of negotiated NC in shaping ESOL learners' motivation, autonomy, and engagement with sociocultural contexts. Drawing together the findings and their interpretation, indicate that learners' ownership of the SOW contributed to a range of changes in both classroom practice and learning beyond the classroom. These changes included increased engagement with speaking and vocabulary development, greater use of digital tools for independent study, and more sustained confidence in approaching language-related tasks.

However, rather than attributing these outcomes to NC, the discussion has highlighted the importance of the pedagogical conditions within which NC was implemented. The interaction between learner contribution, teacher mediation, peer collaboration, and contextual constraints was important in shaping these changes. In this regard, NC functioned not as a standalone method, but as part of a broader pedagogical process that required careful structuring, responsiveness, and ongoing support.

The question of whether NC constitutes a distinct "learning discipline" remains open. While the findings show that the approach encouraged more active and engaged learning behaviours, it may be more appropriate to conceptualise NC as a pedagogical orientation rather than a discrete discipline. It introduced a shift in emphasis from curriculum as something delivered to curriculum as something negotiated and interpreted without fully displacing existing structures of teaching and assessment. The findings indicate more clearly that the absence of such negotiation may limit opportunities for learners to connect classroom learning with their immediate linguistic and social needs.

A key contribution of this study lies in its practitioner-research dimension. As the enquiry progressed, my own assumptions regarding curriculum coherence, control and learner readiness were challenged. Initial concerns that NC might reduce structure or academic rigour were not evident in the findings. Instead, the findings indicate that learner involvement, when carefully

scaffolded, can enrich curriculum content and strengthen engagement. This reflexive process highlights the value of practitioner research within ESOL, where teaching practice itself becomes a site of inquiry and development.

At a broader level, the discussion reinforces the importance of viewing language learning as both a linguistic and a social process. While achieving competence in the host language remains a central goal, the findings indicate that learners also value opportunities to engage with the social, cultural, and institutional dimensions of language use. In this study, embedding such dimensions within the SOW made learning more relevant and, for some learners, more purposeful.

At the same time, the findings underline that such approaches are not without demands. Supporting negotiated curriculum requires significant time, pedagogical judgement, and adaptability on the part of the teacher, as well as sustained commitment from learners. These demands must be understood within the wider constraints of Further Education, including assessment frameworks, time limitations, and institutional expectations.

The study also identified several areas in which learners reported benefits associated with the negotiated SOW. These include:

- increased willingness to engage with tasks beyond classroom time,
- the development of more confident and independent study habits,
- greater use of digital tools to support language learning,
- enhanced participation in peer interaction and collaborative learning,
- a growing sense of responsibility for their own learning processes.

These developments should be interpreted as tendencies rather than uniform outcomes, as variation among learners remained evident throughout the study.

Finally, the discussion suggests that moving beyond a narrow focus on grammatical accuracy or examination performance may allow for a more expansive understanding of ESOL learning. Providing learners with

opportunities to contribute to curriculum design, to express their priorities, and to connect learning with their lived experiences may support a stronger sense of voice and participation. While such an approach does not eliminate structural constraints, it may offer a way of working within them to create more responsive and relevant learning environments.

In conclusion, the findings of this study position NC not as a replacement for existing ESOL practices, but as a complementary framework that can support learner engagement, pedagogical reflection, and contextual relevance. Its value lies in its capacity to bring together learner experience, teacher expertise, and curriculum structure in ways that more closely reflect the realities of adult ESOL learning.

Taken together, the findings and their interpretation suggest that negotiated curriculum operates as a form of structured autonomy within ESOL practice. It does not remove institutional constraints, nor does it guarantee uniform outcomes. However, it can create pedagogical conditions in which learners can engage more purposefully with language, develop greater awareness of their social environment, and participate more actively in their own learning trajectories. In this sense, the contribution of this study lies in demonstrating how NC can be implemented pragmatically within FE contexts as an approach that is both theoretically grounded and pedagogically viable.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter synthesises the key findings of the study and reflects on its contributions to knowledge, implications for practice, and directions for future research. It revisits the central argument that NC, operationalised through the co-construction of SOW, can enhance adult ESOL learners' motivation, autonomy, and sociocultural integration within the FE context. It also situates the findings within the methodological and contextual boundaries discussed in the previous chapter, ensuring that the claims made are appropriately grounded.

The principal aim of this study was to investigate how NC, particularly the co-construction of SOW with ESOL learners, can enhance their language development, motivation, autonomy, and wider cultural and social integration. By foregrounding learner voice and agency, the findings indicate that when learners are invited to participate in the design of SOW, they can take greater ownership of their learning, express their concerns, articulate their priorities more clearly, and engage more deeply with both the linguistic and sociocultural dimensions of ESOL provision.

The findings indicated that the negotiation of the SOW extends beyond a classroom practice; rather, it represents a pedagogical approach that can reshape how learning is experienced by adult ESOL learners. It enabled learners to bring their lived experiences, cultural backgrounds, and immediate needs into the classroom, thereby aligning curriculum content more closely with their real-world contexts. Within the scope of this study, embedding topics selected by learners supported linguistic development alongside increased cultural awareness, confidence, and participation in social interactions. These outcomes resonate with Freire's (1970) dialogic approach to education and Bernstein's (2000) insights into power and control within curriculum frameworks, while remaining situated within the specific context of this research.

The research questions were aligned with three central findings that emerged:

1. Learner Voice and Sociocultural Awareness:

When learners co-constructed the SOW, they prioritised topics rooted in their day-to-day lives. This process supported the development of cultural literacy and increased confidence in navigating social interactions, although the extent of this impact varied across participants.

2. Pedagogical Mediation and Learner Autonomy:

While NC supported motivation by fostering a sense of ownership, it also required careful pedagogical guidance. The teacher's role as a facilitator remained central in balancing learner agency with structural and curricular expectations.

3. Sociocultural Content and Integration:

Embedding topics related to healthcare, local services, and community life supported both language development and learners' understanding of their social environment. However, these outcomes should be interpreted as contextually situated rather than universally generalisable.

Collectively, these findings indicate that NC has can extend ESOL learning beyond a narrow focus on language skills and assessment preparation towards a more holistic engagement with learners' lived realities. At the same time, as discussed in the discussion chapter, these outcomes cannot be attributed to NC only, but rather to a combination of pedagogical practices, learner engagement, and contextual factors.

The study also explored how ESOL learners adopted additional learning practices that supported their progression into employment or further study. It highlighted ongoing cultural and social challenges faced by ESOL learners, particularly those who had previously engaged with more traditional, teacher-

led SOW structures. Within the research setting, it was observed that some SOW had become repetitive over time. While this observation is not a generalisation across all ESOL provision, it reflects a pattern within the specific context of this study.

In this respect, Cooke and Simpson (2008) argue that adult migrants are positioned within complex policy agendas relating to skills, employability, and social cohesion, all of which influence ESOL practice. These structural pressures may contribute to a focus on assessment outcomes, sometimes at the expense of addressing learners' broader linguistic and social needs.

This tension was also reflected in participants' accounts, where some learners questioned the relevance of exam-focused content to real-life communication. Within this study, this was interpreted as a potential limitation of strictly assessment-driven curricula, rather than a universal characteristic of ESOL provision. It also highlights the need for a balanced approach that accommodates both institutional requirements and learners' lived experiences.

The data further indicated that the introduction of NC initially created uncertainty among some participants. Adapting to a more participatory approach required time, support, and reassurance. However, as learners became more familiar with the process, many began to engage more actively in shaping their learning. This gradual shift indicates that NC may require sustained scaffolding rather than immediate implementation.

The negotiation of the SOW positioned this research within a practitioner-based perspective, where insights emerged through close engagement with learners' experiences. While this insider position enabled rich data collection, it also required ongoing reflexivity, as discussed in the discussion chapter. The findings therefore represent an interpretation of practice within a specific context, rather than a universal model of ESOL curriculum reform.

6.2 Summary of the Study

In this section, I provide a summary of each chapter of the thesis, along with the research questions and how each question was addressed.

This thesis introduced Chapter 1, which provides an overview of who ESOL learners are, outlines the aims and objectives of the research, presents the research questions, and discusses my positionality. Chapter 1 also justifies the rationale for conducting this study, drawing on my personal experiences of language learning in a different country and linguistic context. The selection of ESOL participants reflects parallels with my own language learning experiences in the 1980s, which informed both the motivation and direction of this research.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature in relation to the ESOL curriculum, critically examining both its effectiveness and its limitations in addressing learners' cultural, social, linguistic, and integration needs. It highlights how learner-designed SOW can help bridge the gap between policy-driven curricula and the lived realities and needs of learners. Furthermore, it positions NC as a practical enactment of critical pedagogy, offering both a theoretical contribution and an example for practice. While cultural and social topics exist within ESOL curricula, this chapter argues that their impact remains limited if they are not purposefully and openly negotiated with learners. It became evident that pedagogical considerations such as scaffolding, flexibility, and reflexivity are essential when learners contribute to the design of SOW. Teachers are therefore required to balance institutional curriculum requirements with learner input, while creating spaces for dialogue, experimentation, and reflection. This highlights the significance of professional judgement among ESOL practitioners in navigating institutional expectations alongside learner-centred approaches. The literature review also identified a notable gap in adult ESOL provision, where curricula can be restricted to predefined topics, leaving substantial areas of language use underexplored. This includes idiomatic expressions, which are central to social and cultural

interaction. The absence of such linguistic elements contributes to widening existing social and communicative gaps for ESOL learners.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to the methodology and provides justification for the adoption of a qualitative approach. The inclusion of authentic anecdotes, drawn from real teaching experiences, reflects the initial impetus for this study. To facilitate an in-depth exploration of how learners' contributions to SOW design influenced their motivation, autonomy, and cultural awareness, two participants' generated accounts were supplemented. Participant-generated accounts were used as a supplementary data source to capture the experiences of two learners who were less comfortable contributing through the main group-based methods; they were not treated as case studies. As a practitioner-researcher, I was immersed in the research setting, engaging reflexively with my dual role as teacher and researcher. An interpretivist orientation underpinned the study, aiming to understand the subjective meanings learners attach to the process of NC. Knowledge was therefore conceptualised as co-constructed through dialogue, drawing on Bakhtin's (1981) dialogism and Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy. This orientation positioned learners not as passive subjects, but as active contributors to both the learning and research processes.

The chapters then focus on data collection, analysis, and findings in the subsequent chapter. ESOL participants were introduced through concise yet informative biographies, highlighting their linguistic diversity, reflecting the linguistic diversity and multilingual backgrounds represented within the participant group. The chapter outlines and justifies the use of semi-structured interviews, observations, and two participant-generated accounts as methods of data collection. These methods enabled triangulation and ensured that participants' voices were represented authentically. The processes of transcription, data analysis, and ethical considerations were also addressed.

Chapter 4 emphasises trustworthiness, presenting findings through the lenses of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Emerging themes were systematically linked to the research questions, shaping the

overall findings. Participants' responses from interviews, observational notes, and contributed accounts were presented and interpreted to provide a comprehensive understanding of their experiences.

The discussion chapter critically engages with the findings in relation to the literature review. While Chapter 1 established the broader interest in ESOL curriculum and pedagogy, this chapter shifts focus towards scrutinising the SOW as a tool for enhancing its practical value for learners. It highlights the importance of enabling ESOL learners to understand the cultural and social contexts in which they live, and how this understanding relates to language use. The discussion constructs a detailed picture of ESOL learners' prior experiences and positions the negotiation of SOW as a means of enhancing learner ownership. This ownership transforms the SOW into a dynamic resource that extends learning beyond the classroom. The categorised topics identified during data collection responded directly to the issues raised in Chapter 1 regarding learners' understanding of culture and society. Participants' responses demonstrated that:

1. It was essential to learn about England and its people, as this is the context in which they live.
2. They sought to embed culture as a skill to shape their attitudes and identities, facilitating better integration into UK society.

