Forced Migrants’ Success with English Language Learning in the UK

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## Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... 3

Acknowledgements .......................................................................................................................... 4

Introduction ....................................................................................................................................... 7

Literature Review .............................................................................................................................. 10
   Learning theory .............................................................................................................................. 10
   English language learning ........................................................................................................... 10
   Refugees’ specific learning needs and barriers ........................................................................... 12
   Adult learning provision in the UK ............................................................................................. 13
   Refugee integration ..................................................................................................................... 14
   Refugee learners’ experience ....................................................................................................... 15
   Conclusions .................................................................................................................................. 15

Research design ............................................................................................................................... 17
   The methodological context ......................................................................................................... 17
   My position ................................................................................................................................. 17
   Case studies ............................................................................................................................... 18
   Ensuring validity and reliability ................................................................................................. 18
   Dissemination and feedback ....................................................................................................... 18
   Participants .................................................................................................................................. 20
   Group session ............................................................................................................................. 21
   Interviews ..................................................................................................................................... 22
   Data analysis ............................................................................................................................... 23

Findings ............................................................................................................................................ 25
   Profile of participants ............................................................................................................... 25
   Overview of themes .................................................................................................................... 30
   Conclusions of findings ............................................................................................................. 44

Discussion ........................................................................................................................................ 48
   The importance of reviewing my work ....................................................................................... 48
   The participants and their circumstances ................................................................................... 48
   The importance of the teacher ................................................................................................... 50
   The importance of a task ............................................................................................................. 50
   Available resources ................................................................................................................... 51
   Using your own language .......................................................................................................... 52
   Networks and social capital ....................................................................................................... 52
   The issue of control .................................................................................................................... 53
   Further research ......................................................................................................................... 53
   Continuing this research ............................................................................................................ 54

Research Conclusions ..................................................................................................................... 55

Appendices ...................................................................................................................................... 56
   Appendix 1: Questions For Participants ............................................................................... 56
   Appendix 2: Group Activity Plan: First Half Hour ................................................................. 57
   Appendix 3: Group Session Handout ...................................................................................... 58
   Appendix 4: Timeline and Map Activity Examples ............................................................... 59
   Appendix 5: Coding Categories And Example of Coding ..................................................... 60
   Appendix 6: Database Query of Category Three ...................................................................... 61

Bibliography ..................................................................................................................................... 62
Abstract

Forced migrants were asked about their experiences of learning English in the UK, in qualitative case studies looking at factors enabling success in language learning. Refugees and asylum seekers arrive in the UK with experience and education, and also with barriers to learning. The good language learner then draws on various resources, and various informal and formal learning situations, to succeed. A host of personal relationships, courses, social situations, physical resources and emotional behaviours have played a part in the seven participants’ acquisition of language. Also important has been the understanding of society and cultural norms, something that has had to be learnt alongside English. This study attempts to focus research attention on the experience of refugee and asylum-seeking ESOL learners, and their experiences outside the classroom as well as inside. It suggests ways in which further research could, as well as looking at ESOL learners, explore the specific experience of forced migrants, and attempt to define the relationship between classroom learning and the acquisition of language in wider society.
Acknowledgements

Perhaps nobody believes that they will ever finish a piece of work like this. I certainly didn’t. Many people helped me along the way, and I have tried to include them all on the following page.

Part of my method was to ask participants to draw a ‘map’ of all those they thought had been important in learning English in the UK. It helped them, and me, to see just how much effort other people put into our lives and how important a network is. This research was possible because of the huge range of support I have from growing up and being settled in this country. I have tried to recreate this through my ‘acknowledgements map’.

Everything my participants have achieved has been starting fresh and has been their own doing. I was touched by the work they had all put in to learning, and how willing they were to help with this project. I want to thank them so much for taking the time to be part of it.

I have one friend who inspired all the interest I have in immigration and refugees. His success is the reason I started this research and he is an absolute star. This is for him.
I May, I Might, I Must

If you will tell me why the fen
appears impassable, I then
will tell you why I think that I
can get across it if I try.

(Marianne Moore in Benson, Chernaik, Herbert 2004: 71)

Endeavour (n): a purposeful or industrious undertaking (especially one that requires effort or boldness).
Introduction

"Faisullah learns from everything - all stimuli. He learns a lot on his own, he listens in the street, to the radio, TV. He asks about what he's heard and he reads a lot on his own, news on the internet, newspapers, magazines. He has a very good ear"  (Roberts et al 2004: 24)

There are two main areas of English language teaching to adults. EFL (English as a Foreign Language) describes short term or visitor courses, aimed at tourists, business people and students. ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) describes English teaching aimed at people who have come to live and work in the UK. ESOL classes have existed in the UK for a number of years, and so has research on learners. I taught EFL and ESOL in London between 2000 and 2003, and taught forced migrants in both these strands of provision. My experience then was of little understanding among teachers and coordinators of the general and specific experiences of asylum seekers and refugees. There was a perceived difference in the delivery of EFL as opposed to ESOL lessons, but practically the line between the strands was blurred. Through my experiences I became interested in the way that forced migrants use language lessons to achieve their goals; they face many barriers to learning, and have a variety of needs, and formal ESOL classes are just part of a number of tools they use to succeed.