The negotiated themes encompassed aspects of the UK's multicultural society, including food, sports, events, theatre, history, gender equality, mental health awareness, drama, and literature. These topics enabled learners to engage with language in pertinent and contextually relevant ways. Consequently, it became necessary to move beyond traditional teaching practices and implement a broader pedagogical approach that places learners' needs at the centre. The concept of "emergency notes," introduced in Chapter 1, was further developed through data analysis, leading to the categorisation of learners' needs into social and sociolinguistic competencies. Social competencies related to appropriate behaviour within complex cultural

contexts, while sociolinguistic competencies referred to language use within diverse communities.

The discussion also highlighted how negotiating the SOW encouraged learners to:

- Move beyond reliance on guided learning hours.
- Reduce dependence on teacher-led instruction.
- Develop personalised learning spaces.
- Enhance motivation.
- Foster autonomy.
- Engage in independent learning beyond the classroom.

Traditionally, SOW and pedagogy have remained within the domain of teachers. However, this study demonstrated the value of sharing this domain with learners. The literature review identified gaps across multiple dimensions of the curriculum, including psychological aspects linked to learner vulnerability. It also highlighted the limited involvement of ESOL learners in curriculum design, despite the emphasis on learner-centred approaches (Nunan, 1988). Clarke (1991) describes syllabus negotiation as a “radical” form of communicative language teaching, yet such practices remain largely absent in ESOL provision. This study addressed this gap by proposing negotiated SOW as a valuable pedagogical approach. Drawing on Pica (1987), negotiation is central to language learning, enabling learners to collaborate and solve tasks. Similarly, Crookes and Gass (1993) emphasise interaction as a key mechanism through which learners accomplish language tasks. Although these concepts are established in the literature, their application to the negotiation of SOW within adult ESOL remains underexplored.

The qualitative approach adopted in Chapter 3 facilitated a deeper understanding of learners’ strengths and challenges. The ethnographic diversity of participants enriched the data, ensuring authenticity and depth. The use of interviews and detailed observational notes enhanced the quality of the data collected. Establishing trust through transparent communication

and informed consent contributed to positive relationships between the researcher and participants. Providing interview questions in advance allowed participants time to prepare linguistically and psychologically, further enriching the data. While some data were collected through written responses, group discussions proved particularly effective in eliciting detailed insights. Audio recordings, alongside observational notes, ensured accuracy and supported transferability.

Conducting the research within the participants' natural learning environment enabled a deeper understanding of their lived experiences. This strengthened the interpretive validity of the study, as insights were grounded in real interactions rather than assumptions (Atkinson, 2005, in Harklau, 2005). An open and reflexive approach was used to examine how my own position as an insider practitioner shaped interpretation throughout the study. The ethnographic sensibility of the study provided valuable insights into how learners' cultural understandings and beliefs shape their identities and integration within UK society. This ethnographic sensibility was consistent with the interpretivist framework adopted in the study because it prioritised participants' situated meanings and experiences rather than imposing predetermined interpretations.

The impact of the research extended beyond the initial cohort of participants. ESOL learners in subsequent terms (2024–2025) were also introduced to the principles of negotiating the SOW. While this approach has been widely welcomed, it does not guarantee consistent engagement beyond the classroom. It remains difficult to verify the extent to which learners independently complete tasks, the time invested, or the level of motivation involved. However, classroom interactions and submitted work provide evidence of honest engagement. The use of digital tools such as Padlet enabled tracking of learner participation, offering insights into engagement with tasks and independent learning activities. This supports the argument that NC fosters motivation, autonomy, and independent learning.

Despite these strengths, limitations remain. The data from further participants' contributed accounts did not always demonstrate consistent learner commitment to using the negotiated SOW. Additionally, some learners may remain disengaged due to external factors, such as compulsory attendance linked to employment obligations. These realities highlight the practical limitations of fully implementing NC. Nevertheless, the overall findings indicate that negotiated SOW has significantly enhanced ESOL learning practice. While it is beyond the scope of this study to demonstrate universal effectiveness, the positive outcomes observed provide a strong foundation for future research in this area.

6.3 Summary of Findings for Question 1

RQ1: How do learners' contributions to the design of Schemes of Work influence their cultural and social awareness?

"I still have vivid memories of every time I entered the Arabic session not knowing what I was going to learn. If only Mr Toufik (name borrowed) had provided us with an idea about the topic, I would have at least prepared some notes. I did not want to be embarrassed in front of the others. I moved to live in this country (in North Africa) and I wanted to understand more about its culture. I very much wanted to communicate in a way that people would understand what I meant.....I hoped he would not put me in an embarrassing situation....."

The above anecdote stems from a lived learning experience during my adolescence, when I moved to a different country. It continues to evoke a strong emotional response upon recollection. Throughout my teaching journey, this experience has shaped my sensitivity towards ESOL learners, many of whom have shared similar feelings of uncertainty. They frequently expressed concerns about attending lessons without knowing what content would be covered, and whether what they had previously practised would enable them to manage real-life cultural and social interactions in the UK.

The findings related to the first research question, were presented in Chapter 4. These findings were analysed by linking cultural and social dimensions to learners' developing awareness. The data revealed that some ESOL learners possessed only a limited understanding of everyday cultural and social conventions in the UK. These included basic polite expressions (e.g., sorry, please, thank you, you're welcome), queuing behaviour, and social norms such as arranging visits in advance rather than arriving unannounced. However, this knowledge remained superficial and insufficient to support adequate integration, which many ESOL migrants identified as one of their most significant challenges.

The findings further demonstrated that the introduction of negotiated topics in SOW provided learners with an opportunity to articulate their learning needs and priorities. By embedding topics that were directly relevant to their lived experiences, learners were able to establish clearer connections between language learning and social integration. This was particularly evident in their expressed desire to understand and use English idiomatic expressions, which many advanced participants described as challenging and often confusing. This "conundrum" was also reflected in my earlier academic presentations at the University of Sunderland and is further discussed in Chapter 1 and the literature review (see Appendices 2 and 3).

The data showed that learner ownership of the SOW functioned as both a structured resource and a psychological support mechanism. It allowed learners time to prepare, focus on specific topics such as employment, and engage with digital tools to develop relevant linguistic skills in their own time. For example, learners used online resources to practise vocabulary and expressions required for job interviews. In this respect, the findings provide a clear response to the research question: learners' contributions to the SOW enabled them to prepare more effectively for lessons, increased their confidence, and supported more active participation in classroom interaction.

However, this process was not without challenges. It required learners to adapt to new learning practices, take responsibility for preparation, and

sustain motivation. Despite these initial challenges, all participants successfully engaged with and completed the topics within their collaboratively designed SOW.

Moreover, access to a learner-informed SOW encouraged the use of digital technologies, enabling learners to explore educational websites and extend their linguistic knowledge independently. This contributed to a noticeable shift in learners' attitudes towards learning. Participants reported feeling valued, trusted, and capable, developing what is described as a "can-do" mindset. They also expressed a sense of pride in taking ownership of their learning through the SOW. As a result, the ESOL learning experience became more relevant and coherent compared to their previous learning experiences.

While the findings indicated limited evidence of intrinsic motivation, there was strong evidence of externally motivated engagement. Learners formed peer support networks through platforms such as WhatsApp, met in informal settings like meeting in local cafés to prepare presentations, and applied their language skills in real-life contexts, including job interviews. Some progressed to further educational opportunities, including vocational courses, undergraduate degrees, and even enrolling in a CELTA course. These outcomes demonstrate that negotiated SOW can act as a catalyst for increased engagement, confidence, and participation beyond the classroom.

6.4 Summary of Findings for Question 2

RQ2: What pedagogical considerations arise when learners participate in designing Schemes of Work?

I consider Question 2 to be at the heart of this study, as it encapsulates what this research represents both for me as a language teacher and for ESOL pedagogy more broadly. The findings revealed several pedagogical implications, particularly regarding the role of the SOW in fostering a collaborative and active learning environment. The SOW functioned as a tool that brought learners together, creating an atmosphere characterised by engagement, mutual support, and shared responsibility. It facilitated the

formation of small learning communities within peer groups, where learners supported one another and co-constructed their learning experiences. Furthermore, pedagogy played a critical role in reinforcing learners' future aspirations by enabling them to identify and work towards clear future goals. As discussed in the previous chapter, ESOL learners demonstrated an increased ability to set long-term goals, whether related to employment, vocational training or further education.

In this respect, Shepherd (2024) argues that “lessons link to learners’ long-term plans and real-life needs; when you are faced with nothing in the room except those people and their commonalities, you are forced out of necessity to make use of those people as a strategy and a resource.” Learners’ needs therefore became a shared foundation upon which they could negotiate and exchange learning strategies. These strategies, supported by the negotiated SOW and peer collaboration, acted as roadmaps that contributed significantly to increasing learners’ motivation and autonomy, both within classroom dynamics and beyond the classroom.

The findings also highlighted that collaborative learning whether in pairs or small groups was central to learners’ immediate engagement with language learning. As outlined in the discussion chapter, such collaboration created opportunities for interaction and reinforced learners’ focus on their long-term aspirations. The selection of learner-driven topics and associated tasks, such as topic-based discussions, enabled learners to develop linguistic competence in ways that were directly relevant to their lives. This pedagogical approach enhanced their ability to use language both in classroom interactions and in wider social contexts. Importantly, it also fostered a sense of confidence and a developing “can-do” attitude, even among learners who were initially reluctant to participate.

Such pedagogy can be understood as a long-term investment in ESOL learners’ learning development. When implemented effectively, it can strengthen motivation, promote autonomy, and increase learners’ awareness of their personal goals and future trajectories. This aligns with Lamb’s (2017)

theory of motivational teaching, which emphasises the importance of classroom dynamics in supporting language learning. Similarly, Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014) highlight the role of group interaction as a supportive mechanism, rather than a substitute for structured pedagogy. However, implementing this approach presents challenges, as it requires a significant shift from traditional teacher-led practices to a more learner-driven model. Learners need to adapt to becoming active agents in their own learning, which may initially be unfamiliar after years of more passive educational experiences.

The study further demonstrated that ESOL learners enter the classroom with diverse motivations. For some, the primary motivation is linguistic development, particularly learning English within its authentic sociocultural context in the UK. For others, motivation is linked to integration and navigating everyday life. While for many it is connected to future aspirations, including academic progression, employment, or vocational training. The findings also indicated that learners expressed varied preferences regarding the content of their chosen topics. These included themes such as life in the UK, British culture, community-specific practices, colloquial language and slang, safeguarding, the education system, financial literacy, psychological well-being, and concerns about raising children in a multicultural society.

In addition, learners negotiated not only the content of the SOW but also their preferred learning strategies, both within and beyond the classroom. These included working individually, collaboratively with peers, or in small groups. From a pedagogical perspective, addressing such diverse and personalised learning preferences presented challenges. However, engaging learners in clarifying their goals and supporting them in identifying appropriate learning pathways can contribute to more responsive and effective instructional practices.

One example of such instructional practice is the integration of multiple forms of input within a single topic. This may include combining dialogues, short reading texts, and structured writing tasks, all connected to learners' chosen

themes. Such an approach allows learners to deepen their understanding of the topic while simultaneously developing a range of linguistic skills. Importantly, it also helps to bridge the gap between learners' individual needs and their engagement with language learning, fostering enjoyment, motivation, and increased competence.

6.5 Summary of Findings for Question 3

RQ3: How does embedding socio-cultural content within Schemes of Work influence learners' engagement and participation beyond the classroom?

During the data collection phase, it was initially difficult to determine whether the SOW, although designed by the participants, could somehow contribute to learners' integration into society. However, through sustained engagement in collecting and analysing the data, participants' accounts increasingly indicated that the negotiated SOW could support aspects of sociocultural participation. This interpretation was supported when participants engaged with texts that exemplified success in adapting to life in new countries, particularly within the UK context. Learners were able to relate these narratives to real-life stories within their local communities. This connection enabled them to reconceptualise integration as an achievable process rather than an overwhelming challenge. This perception was further reinforced when participants attended a series of talks delivered by a former ESOL learner who had successfully established a sweets business within the local community. Such lived examples enabled sociocultural participation to be understood as attainable, particularly when supported by language development and sociocultural understanding.

In response to Question 3, the findings highlighted the importance of understanding societal success through language practices that are rich in sociocultural content. This included exposure to vocabulary, sentence structures, dialogues, and texts grounded in real-life contexts, as well as learning through media and direct interaction with individuals who had

experienced and navigated integration challenges. These experiences enabled learners to connect language learning with practical, lived realities.

The findings also indicated that embedding sociocultural topics within the SOW facilitated a deeper understanding of the relationship between learners' identities and the norms of the society in which they live. This process influenced learners' attitudes towards adaptation, including their willingness to accept, negotiate, or resist aspects of their new environment. It also highlighted the emotional and psychological dimensions of integration, including experiences of confrontation, uncertainty, and adjustment. Significantly, this approach generated naturally occurring learning opportunities, where tasks aligned with real societal challenges, thereby supporting integration regardless of the extent to which learners chose to adopt new cultural norms.

Question 3 reflects the complexity of learners' experiences, incorporating multiple perspectives, voices, and personal narratives. These diverse experiences contributed to demonstrating the perceived value of the negotiated SOW. The findings indicate that engaging with sociocultural topics both within and beyond the classroom expanded learners' perspectives and fostered a perception of possibility regarding their lives in the UK. This was particularly significant for learners who reported feelings of marginalisation, whether due to systemic factors or interpersonal experiences.

As noted in Chapter 1, while the current ESOL curriculum includes elements of cultural and social content, these are often treated superficially and remain peripheral to core language practices. As a result, they are insufficient to address the complex realities of learners' lives. In contrast, this study demonstrates that engaging with sociocultural norms in a more sustained and purposeful manner enhances the overall teaching and learning process. From a sensible ethnographic perspective, culture and society are central to language learning and require recognition of the diverse needs that ESOL learners bring into the classroom.

Furthermore, the findings highlight that learners' language needs related to integration are varied and often require an advanced linguistic repertoire. This reinforces the need to reconceptualise the SOW as a flexible and evolving pedagogical tool, capable of supporting learning both within and beyond the classroom. It also underscores the importance of responding to the dynamic nature of learners' settlement experiences in the UK, which are subject to a continuous change.

Addressing Question 3 therefore requires a pedagogical approach that prioritises how learners actively mobilise their negotiated SOW through meaningful and purposeful engagement with sociocultural topics. It is evident that reliance on pre-set curriculum content limits learners to a surface-level engagement with their learning needs. Consequently, it is essential for adult learning stakeholders to consider how ESOL provision can better support learners in managing their day to day lives while accommodating comprehensive language development. This includes recognising the importance of learning that is grounded in both a "need to know" and a "need to be aware of" framework, an approach that remains insufficiently addressed within the current curriculum.

6.6 The Importance of this Thesis and its Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes to knowledge by reconceptualising the SOW as a dynamic, negotiable and context-responsive pedagogical tool rather than solely as a teacher-owned planning document. While learner-centred and negotiated approaches are established within language education, this study extends this knowledge by examining how negotiation can be operationalised specifically through the co-construction of SOW with adult ESOL learners in Further Education.

The study makes a conceptual, empirical and pedagogical contribution. Conceptually, it positions the negotiated SOW as a space in which language development, learner agency and sociocultural participation can intersect.

Empirically, it provides contextually grounded evidence of how adult ESOL learners identify and mobilise linguistic and sociocultural priorities when given meaningful opportunities to influence curriculum content. Pedagogically, it demonstrates that learner participation does not remove the role of the teacher; rather, effective co-construction requires professional judgement, scaffolding and mediation to balance learner priorities with institutional and curricular requirements.

A further contribution is the distinction emerging from the findings between learners' **"need to know"** and **"need to be aware of"**. The former relates to linguistic knowledge and practical language requirements, while the latter encompasses the sociocultural knowledge learners may require to understand and navigate everyday life in the UK. Together, these findings offer a more nuanced understanding of negotiated curriculum within adult ESOL and demonstrate how the SOW can function as a bridge between formal language learning and learners' lived social realities.

The significance of the findings relates directly to learners' willingness to accept change and transition from being passive, spoon-fed recipients of language instruction to active contributors to a pedagogical document that was traditionally regarded as the teacher's domain. The SOW emerged as a valuable tool in enhancing learner engagement in practising the English language. Moreover, it contributed to improving the quality and clarity of the goals learners set for themselves. The participants in this study provided a strong representation of how learners can take on active roles, demonstrating agency and impact. This contribution enabled them to bridge cultural and social gaps, address their day-to-day needs, and confront aspects of social language that were previously barriers to integration.

For example, following the data collection and analysis phase, one learner reported an improvement in her relationship with an English neighbour as a result of developing a better understanding of cultural differences. Another learner described how practising potential questions and responses related to her asylum application reduced her anxiety during interviews with the Home

Office and enhanced her ability to respond appropriately, including the use of idiomatic expressions in social interactions. Although these outcomes were observed after the formal data collection phase and therefore are not included as primary data, they nonetheless provide valuable indicative insights into the longer-term impact of the study.

Gabrielatos and Baker (2008) highlight the positioning of ESOL learners, as migrants in the UK, within public and everyday discourse, often being perceived as having a “lower status than the local-born population.” They further argue that migrants are frequently negatively represented in the media, using metaphors such as “flood,” “stream,” and “invasion,” which contribute to their marginalisation. During the interviews, several participants shared experiences of encountering prejudicial and anti-migrant comments, particularly during their first months and years in the UK. The video presented in my second presentation at Sunderland university (07 July 2023) illustrated a personalised account of an ESOL learner’s emotional struggle when attempting to participate in social and academic interactions. This difficulty was not related to linguistic competence, as the participant was already a qualified teacher in her home country. Yet, the learner was confronted with several yes(s) and but(s), leading to a lack of recognition.

In this context, Chapter 2 draws on Bourdieu (1986), who argues that being recognised within a society requires not only linguistic competence but also the possession of social and cultural capital namely, the knowledge, skills, and dispositions valued by the dominant social group. This perspective is further supported by Cooke and Simpson (2008), who emphasise that communication involves not only linguistic ability but also audibility in terms of social and cultural capital. Many migrants lack such capital, particularly in the early stages of settlement, and for some, the absence of this capital persists over time.

This research offers an extended and nuanced perspective on adult ESOL provision, aligning with Shepherd’s (2024) critique of limited personalisation in FE and his emphasis on linking ESOL lessons to learners’ long-term plans

and real-life needs. The strength of this study lies in its integration of participant-informed curriculum development, as detailed in previous chapters. By positioning learners as co-constructors of the SOW, the study foregrounds their responsibility for learning beyond the classroom, thereby strengthening its pedagogical contribution.

The findings support the importance of negotiating the SOW with learners as a means of extending learning beyond guided classroom hours. This approach enables learners to focus on topics that are important to their lives, rather than engaging solely with imposed content that may not address their broader social and linguistic needs. The research demonstrates that higher-level ESOL learners (Entry 3, Level 1, and Level 2) are capable of engaging with more advanced and contextually rich language beyond the constraints of examination criteria. Many participants prioritised ownership of the SOW and used digital tools to support their language learning, particularly outside the classroom, applying their learning in real-life social contexts.

Furthermore, the study shows that having access to a learner-informed SOW contributed to improved preparation for learning, sustained motivation, enhanced collaboration, increased autonomy, and reduced anxiety, particularly for learners who previously lacked confidence in pair or group work. From the learners' perspectives, the negotiation of the SOW played a significant role in validating their experiences and ideas, particularly in contexts of uncertainty, such as awaiting official recognition of settlement by the Home Office. In such circumstances, the SOW became more than a pedagogical tool; it functioned as a stabilising and empowering resource.

The findings further demonstrated that negotiating and sharing the SOW can act as a catalyst for transforming learners' attitudes towards learning. It encouraged them to search for knowledge, express their opinions, and actively participate in shaping their learning journey. It also reduced feelings of embarrassment and uncertainty when attending classes, while enhancing confidence and clarity regarding learning purposes. These findings indicate that understanding learners' goals, needs, and aspirations requires an

expanded investigative approach that considers the broader sociocultural contexts in which their experiences are embedded.

In addition, this research highlights the importance of incorporating teachers' perspectives into pedagogical development. As noted by Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014), this remains an underdeveloped area that requires greater attention in teacher education. The study demonstrates that teachers' awareness and responsiveness to learners' experiences significantly influence the quality of learning within and beyond the classroom, as well as its impact on learners' wider social lives.

The contribution to knowledge in language pedagogy is further evidenced through learners' activation of prior knowledge and their focus on acquiring specific linguistic skills aligned with their individual needs. Ownership of the SOW enabled learners to extend their learning into their personal environments, using digital tools without time constraints. This included practising speaking skills through online resources, repeating audio materials to improve pronunciation, using subtitles to support comprehension, and employing translation applications to bridge understanding between languages. Learners also engaged in collaborative comparison of their work with peers, further reinforcing their learning.

Such practices, which could not be fully accommodated within guided hours, illustrate the significance of learning beyond the classroom. This extended learning was brought back into the classroom and applied in social and cultural contexts, as evidenced through ongoing discussions, feedback, and learner narratives. Improvements in communication, particularly outside the classroom, were reflected in participants' vignettes and personal accounts.

Finally, the contribution of this research was recognised by colleagues who taught some of the participants in subsequent academic years. These teachers observed that sharing the SOW with learners transformed language learning into an active and purposeful process. ESOL learners began to value their learning more deeply and perceived themselves as equal to learners in

other departments, such as Functional Skills, GCSE, and mathematics, within the adult learning centre where the research was conducted.

6.7 Limitations and Challenges

All studies have limitations and challenges, and this current study is no exception.

Challenges Faced:

1. The initial challenge I encountered at the outset of the research was the difficulty in maintaining a clear focus on the central problem of the enquiry. Although I had identified ESOL learners' linguistic needs, I did not sufficiently narrow them to align with the specific focus of the study. Consequently, it proved challenging to establish clear connections between my field of enquiry and the existing literature.
2. The number of ESOL learners involved in the study was disproportionately large, consisting of 24 participants across two different classes. In addition, the participants presented diverse and complex learning needs within a single cohort. This made it difficult to isolate and analyse a specific aspect of the research focus.
3. Writing the literature review chapter presented a significant challenge. My primary intention was to foreground ESOL learners' voices and enable their participation in co-constructing the SOW. However, as I progressed through the methodology, developing interview questions, conducting discussions, and engaging with feedback from monthly tutorials, the study evolved. This process highlighted the necessity of revisiting and strengthening the literature review to enhance both its breadth and depth.
4. A further challenge arose from the inclusion of two additional participants-contributed accounts alongside the original qualitative methods. This placed considerable demands on time and required the organisation of additional online meetings. Despite these

constraints, the participants-contributed accounts proved valuable, as they provided in-depth insights and ensured that participants' experiences were represented comprehensively.

5. Another issue was the unintentional duplication of data. Driven by a desire to capture diverse perspectives, I recruited participants from two separate classes. While this approach generated richer comparative insights, it also resulted in overlapping data, as many participants shared similar linguistic, social, cultural, and integration experiences. In retrospect, focusing on a single cohort may have been more efficient and equally effective.
6. A further challenge related to the extent to which participants translated their expressed enthusiasm into practice. Although many learners engaged actively in interviews, discussion and contributed accounts, some demonstrated reluctance when applying the co-constructed SOW in practice. This reflects a broader reality within ESOL contexts, where a minority of learners may remain disengaged despite available opportunities.
7. It is also important to recognise that teaching is a demanding profession. Any pedagogical intervention that requires additional time such as negotiating the SOW, must therefore be carefully justified in terms of its value and feasibility within existing workloads.

Limitations

Beyond the challenges outlined above, several methodological and contextual limitations must be acknowledged when interpreting the findings.

Methodological Limitations

1. Self-reported data bias: The reliance on semi-structured interviews, discussion and participants-contributed accounts introduces the possibility of social desirability bias. Participants may have expressed positive views about the co-constructed SOW in order to align with perceived expectations of the researcher.

2. Observation effect: The presence of the researcher during observations may have influenced both teaching practices and learner behaviour. This could have resulted in more structured or performative interactions than would typically occur in a natural classroom setting.
3. Interpretive nature of qualitative data: The findings are interpretive and shaped by the researcher's positionality and engagement with data. Alternative interpretations of the same data are therefore possible, reflecting the interpretivist orientation of the study.

Range and General Applicability Limitations

1. The findings are specific to the ESOL context, where language barriers add complexity to the negotiation process. This may limit transferability to educational contexts where learners operate in their first language.
2. The participants-contributed accounts, as part of a qualitative approach, involve a relatively small number of participants. As such, the findings are context-dependent and may not be directly generalisable to larger populations, different ESOL levels (e.g., literacy versus advanced), or diverse cultural settings.
3. The effectiveness of negotiating and co-constructing the SOW may be influenced by the teacher's philosophy, skills, and willingness to adopt such an approach. Therefore, the findings reflect a specific teacher–learner dynamic rather than a universally applicable example.
4. The negotiation and co-construction of the SOW present challenges at lower ESOL entry levels, where learners may lack the linguistic proficiency required to participate fully. However, this limitation also points towards a potential area for pedagogical development, which will be discussed in the following section.

As in many aspects of education and life more broadly, not all learners will fully engage with or benefit from the opportunities presented to them. This

must be taken into account when evaluating the overall effectiveness of any study. Nevertheless, these limitations do not diminish the value of this research; rather, they provide a transparent and critical framework through which the findings can be understood and developed further.

6.8 Recommendations

This study was primarily designed to investigate how best to equip ESOL learners to function effectively both within and beyond the classroom, in ways that meet their linguistic, cultural, and social needs. The findings indicate that co-constructing the SOW with learners, when implemented appropriately, can serve as an effective pedagogical intervention. This approach, supported by the use of digital applications, enables learners to take responsibility for their own linguistic development, cultural and social learning, and wider integration.

Discussions with learners revealed that explicit knowledge of topics they wish to explore, particularly those related to culture and society, enhances their understanding of diversity and inclusion. This, in turn, supports their ability to navigate social differences and integrate more effectively into UK society. In order to facilitate this process, it is essential that teachers develop an understanding of learners' backgrounds, including their cultural, social, and life experiences. Such awareness enables teachers to provide worthwhile and purposeful learning experiences, thereby enhancing the relevance of language learning within the learners' new societal context.

With increasing migration, ESOL classrooms are becoming more diverse, presenting both opportunities and challenges. The education system must therefore adapt to meet the complex and evolving needs of ESOL learners. In this context, enabling learners to embed their own topics of interest within the SOW is a key strategy for ensuring that their voices are valued. This diversity should be viewed as an asset, supporting the development of pedagogical strategies that scaffold learning in responsive and inclusive ways.

Furthermore, teachers' willingness to engage with learners not only as language learners but as individuals with broader life needs is crucial. ESOL

teachers often serve as sources of trust, safety, and support, particularly for newly arrived migrants. Recognising and responding to this responsibility is essential, especially for new and less experienced practitioners. Developing an understanding of the complexities of learners' experiences can foster positive learner–teacher relationships and create a supportive learning environment that facilitates integration.

It is anticipated that such approaches will enhance learners' linguistic, cultural, and social understanding, thereby supporting their integration into society. Increasing teachers' awareness of learner diversity and needs can lead to more effective pedagogical practices. The growing diversity within ESOL provision, including among teaching staff, presents an opportunity to further develop and refine learner-centred approaches. This places a responsibility on teachers, administrators, and curriculum designers to deepen their understanding of ESOL learners' backgrounds and needs, and to embed such practices across provision.

Observations from this research indicate that staff within the adult learning centre have become more open, reflective, and responsive in their interactions with learners. This shift has contributed to better meeting the needs of culturally diverse learners, particularly within the context of a multicultural community. However, given the limited prior knowledge many ESOL learners have regarding the linguistic, cultural, and social expectations of the UK, it is necessary for ESOL curricula to incorporate a more comprehensive exploration of both learners' own cultures and those of the host society.

Observations arising from initial assessments conducted in the academic years 2024–2025 indicate that learners increasingly require opportunities to explore both the diversity within their peer groups and the broader community. This highlights the need for pedagogical practices that are supported by ongoing teacher training, preparation, and professional development, ensuring that teaching practices remain responsive to learners' evolving needs.

The experiences of participants in this study were shared with teachers in subsequent academic years, leading to several key reflections:

1. Negotiating the SOW with learners enables teachers to better understand culturally diverse learners and their specific learning needs.
2. Co-constructing the SOW supports more empathetic and responsive teaching practices, particularly for learners who have experienced emotional or psychological challenges upon their arrival in the UK.

However, it must also be acknowledged that not all stakeholders, teachers, administrators, or managers share this perspective. This highlights an ongoing tension between the transformative aims of ESOL provision and institutional priorities relating to assessment and funding requirements. Addressing this tension requires further development in the following areas:

1. Developing a deeper understanding of who ESOL learners are and what their needs entail, so that this ethos can be embedded as a natural approach within adult education.
2. Investigating the extent to which teachers are prepared to meet ESOL learners' expectations, including engagement with continuous professional development and subject-specific expertise.
3. Exploring strategies to foster alignment between institutional values and learner-centred pedagogical approaches.
4. Examining the level of awareness among ESOL practitioners regarding the significance of learners' sociocultural needs and its impact on curriculum design, pedagogy, and learners' lives.

Through such developments a more sustainable framework be established that enables all staff to engage effectively with the approaches advocated in this study.

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendations for ESOL Teacher Practitioners

1. Formal training in co-construction: Teacher education and continuing professional development (CPD) programmes should include training on the pedagogical value and practical implementation of negotiated SOW.
2. Resource allocation for planning: Institutions should provide dedicated time for teachers and learners to engage in relevant curriculum negotiation, recognising that co-construction is time intensive.
3. Developing 'negotiation literacy': Teachers should implement scaffolding strategies that support learners in articulating their needs and engaging critically with the curriculum. This is particularly important for learners who are unfamiliar with participatory approaches. Future work should also explore how such practices can be adapted for lower-level ESOL learners.

Recommendations for Institutions and Policy

1. Flexible SOW policies: Educational institutions should review existing quality assurance frameworks to allow for adaptable, learner-driven SOW, rather than rigid adherence to pre-defined curricula.
2. Assessment alignment: Further exploration of alternative assessment models, such as portfolio-based or continuous assessment, is recommended to better align with negotiated and non-linear learning pathways.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. Longitudinal studies: Future research should examine the long-term impact of co-constructed SOW on learner motivation, autonomy, and retention over extended periods.

2. Transferability: Further studies should investigate the applicability of this approach across different educational contexts, including English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Functional Skills (FS), English for Academic Purposes (EAP), and vocational or apprenticeship training.
3. Teacher-focused research: Additional research should explore the psychological and professional impact of co-construction on teachers, including changes in professional identity, workload, and perceived efficacy.

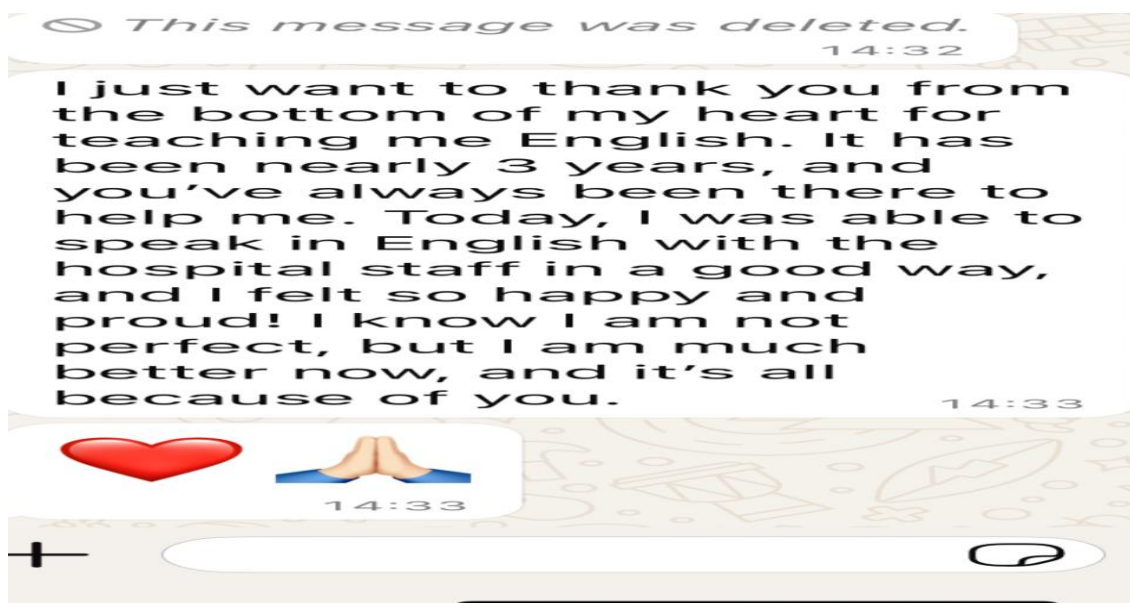
6.9 Researcher Reflexivity

Conducting this practitioner inquiry required sustained reflexive attention to my dual role as teacher and researcher. The process of collecting, analysing and interpreting qualitative data developed my awareness of how my professional experience, assumptions and relationships with participants could shape both data generation and interpretation. Rather than treating this position as neutral, I sought to make it visible through reflective notes, methodological documentation, discussion with other researchers and repeated engagement with participants' accounts. This reflexive process also strengthened my understanding of the complexities faced by adult ESOL learners when navigating language, social expectations and participation in the UK.

The observation was a valuable technique that facilitated a reflection of my own teaching methods and equipped me to search for suitable pedagogical styles to embed in my teaching. I reflected on how pedagogy could be applied purposefully in practice to support ESOL learners to make sense of their learning and consequently establish a clearer vision of their future as residents in the UK. In the current ESOL classes and previous ones who had subsequently moved on to work with other teachers, I now appreciate the effort necessary for learners to be able to cope with a language with all its complexities in order to secure a decent life in this country. This directly reflects the personal experience during the researcher childhood.

I had to admit to myself that I had difficulty in understanding the significance relating to the literature. I came to the opinion that literature review was of limited relevance regarding my primary aim of encouraging the learners to contribute to the development of the content of the SOW. However, after reviewing the literature chapter more than once and reflecting on my supervisor's comments and advice, I developed an understanding of the cruciality of the literature as it enabled me to benefit from the work of other researchers.

I should also acknowledge that I found the research/PhD fellow students' group at the University of Sunderland very encouraging along with all the support with which I was provided during the monthly meetings with my supervisor. The on-site and online seminars along with my contribution to two conferences and receiving good feedback on them, was the driving force to develop my awareness and skills in the domain of research. Nevertheless, it remains my believe that there is always space to increase knowledge and to improve my research skills. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that when learners are positioned as active contributors to curriculum design, ESOL classrooms can become spaces of purposeful engagement, empowerment, and social participation. Negotiated curriculum, when carefully facilitated, offers a pathway towards more inclusive, responsive, and transformative language education within the FE sector. ***An epiphany from a satisfied learner.***



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Appendices

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Study Title: Negotiated Curriculum and Integration in Further Education
ESOL: A Qualitative Study of Co-Designed Schemes of Work

An open invite to ESOL learners

I am about to embark in research and would like to invite you to take part. This research is directly related to you and your learning journey. It investigates finding ways to support you understand and learn about cultural and social norms in the UK that may bridge any gaps you encounter relating to your integration in this society. Your experiences will be central to the development of this research. Moreover, supporting me in this project, is an endeavour that will enable both you and I to seek suitable and quicker ways to make progress in learning the English language with all its complexities in your own time when you are not in class.



1- Your role and what am I looking for

I would like you to share information with me relating to any work you do when you are not in class. For example, your homework, when and who do you speak English with? What issues do you face in language when you speak to others who do not speak your language? What most do you find challenging about the English language when you are outside the class? How do you cope with those issues? Do you seek help? From whom? How do you feel when you find speaking challenging? How do you feel when you understand the message said but you do not understand what it means? Do these challenges impact the way you want to feel living in the UK? I want to know whether you chose to join the ESOL classes by your own desire or someone else encouraged you or maybe challenged you to enroll in the course. I want to know how you introduce and share elements of your own culture in English

with others who only use the English language. I would also want you to suggest ways that will help you practise the English language beyond the classroom and adopt them as good learning habits.

2- Consent and confidentiality

First, I would like to reassure you that this research will not impede your course. You will be attending your classes in the assigned times and days. I will then have an informal chat and interview with you. I will listen to what you tell me, and I will respect all your opinions and views with no judgment at all. I will check the time you will spend on tasks through the padlets. I will check the suitability of the topics you choose to investigate and share amongst you. I will also look at your feedback and your messages to me on your ILP. However, due to my sight disability, I need to take your consent to record you (audio) when you are giving me the information. The recordings will help me transcribe the data correctly as I listen to it. Therefore, the research needs your honest opinions and all the answers you provide form the truth.

To protect your identity, I will use pseudonyms (like "Learner 1" or "Learner 2" and cosmic and fruits names) in my notes and final report. Your real name will never be used. All information I collect will be stored securely on my encrypted laptop, and it will be permanently deleted once the research is complete.

Please check the boxes below to give your permission:

- ☐ 1. I confirm that my participation in this research is voluntary, and I understand I can withdraw at any time.
- ☐ 2. I understand my role in this research, and I am happy to participate.
- ☐ 3. I give my permission for my voice to be recorded for transcription purposes.
- ☐ 4. I give my permission for my ILP notes and other relevant class work to be used for this research.

Appendix 1: The Consent Form



Participation Consent Form – Students

Study title: Negotiated Curriculum and Integration in Further Education ESOL: A Qualitative Study of Co-Designed Schemes of Work

Pseudonym code: _____

- ☐ I am over the age of 16 (insert box for participant to initial)
- ☐ I have read and understood the attached study information and, by signing below, I consent to participate in this study
- ☐ I understand that I have the right to withdraw from study without giving a reason at any time during the study itself.
- ☐ I understand that I also have the right to change my mind about participating in the study for a short period after the study has concluded, i.e., prior to answering the questions and the information being recorded and stored on my protected computer password.
- ☐ I give consent to the fact that the information used in my verbal discussions with you can be used as part of this research.
- ☐ If a completed questionnaire is used, information from this can be taken from this and used as part of the research.
- ☐ When recordings take place, (Zoom/Teams) no names will be used in them, and the information will be stored on a password protected device to protect the data.

Signed: __S.C._____

Print name: __SALIMA COPLEY_____ Date: __22-05-2022_____

(Your name, along with your pseudonym code is important to help match your data from two questionnaires. It will not be used for any purpose other than this.)

Witnessed by: _____

Print name: _____ Date:

Appendix 2: Epiphanies from dissatisfied learners

My reply to these expressions was 'Not all is lost. We can do something about it'. To begin with, I was shaken. But the pronoun we in my response, entailed that the problem concerns both them and I to work towards a reasonable solution as a team. I could sense the anguish and anxiety in dialogues. I counselled them as much as I could, but they still emphasised that something must be done to help them see the value of attending the course. The participants who contributed to this work were not the only learners who expressed such epiphanies. I have heard it all before but now embarking on the research gave me good grounds to help them.

Appendix 3: Table 1: Research Q1- Area Of Knowledge-Attitudes and Thoughts

Can the learners' contribution to the design of S.O.W promote their cultural and social awareness in society?

Area of knowledge: Learner Attitudes & thoughts	How to find out
Do learners understand what a scheme of work is? What do they think they want to learn and be more aware of in terms of themes? Do they wish to contribute to the schemes of work?	semi-structured interviews focus group Learners' accounts observation - research notes taking
Do they wish to be in possession of their designed S.O.W copies? What to do with this copy? Where to use it? How to use it?	interview focus groups Learners' accounts observation - research notes taking
Would the ownership of the newly designed S.O.W initiate more learning practice outside the classroom? How?	Interview observation - research notes taking

Learner Attitudes & preferences	
What do they think of learning, searching and preparing their own lessons prior to attending class in this new learning way?	interview focus group Learners' accounts Contributed account-research notes taking
What are the advantages of using the S.O.W in their learning practice at home?	interview focus group Learners' accounts observation - research notes taking
Do they want to practice the language in this way and how helpful is it?	interview focus group Learners' accounts observation - research notes taking
What is their opinion of having to contribute to the input of the S.O.W and has the document made any impact to their learning outside the classroom? Has it helped? Any challenges?	interview focus group Learners' accounts observation - research notes taking

Appendix 4: Table2: Research Q2- Area of Knowledge- Assessment- Attitudes-Preferences

What pedagogical considerations are needed when learners design their schemes of work in order to increase their motivation and autonomy in class and beyond?

Area of knowledge	How to find out
Learner assessment & knowledge	
- How often do they use their S.O.W? - For those who do not, what stops them using their S.O.W? - How do you search for topic related? - What technology application helps them search for knowledge of a particular topic? - If you learn about a topic on youtube or a video, do you use the subtitles in English to aid your comprehension? - How often do they use technology to help with real examples of situational themes? - How long do they spend learning outside the classroom? - Do they communicate with native speakers? Who are they?How frequent?	Schemes Of Work YouTube analytics data Semi-structured Interviews Focus group Learners' accounts Observation- research notes taking
Learner Attitudes & Preferences	
- Which pedagogic mediations do the learners use to aid their language learning outside the classroom? - S.O.W designed by the learners themselves - Other apps - Self-testing tasks	Interview focus group Learners' accounts

- Informal learning with family and friends - Being in the heart of real cultural and social situations (work-job interviews-shops-post office-pubs-police station-other officialdom....) - Others	observation - research notes taking Learners' accounts
- What helps the learners' motivation & autonomy to spend more time learning? - Which interventions are mostly used?	Interview focus group Learners' accounts observation - research notes taking
- Are there any other interventions that should be given to the learners to engage them more and better with learning?	focus group interview observation- research notes taking
- Which of the four skills they found easier to practise: Reading-Writing-Speaking-Listening-Asking questions-Giving feedback-Self testing-Reading subtitles-Using translators/dictionaries-Engaging in	interview contributed account

social conversations with native speakers....?	observation - research notes taking
Teacher	
- Which strategy did the learners use to acquire the language out of classroom and what proves that for me?	interview Contributed account observation - research notes taking
- To what extent was I able to successfully meet the learners' learning needs by adapting a S.O.W content and assigning it to them?	observation - research notes taking

Appendix 5: Table 3: Research Q3

To what extent will suggesting embedding topics related to socio-cultural norms in ESOL schemes of work benefit the learners' motivation, autonomy and integration?

Evaluation questions
Is there clear experience of learners extending their learning time beyond the classroom aided by owning the new S.O.W? If so, to what extent and how is it evidenced?
Is there a clear experience of learners developing their English language skills beyond the classroom? If so, alongside the ownership of the S.O.W, what other tools can be suggested or are

the learners using to develop the learning practice beyond the classroom?

Can the co-construction and negotiation of S.O.W be widely fostered in ESOL teaching and learning practice? If standardised, can it develop an empathy towards learners' awareness about their role as important contributors, learning in general, raise social and cultural awareness, prompt, motivation & autonomy and leads to better integration? If so, what proofs are there?

Appendix 6: Vignette 1- An initiative and fearless attitude-

"I will not be anxious when I come to class....."

"I know what I am looking for because I know the topic"

"I know what to revise for next lesson because that is the topic I added to the SOW"

"I know next lesson for class and I can work on it on Saturday"

" I can search for videos related to topics and collect new vocabulary...."

"Some resources are on youtube.....I search for them when my children sleep....."

" I feel more active....."

"I use the translation App on my mobile phones"

"It is great to have The SOW document, I can prepare the lesson and generate vocabulary....."

"I can send my work through the padlet for peer, group and teacher correction....."

Appendix 7: Table 4- Participants' profiles

ID	Modes Completed (SL/R/W)	Gender	Age (2023)	Nationality	Job Status	Data Sources Collected (IJ/FGA/OS/CA)	ILP Data	Attended ESOL Pre-2023?
Cohort 1 & 2: Entry 3								
1	SL, R, W	F	50–59	Bangladeshi / Italian	Not employed	IJ, FGA, OS	Yes	Yes
2	R, W	F	50–59	Bangladeshi	Not employed	IJ, FGA, OS	Yes	Yes
3	R, W	F	30–35	Bangladeshi	Not employed	IJ, FGA, OS	Yes	Yes
4	R, W	F	40–55	Bangladeshi	Not employed	IJ, FGA, OS	Yes	Yes
5	W	F	30–39	Angolan / Portuguese	Not employed	IJ, FGA, OS	Yes	No
6	R, W	F	40–50	Bangladeshi / Spanish	Not employed	IJ, FGA, OS	Yes	Yes
7	SL, R, W	F	25–30	Kurdish	Self-employed	IJ, FGA, OS	Yes	Yes
8	SL, R, W	F	50–59	Ukrainian	Self-employed	IJ, FGA, CA (Dec)	Yes	No
9	SL, R, W	F	40–49	Bangladeshi / Spanish	Not employed	IJ, FGA, OS	Yes	Yes
10	W	F	30–40	Pakistani	Not employed	IJ, FGA, OB	Yes	No
11	SL, R, W	F	30–39	Bangladeshi / Italian	Not employed	IJ, FGA, OS	Yes	Yes
12	SL, R, W	F	40–49	Albanian	Employed	IJ, FGA, OS	Yes	No
13	SL	F	40–49	Polish	Employed	IJ, FGA, OS	Yes	No
14	SL, R, W	F	40–49	Somali	Employed	IJ, FGA, OS	Yes	Yes
15	SL, R, W	F	30–39	Italian	Employed	IJ, FGA, OS	Yes	Yes
16	SL, R, W	F	40–49	Bangladeshi / Italian	Not employed	IJ, FGA, OS	Yes	Yes
Cohort 1 & 2: Level 1								
01	SL, R	M	60–69	Pakistani	Self-employed	FGA, CA (Dec)	Yes	No
02	SL	F	30–40	Bangladeshi	Not employed	IJ, FGA, OS	Yes	Yes

ID	Modes Completed (SL/R/W)	Gender	Age (2023)	Nationality	Job Status	Data Sources Collected (IJ/FGA/OS/CA)	ILP Data	Attended ESOL Pre-2023?
03	SL, R, W	F	40–49	Ukrainian	Self-employed	FGA, CA (Dec)	Yes	No
04	SL, R, W	F	30–39	Bangladeshi / Italian	Not employed	IJ, FGA, OS	Yes	No
05	SL, R	F	40–49	Albanian / Italian	Employed	IJ, FGA, OS	Yes	Yes
06	SL, R, W	F	30–39	Turkish	Not employed	IJ, FGA, OS	Yes	No
07	SL	F	40–49	Bangladeshi / Italian	Not employed	IJ, FGA, OS	No	No
08	SL, R	F	40–49	Bangladeshi	Not employed	FGA, OS	Yes	No

**Appendix 8: Table 5 – Course Organisation and Guided Learning Hours
(Academic Year 2023)**

Phase1- Guided Learning Hours

Table 5- Course Organisation-Academic year: 2023

Ph	Cohorts	Weekly Guided Learning Hours	
Ph1 June-Sep 23	Level1 Reading Entry 3 Speaking & Listening	L1 R= 5 hours E3 S/L= 7 hours	Self-study= 4 to 6 hours Self-study= 5 to 8 hours (with the additional 4 hours on zoom prior to the exams)
Ph2 Sep-Jan 23/24	Level 1 Speaking & Listening Entry 3 Writing	L1 S/L= 7 hours E3 W= 7 hours	Self-study= Vary from learner to learner plus 6 additional zoom hours Self-study= 4-6 hours

Appendix 9: Phase2- Knowledge Focus and Methods

Table 6

Phase	Knowledge focus	Methods
Phase 1 April-July 23	Techniques of using the scheme of work Using time to study beyond the classroom	Interviews Observation in research diary Comments on ILP

	Embedding participants' topics in need into S.O.W Motivation to prepare at home Motivation to use digital technology to search and self-study Comparison of sharing the S.O.W to non-sharing it Learners' perceptions and habits of independent learning using a new strategy of sharing a S.O.W to develop learning Initial evaluation of using the S.O.W prior to class	
Phase 2 September-December 23	Attitudes and experiences of six interventions to increase learning time and motivation: Preferences and motivation to study The ownership of S.O.W Mobile phones Translation app YouTube Search engine	Interviews Observation in research diary Focus group X2 contributed account Comments on ILP

Phase 3 Dec 23- Feb24	Comparison and evaluation of learning before sharing the s.o.w and after Importance of using digital technology to assist with the search during the learning beyond the classroom Evaluation of the learning practice NOW compared to previous standard way of learning Development of new learning habits Continue learning during the holiday or teachers' absence.....	Interviews Focus group X contribute account Observation in research diary Comments on ILP
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Appendix 10: Initial Interview Questions (Term 1)

- ☐ How satisfied are you with the ESOL course?
- ☐ What area of the ESOL course made you motivated and active?
- ☐ Which area of the ESOL course did or do you find more beneficial?
- ☐ To what extent do you feel more confident in using what you learnt outside the classroom?
- ☐ How often do you use the new vocabulary in your daily life?

- How often do you engage in English conversation outside in the community?
- Has the course helped in any way to successfully use English in the community?
- Have the topics you practised in your ESOL course helped you to support your children with their homework?
- Have you been able to respond to different social queries?
- Do you feel more connected to the British society through your involvement with the ESOL course?
- What stops you communicating in English once you leave your class?
- Apart from what you practise in class, what other ways do you use to practise your English outside the classroom?
- How up to date are you with the BBC News? Do you watch the BBC News? If you do, how well do you understand the current affairs in English?
- Do you get support in the language outside the classroom?
- Do you know of any good ways to practise your English outside the classroom?
- What area of the English language you find challenging in the wider community?
- How prepared are you when coming to class?
- How do you feel when you are practising the language in class?

- Are there any particular topics do you want to explore in class in English?
- Would it help you if you knew the topic of the lesson before you come to class? If yes, in what way does it help you? If no, justify your answer?
- How can I help you, so you feel you are actively taking part in the language practice

Appendix 11: Focus Group Questions (Term 2)

Term two group interview questions

- Do you know what a **scheme of work** is?
- What do you think you want to learn and be more aware of in terms of themes?
- Do you wish to contribute to the SOW?
- Do you wish to be in possession of your newly designed SOW copy?
- What to do you do with this copy?
- Will you refer to this SOW details to generate vocabulary?
- When we share the SOW, how will you use it?
- What do you think of learning, searching and preparing your own lessons before you come to class?
- How will you benefit from using the SOW at home?
- Do you think it will make you ready to take part in the lesson?
- What is your opinion in having to contribute to the input of the SOW?
- Will it help? Any anticipated challenges?

Appendix 12: Entry 3 Trial SOW Overview

First trial Scheme of Work-Entry 3	First trial Scheme of Work-Entry 3
Course Name:	ESOL E3 S/L
Start Date:	03-07-23
Sessions:	9 over 3 weeks
Course Aim/s:	The input of all 6 learners To support ourselves to be confident enough to engage in conversations and search for the necessary support to improve communicative skills. To work towards an E3 standard in all skills but mainly Speaking/Listening in this course. To work on improving communication grammatically correct and use correct & specific vocabulary in order to manage a decent conversation with others outside the class. To promote the use of the cultural and social English in the chosen topics to use outside the classroom when necessary.
Course Goals/ Outcomes : (skills/knowledge/ attitudes)	To be able to learn new vocabulary and recognise vocabulary learnt previously and use them correctly when speaking. Promoting knowledge in-group discussion related to current issues such as: Mental Health, Safeguarding and sexual abuse, harassment and grooming in children's lives and equally adults'. Expressing opinions in English without being embarrassed. Verbally answer questions according to texts' information at an E3 standard. Use informal language then progress to formal language when responding to every day queries. Learn formal vocabulary, idioms and modern slang then working towards developing comprehensible: sentences, short dialogues and wider discussions, which may help us understand what native people say.

	The input of the graduate learner alone As I completed a course in Mental Health, I will endeavour to embed MH subjects as part of an active learning process in our scheme of work. All will develop an understanding in relation to: Depression, Autism, ADHD, Anxiety.....(At this stage, reading short texts and discussing some of these MH issues will support us to understand these topics and deal with them if/when necessary)
Teaching Resources Used: (type the letter a if applicable)	Teaching Resources Used: (type the letter a if applicable)
Assessment Methods: (please tick as appropriate)	Assessment Methods: (please tick as appropriate)
Teaching and Learning Techniques: (please tick as appropriate)	Teaching and Learning Techniques: (please tick as appropriate)

Appendix 13: Entry 3 Co-Constructed SOW

Session No. & Date	Content/ Topic	Learning Objectives: by the end of the session students will be able to	Teaching & Learning Activity/Method	Resources (Differentiated)	Assessment Methods (For and Of) (include progress reviews)

W 1 13/07/23	Fear Introduction to WH questions Mini presentation - talking about fear or any related topic. Text: "Amy fears the change"	Finding ways to keep our class going To discuss learners' abilities and needs. To get engaged in various discussions and most importantly, to promote learners' voice. ----- ----- -----	Q&A Listening Responding	Youtube Google engine	Q&A Completed exercises Peer assessment Discussion Upload in padlet
W 2 17/07/23	- Feelings/Emotions How do you feel now compared to the early weeks/months when the virus appeared? Dialogues to practise	To be able to: recognise 5/10 adjectives related to feelings & emotions, feel confident to use the comparative adjectives,	Listening activities Eliciting information and key words that are associated with the topic. individual work reading	WB Q'aire Esolnexus .com British Council website Youtube short videos for discussion	Obs Q&A Peer assessment Discussion Link to be emailed

	Youtube short videos for discussion	use of the past simple correctly to express how you felt in 2020, use the present simple correctly to express how you feel now. Understand a story in a short video and say what you think.	text Writing:Gap fill Dialogue practice in pairs		for learners to do the homework.
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Appendix 14: Level 1 and 2 Co-constructed SOW

Scheme of Work	Scheme of Work
Course Name:	ESOL L1/2 Speaking&Listening
Start / End Date:	04/07/23
Sessions:	03 weeks

Course Aim/s:	To contribute to the design of the S.O.W by selecting topics of interest that might help when communicating beyond the classroom To be able to improve confidence in order to develop accuracy in communication. To be able to improve grammar and build on vocabulary. To promote and embed Core values within the learning journey To be able to enhance employment opportunity and to increase ability to function independently and confidently in the community. To use compound and complex sentences when giving verbal accounts To use a variety of intonations when asking questions or showing astonishment (?/ !) To distinguish between formal and informal language To use language in social situations outside the classroom, particularly if we visit the local library To use a variety of tenses – present simple, present perfect, simple past, past perfect, future To explore Mental Health Issues' topics and develop an understanding. To explore sustainability issues' topics and develop an understanding To develop website searches' skills to help improve English language skills and to work towards a level ½ S/L exam. All learners to contribute to the design of the S.O.W and show what topics of interest they would like to investigate. Learners will be provided with a copy of the doc since they have contributed to its design. This will help them search for relative knowledge independently beyond the classroom. By getting engaged in such tasks, will give them an idea of what the next lesson is about and remove the tension of walking to class without any knowledge.
Teaching Resources Used:	Teaching Resources Used: (type the letter a if applicable)

the letter a if applicable)	
Assessment Method s: (please tick as appropriate)	Assessment Methods: (please tick as appropriate)

Level 1/2 Detailed SOW Sessions

Session No. & Date	Content/ Topic	Content/ Topic	T	Teaching & Learning Activity/Method	Resources (Differentiated)	Assessment Methods (For and Of) (include progress reviews)
Week 1 04/07/23	One to one discussion Designing	One to one discussion Designing	Discuss progress and any areas of develop	Q&A Make notes Discussion	Sharing the S.O.W Document-	Obs/Q &A

	our S.O.W Looking at different topics among which are: Learning beyond the classroom- Culture- Sustainability- Mental HI	our S.O.W Looking at different topics among which are: Learning beyond the classroom- Culture- Sustainability- Mental HI	ment Work on / check progress	Correctio n/coachin g Writing&d iscussing Key points	Lesson workshe ets HW work sheets Website	
Week 2 05/07	Topic: The queuing system in England and in other countries. Compound & Complex Sentences CV – give	Topic: The queuing system in England and in other countries. Compound & Complex Sentences CV – give	recognis e and use compound and complex sentences Use and / but / so / or to write 3 compound sentence	C&I TT Pairwork Individual work	Engvid. com Powerp oint slides Compound & complex sentences	Obs / PT /Q&A/ Q

	listen to opinions N – times, dates, prices	listen to opinions N – times, dates, prices	s Use when / because / then / that and write 3 complex sentence s Recognis e and use Past tense regular / irregular verbs			
Week 2	Topic: Parenting and autistic children Compound / complex sentence s Past Tense – regular / irregular	Topic: Parenting and autistic children Compound / complex sentence s Past Tense – regular / irregular	Identify in the text compound / complex sentence s-give similar examples -Discuss Write sentence s using regular / irregular verbs-	Independent learning	Translation app Ted talk	Practical Tasks

			Give similar examples -discuss - Future plans- suggestions			
Week 3	Topic: Climate change Effects on economy and mental health CV – give listen to opinions N – times, dates, prices	Topic: Climate change Effects on economy and mental health CV – give listen to opinions N – times, dates, prices	Say and write 3 compound sentences Say and write 3 complex sentences Listen to an account / comment on that. Share with the class Use 4 past tense, compound and complex	C&I Q&A Pairwork Groupwork Correction/coaching	BBC News David Altenburg Luton wellbeing hub	Obs/Q &A/P W

			sentence s. Share with the class. Take part in a past tense quiz			
Week 3	Topic: Social activities Progress from previous session: Mini presentations	Topic: Social activities Progress from previous session: Mini presentations	Write 10 irregular past tense sentence s-Share them verbally with the class Look at the images and comment using irregular verbs and compound/complex sentence s	Independent learning	Luton library A short video:film.english By Kieran Doghney	Practical Tasks

Topic: Self-esteem/ Emotions CV – give listen to opinions N – times, dates, prices	Topic: Self-esteem/ Emotions CV – give listen to opinions N – times, dates, prices	Say sentences in the past, compound, complex, Read texts and find adjectives Read texts and add suitable adjectives to improve a sentences	Say sentences in the past, compound, complex, Read texts and find adjectives Read texts and add suitable adjectives to improve a sentences	C&I TT	Obs/Q& A/PT	Obs/Q &A/PT
Topic: Self-dependent Adjectives Past tense story- Narrative	Tell a story to the class- Use HF adjectives -Use compound &complex sentence s-Use	Tell a story to the class- Use HF adjectives -Use compound &complex sentence s-Use	C&I TT	Power point slides Adjectives – describe pictures Past tense – story telling	Obs/Q& A/PT	Topic: Politics Reporting techniques- a story in the past tense

CV – give listen to opinions N – times, dates, prices	irregular- story in the past tense	irregular- story in the past tense				Different texts Adjectives
Read stories and report to class- Use your own adjectives to describe : a scene- pictures Use the past simple- the past perfect	Read stories and report to class- Use your own adjectives to describe: a scene- pictures Use the past simple- the past perfect	Independent Learning	Independent Learning	Power point slides Different texts Adjectives – describe scenes/ pictures Past tense – story telling		

Appendix 15: Participant Generated Account 1

Entry 3-Learner 13

Learner 13-It has now officially been 3 years since I became solo mother with three younger children. I have no support and the job centre coach keep asking me to find jobs. I want job but I missed it twice because I don't learn any training in language about job questions and answers. I asked the teacher you know her, she is nice-(name of the teacher)-but only learnt names of jobs.(silent)- The job centre coach tells me my English is good for work. I know but a lot of words in the form we did not learnt.(Silent-) I told my friends I hope I learn something differently in your class as I don't want to repeat the same course that's why I did not understand in the interview what's your purpose you know in your studies-But now I know if I ask you this is what I want to learn, I can search at home and improve my English better. That's why I put in my scheme of work section "Employment and job interview questions" to learn. This English is about my environment and day to day life not just classroom. You know, I passed my exams but what's the point? I need environment learning (by environment, she meant social and everyday needs English)-

Appendix 16: Participant Generated Account 2

Level 1- Learner 1

You know there's a saying in Pakistan say you can't die until you make your dream true but only if you believe it-do you understand that teacher? I responded "no" in order to get more out of the participant who was reluctant to take

part in the interviews and discussion but volunteered to participate in this account, which occurred on zoom. Well, I had a dream to be an accountant but completed my duty with my father who wanted me to marry my cousin, so, that's done and I am happy-laughter-a long time ago-you know-I came to the UK no word of English but I never accepted leaving my dream. Aha, I had to learn English but I was working very busy working and not like nowadays no English classes-in the 70's you know-laughter-I learnt with my customers in shops that's why my English is good. Yes-I believe so it is good. Because I did not joining the ESOL class before I feel not with motivation but the dream always tell me you must attend class. I am a good scholar this year because teaching is different- Now the dream- My son deals with every accounting, money you know in my shops. I trust of course but I sometime don't trust. Not about trust-It is about my dream-I can ask if you may put topics of accountancy and the queue system in this new program-is it possible? Maybe I can sign to computer class and get more knowledgeable in accountancy sentences and fulfil my dream.

Appendix 17: Themes coding

Question	Participants' responses	Codes	Theme
To what extent will embedding topics related to socio-cultural norms in ESOL schemes of work	The teacher's main objective is to make the lesson personal to us-	Motivation is in the heart of a personalised lesson	The relationship between learners' motivation and culture

benefit the learners' motivation, autonomy and integration?			
To what extent will embedding topics related to socio-cultural norms in ESOL schemes of work benefit the learners' motivation, autonomy and integration?	Discussing cultural matters motivates us in class. Otherwise, it becomes boring.	Avoiding boredom and demotivation in a learning atmosphere	The relationship between learners' motivation and culture
To what extent will embedding topics related to socio-cultural norms in ESOL schemes of work benefit the learners' motivation, autonomy and integration?	We feel happy when the teacher gives us the opportunity to discuss culture-	Pleasant and joyful learning experience	The relationship between learners' motivation and culture
To what extent will embedding topics related to socio-cultural norms in ESOL schemes of work	We love sharing our cultures and background with others. It makes us feel we are important-	Pride and joy in discussions	The relationship between learners' motivation and culture

benefit the learners' motivation, autonomy and integration?			
To what extent will embedding topics related to socio-cultural norms in ESOL schemes of work benefit the learners' motivation, autonomy and integration?	We enjoy doing presentations about special events in our countries	Motivating and autonomous personalised tasks	The relationship between learners' motivation and culture
To what extent will embedding topics related to socio-cultural norms in ESOL schemes of work benefit the learners' motivation, autonomy and integration?	It is of great benefit to learn about British culture and compare it to our own culture-More knowledge and generate more vocabulary	Purposeful learning is encouraging	The relationship between learners' motivation and culture
To what extent will embedding topics related to socio-cultural norms in ESOL schemes of work	Because we speak from the heart about our culture, we communicate better-It is all true	strengthening student engagement	The relationship between learners' motivation and culture

benefit the learners' motivation, autonomy and integration?			
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Appendix 18: Table 7 -Data from Level 1&2 Group Discussion

Question / Category	Learner 1 (L1)	Learner 2 (L2)	Learner 3 (L3)	Learner 4 (L4)	Learner 5 (L5)	Learner 6 (L6)	Learner 7 (L7)	Learner 8 (L8)
Use of English (Mon, Wed, Fri)	90%	85%	70%	90%	60%	75%	80%	60%
Who With?	Customers	Son, Children	Neighbour, Schools, In-laws	Friends, Teachers in training, Friends	Schools, 1 friend, Neighbours	Agencies, Doctor, Job coach	Agencies, Children, Job coach, Phone	Training, Children
Vocational / Training / Personal Goals	Accountancy & Marketing	Travel, Jobs & Integration	Jobs, Integration & Confidence	Self-esteem & Relationships	Jobs & Integration	Jobs, Self-esteem & Integration	Jobs, Integration & Confidence	Jobs, Integration & Self-esteem
Help with Speaking / Pronunciation?	By myself	Phone translation app	By myself, Websites	By myself, On-the-go app	By myself, Friend, Websites	By myself	By myself, Husband	By myself, Phone translation app, TV, Websites
Help with Writing?	Subtitles	Son	Apps	Dictionary & Apps	N/A	N/A	ESOL work, Padlet	Others' work, Phone app, Padlet
Number of People Spoken to in English (Daily)	Over 100 a day	5–6	Over 20 a day (depending on training)	1–3	0–2	2–4	5–10	5–10
Feeling Using Own Vocab Search	Challenging	Very good	Helpful / I need it	Depending on needs	Depending on needs and mood	Very good	Great	Excellent
Opinion / Reflections	"We need to connect"	"Talk to more people"	"Connect, don't be isolated from society"	"Be in contact with others"	"Talk to others to help you"	"Connect"	"Learn and use English with others"	"Get involved with other people"

Appendix 19: Table 8 – Data from Entry 3 Group Discussion

Question / Category	Learner 1 (L1)	Learner 2 (L2)	Learner 3 (L3)	Learner 4 (L4)	Learner 5 (L5)	Learner 6 (L6)	Learner 7 (L7)	Learner 8 (L8)
Q1: Use of English (%)	90%	70%	50%	70%	100%	80%	60%	100%
Q2: Who With?	Not specified	Kids, Teachers	Neighbours	N/S	Solicitors	N/S	Kids	Customers
Q3: Vocational / Integration Goals	Integration	Integration	Travel	Jobs, Integration	Jobs	Self-esteem	Confidence	Integration
Q4: Speaking & Learning Strategies	Community, Myself, Learning websites	Myself, Kids, Phone apps	Myself, On the go	Myself, Kids, Google Translate, TED Talks	Myself	Myself, Mobile apps	Family, Myself	Myself, Friends, Films
Q5: Writing & Literacy Support	Subtitles	Dictionary	N/S	N/S	Taking notes	Games	Kids' books	Dictionary, Notes
Q6: People Spoken to Daily	10–20	10–20	2–5	10–20	5–10	2–5	1–3	10–20
Q7: Feeling Using Vocab Search	Great	Helpful	Ability to memorise	"I know what it means"	"Just what I need"	Very good	"Good but I forget"	"Good for my confidence"
Q8: Reflections / Metaphors	"Get closer"	"Red and white"	<i>(Unspecified)</i>	"Build a bridge"	<i>(Unspecified)</i>	"Meeting needs"	<i>(Unspecified)</i>	"Complete each other"

Question / Category	Learner 9 (L9)	Learner 10 (L10)	Learner 11 (L11)	Learner 12 (L12)	Learner 13 (L13)	Learner 14 (L14)	Learner 15 (L15)	Learner 16 (L16)
Q1: Use of English (%)	40%	50%	60%	90%	100%	80%	70%	50%
Q2: Who With?	When needed	N/S	N/S	N/S	Colleagues	N/S	Kids	When needed
Q3: Vocational / Integration Goals	Self-esteem, Confidence	Trust	Integration	Integration	Integration, Self-esteem	Cultural awareness	Integration, Society	Confidence
Q4: Speaking & Learning Strategies	Myself	Myself, News, Mobile apps	Myself, Mobile apps	Myself, News, Google Translate	Myself, Community, Websites	Myself, News, Websites	Myself, Friends, Films	Myself, Doctor's calls
Q5: Writing & Literacy Support	N/S	Cartoon, Subtitles	Taking notes, Checking with others	N/S	N/S	Mobile checking	N/S	N/S
Q6: People Spoken to Daily	1–3	1–3	1–6	1–20	12–20	4–10	1–10	1–3
Q7: Feeling Using Vocab Search	Good	Slow progress	It depends	Excellent	Up and down	Very good	Excellent	Good
Q8: Reflections / Metaphors	<i>(Unspecified)</i>	"Red and white"	"Connect"	"Connect to understand"	"Accept the other"	<i>(Unspecified)</i>	<i>(Unspecified)</i>	"Keep going"

Appendix 20: A colleague's reflection when adopting the approach I suggested (extracted from a communicated email)

Following an ESOL fortnightly meeting, I decided to undertake an activity during the first hour of the new course that would allow me to negotiate the scheme of work with my learners.

The course was entitled 'Preparing for Level 2 English', so we began by discussing what that might mean and which objectives might be covered. I asked the learners which areas of their English they were hoping to work on and which areas that they felt did not need to be covered in-depth. I asked them if they had any expectations of what might be taught; was there anything they were hoping for more of, and why? Was there anything they were dreading coming up and why? I posed the question 'If you were the teacher, what would you teach?' and we discussed our ideas. Learners were mostly surprised to realise that they had attended the course with almost no expectation of lesson content other than vague ideas around topics such as 'grammar', and initially found it difficult to reflect on what they might need to, or want to learn. I asked them to think about where they might get some ideas of what topics they needed to practise, and they were able to tell me what feedback they had been given on previous courses and which lessons or homework they had found challenging. They also began to discuss what barriers they faced in using 'real-life English', and what they might need to learn for everyday use. We discussed the overlap between this and the exam-based objectives and the learners began to formulate ideas on what they believed were the most valuable aspects of English to work on during their lessons. However, at this stage, the conversation was still somewhat vague and learners could not fully articulate their ideas on what should constitute their scheme of work.

We then undertook an activity inspired by Magenta Principles (Mike Hughes, 'The Magenta Principles, 2014) that required learners to prioritise hypothetical lessons. I had previously undertaken similar activities with both adults and young people, and had always found it be something that

engaged them in critical thinking and fostered productive discussion. I asked them to work in a small group and write all the possible lesson titles/objectives that might be planned on post-its. When they wrote 'grammar' or similar wide-ranging areas, I asked them to reflect, discuss and break this down into the most detailed aspect possible, e.g. 'compound sentences' or 'using articles'. I then asked them to rearrange the post-its in order of importance. This generated some excellent discussion and debate. Some areas they felt were important but they were confident enough in the topic to move to the end of the list. Some topics they felt were of minor importance, and so moved them into the lower-priority section too. They were able to reflect, with prompting, on why this was, i.e. it does not come up in exams, it isn't useful in real life etc. They generally agreed upon the areas of most importance and were also able to articulate why. Additionally, they could reflect independently on their personal strengths and weaknesses, and this formed an important part of the discussion. They began to see that, although they agreed on most topics, there was some dispute as a result of individual learning needs or gaps in knowledge and understanding. I challenged them further with more questioning, e.g. 'If one lesson had to be taken out, what would you choose? Does everyone agree?' 'Which lesson would you be looking forward to the most and why?' As a group, they eventually settled on an agreed priority of objectives, but with some adjustment for individual areas of development.

The Individual Learning Plans had been pre-populated with some key objectives generally needed to pass the exam, but there was also space to enter extra objectives. I explained to the learners that, although these were the curriculum objectives, I wanted to ensure that the activity that had been carried out earlier was productive. So we decided to add one or two individual objectives to the list. Each learner, with my guidance, decided on their own targets. As well as this, we read through the existing objectives and discussed which ones we felt needed to be covered first, or in more depth. Additionally, some objectives we broke down into more detail, e.g. 'to recognise bias, and distinguish fact from opinions'. In this case, learners felt that they were mostly confident with identifying opinions and facts, but were

less sure of how to recognise or explain bias. So we negotiated a change in wording on the objective, and agreed that we would focus more on that aspect during that lesson.

Overall, the activity was very successful. Through a mixture of reflection, discussion and activity the learners came to an agreed decision on the key areas to be addressed over the coming weeks. They were able to take ownership of the objectives, adjusting them to their own requirements, and adding personalised learning targets. This, I feel, will help ensure that the lessons are well-attended, productive and beneficial to the learners' needs.

~~Julia Deels~~

Appendix 21: From wander to wonder!

I was waiting at the bus stop in the pouring rain when my neighbour said: "What a day! It's raining cats and dogs."

Learner: "What do you mean cats and dogs?"

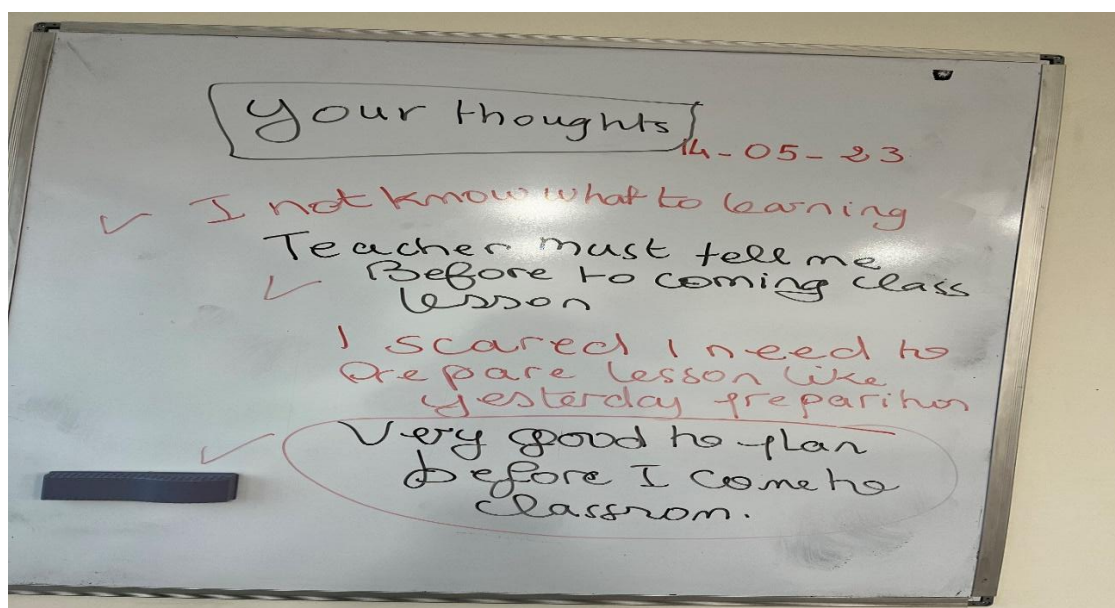
Neighbour: "Oh, it's something we say when the rain is really heavy."

Learner: I go to English classes, I am in higher level, and I have never been taught something like that.

Neighbour: Well. English is full of sayings like that, which can be very confusing if nobody tells you what they mean. The ball is in your court now!

Learner: "Oh no! The ball is in your court. What does that mean now?"

Neighbour: "It's up to you to do something about it"



Appendix 22: Participants' Notes

Extract 1: Learner 6

Demographics: Female, Turkish, Level 1 **Topic:** Reflecting on Classmates' Experiences and Cultural Perceptions

"When I came to this college, everyone had some experiences at least communicating with English people. They all had English neighbours, landlords or bosses in work. I didn't have nothing not as well a passport but I was interested in foreign things and they told me stories, so it was motivating me to understand more in society. It felt more real like I wanted to get involved in the society, you know, I have friends who came here before me and I thought, "Oh, maybe I can be like them and have the same kind of experience". I saw the birthday photos with all neighbours, English and the other countries and then thought, "Wow! This person in front of me can work and her English neighbour look after her kid!!!", so, that's why to know about local people and cultures help me to belong here. I did not know English people can help other people. I know before I came to live here English people are cold and do not speak to foreigners"."

Observational and Interview Summary

The notes from the observation and interviews also revealed that most participants knew very little about each other's cultures. Therefore, to fit culture topics in a S.O.W, as an area of study would broaden their diversity awareness and bring them closer. They expressed that they needed to do research of different cultures of their peers' backgrounds, countries, languages, beliefs and traditions. By incorporating such topics into the newly reconstructed SOW was a challenge but also an asset to their learning progress in relation to diversity and awareness. As stated by learner 7:

Extract 2: Learner 7

Demographics: Female, Kurdistan, Level 1 **Topic:** Understanding Classmates' Cultural Backgrounds

"I never met people from Ukraine. I can't understand anything about my friend (name) until I know something about her country and her religion and everything....."

Participant Feedback

The feedback above reflects the learner's contentment after embedding topics related to other cultures and exploring it in her own way.

Appendix 23: Participants' feedback on their SOW co-construction experience.

Lesson date and Topic	Learner Comment	Teacher
13/05/2024 Homless/ Salary/ re shock er	3 things I have learnt today are: Scheme of work - it is very helpful for me. I can prepare my work myself and I know about my class and exams. I have known about my ~~shock~~ this ~~topic~~ 1 thing I need to work on / a question I need to ask:	

	1 thing I need to work on / a question I need to ask: Check the work and recheck	
to. 13.05.24 Culture Shock Stories	3 things I have learnt today are: We did writing practise about culture shock and learned new vocabulary / gestures, awkward, nodding, no hand feelings. 1 thing I need to work on / a question I need to ask: The Schemes of Work recurred my preparation process for the lesson because knowing the next topic makes me feel comfortable in class.	I didn't work I'm a nice

Appendix 24: Learner Vignettes 2

Integration through Healthcare

A female learner expressed her difficulties navigating GP services. When the group negotiated a lesson around booking appointments, she explained: “Now I can call and ask for an appointment without fear.” This vignette illustrates how NC connects language to immediate social needs.

Public Transport

A male learner designed a role-play around bus travel. After practising with peers, he later reported: “I used the right words with the driver. I felt strong.” This example shows how NC can empower learners in everyday interactions.

Community Festivals

Learners co-planned a lesson around local celebrations such as Bonfire Night and Diwali. One learner reflected: “I told my children about the festival. It helped me feel part of this place.”

Appendix 25: Observation Notes Extracts

Observation 1:

Learners negotiated a lesson on housing. They identified key terms (rent, landlord, deposit) and created role-plays. Engagement was high, and learners related directly to their lived experiences.

Observation 2:

During a group brainstorm, learners generated a list of lesson topics, ranging from employment to cultural festivals. The teacher facilitated but did not dominate discussion, allowing multiple voices to shape the curriculum.

Vignette 3

This basic premise of relationships between learners and teachers improving when learners feel valued and respected can be observed across all levels of education, as can the opposite. An associate of mine who worked as a self-employed education consultant had many examples of the positive effects that generating value and trust can have, and the negative effects of this not being given due consideration. Many schools adopt a system whereby when a pupil exhibits an example of poor behaviour (in ESOL, poor performance), the pupil's initials are put on the board. Should a subsequent display of negative behaviour occur, a second initial is added. A third initial results in exclusion from the lesson. During observations by the consultant, it was clear that quite often the pupil's behaviour was designed to get him/her out of the lesson. On the other hand, it was clear that sometimes a teacher used the system to quickly remove a pupil he did not want to be there.

Some schools turn the system on its head. My associate had observed a teacher working with a group of challenging SEND (special education needs and disabilities) teenage students, who chose a pupil to be at the front with a marker pen. Each time the teacher observed a student contributing to the lesson, he asked the student at the front to put his or her initials on the whiteboard. When a student had their initials on the board three times, they received some form of agreed reward. During this lesson, the following interaction was observed:

"Sir, you haven't put my initials on the board."

"But you haven't been listening, Paul." Brief pause. "You are listening now. Put Paul's initials on the board."

A grin from Paul (the pupil with challenging behaviour) ensued.