In my first teaching job I met a young asylum seeker who later became a good friend. The English class was EFL, and he was learning alongside visitors to the UK on short courses. He started in a low level class, moved to intermediate, and then stopped learning formally for a while. He worked on and off, spent a lot of time in the cinema and quite a lot of time in my company, picking up my and my friends’ colloquialisms. In the space of four years he had used formal and informal English language learning to get into a Further Education College, completing a computer course, then an NVQ. After that, he found work using his qualification. By the time he was removed from the UK after losing his appeal, he had used various tools to become near to fluent in the language, after arriving with nothing.
It is this that the research addresses: it aims to gain an appreciation of individuals' resourcefulness, to see examples of good practice in learning strategies, inside and outside the classroom. There are a range of characteristics that affect learning, such as learning styles, previous education, cultural perspectives, and situations unique to those forced to flee their country. There are also other issues shared with other sets of individuals: learning difficulties, physical disabilities, and mental illness.

The definition 'forced migrant' is deliberately wide. An asylum seeker not allowed to work for a number of years will have a different experience of learning compared to somebody allowed leave to remain for a specific number of years, and neither of them have refugee status. Somebody may consider that they were forced to leave their country as they were being persecuted, but have entered the country via a different route, such as a student visa or family reunion. All of these people have had to deal with issues of flight, settlement, and learning and I am interested in all their stories. The term forced migrant means that I can work with participants who consider that they were forced to leave their country, and is sufficiently wide that I can look ethnographically at different perspectives of experience.
I initially hypothesised that forced migrants' success in English language learning depends on:

Having control over what they learn and how they learn it: in most areas of their life they will have lost control

Relevance of what they are learning to their day-to-day experience: focus has moved to the issue of survival

Positive cultural learning experiences outside the classroom

Informal learning situations

Positive social interaction

The presence of an English speaker that you trust, as a 'guide'

I was also interested in finding out more about the following points but felt that to avoid pushing the research too far in my cultural direction I’d like to keep these ideas loose:

The effect of home circumstances on learning success: position in family, languages spoken at home, ages of children etc.

Differences in learning strategies and views of learning according to cultural backgrounds

The relationship between the need to maintain identity through one's mother tongue, and the learning of English
**Literature Review**

Related research exists around learning theories in general including motivations for adult learning; the provision of adult learning, including ESOL, in the UK; also barriers that refugees face when learning and integrating into a new society, and the experience of refugees and asylum seekers in learning new languages. The literature review will outline these areas, consider key aspects and conclude how this can inform my study.

**Learning theory**

We learn for many reasons and in many ways, due to characteristic styles (Honey & Mumford 1982) or experience. Motivations play a part, Cantor (1992) outlines the following motivations for adult learners: to make or maintain social relationships, meet expectations, learn to better serve others, professional advancement, escape, stimulation or pure interest. Recently with adult learners in the UK reasons to learn included empowerment in life and accessing provision such as childcare and health care (Barton et al 2004: 100-101). There is also evidence to suggest that much learning comes from watching others (Miller and Dollard 1941, Bandura 1971): social learning theory has something to offer a study that is looking at language learners in a social environment, with culture to be learned for survival. All learners I will talk to will have different motivations and experience. Understanding some of these will help, and their individual achievements will often not be comparable.

**English language learning**

Research inside the EFL classroom contends that there are barriers to learning created by previous experience and classroom situation. Krashen’s Affective Filter Hypothesis suggests that experience can cause a learning block, and a teachers’ challenge is to find ways of removing that (Krashen 1982). He makes the distinction between acquisition (implicit, subconscious, informal) and learning (explicit, formal) and suggests that a theoretically correct adult learning programme will have both aspects at its heart (Krashen 1981: 101). Allwright (1998) talks about the possibilities of practitioner-led research (‘exploratory practice’) in addressing reasons for not learning. He suggests a clutch of causes including social and academic fears, as well as the behaviour of the teacher.
The many theories of classroom language learning range from traditional cognitive to more modern, humanistic possibilities. Vanegas (1998) draws on both these areas to propose Task-Based Language Learning; more realistic and autonomous activities within the classroom. He outlines cognitive and social strategies that are effective for learners, and the importance of completing independent tasks. He calls for ESOL teaching to involve more task-based learning, and for learning strategies to be taught; using Kolb’s theories of the process of learning: “Experiential learning theory is a holistic integrative perspective on learning that combines experience, perception, cognition and behaviour” (Kolb 1984 in Vanegas 1998).

In the field of applied linguistics attempts have been made to define the ‘good language learner’ (Ruben, Stern, Naiman in McDonough 1999), and to instruct learners in strategies. Ivanic and Tseng (2005: 22-24) discuss the importance of engaging learners, and creating opportunities for learning, which may have outcomes expected by the teacher. They cite Krashen’s ideas of acquisition and propose that interaction can lead to learning, without the need for direct instruction. Interaction provides opportunities to learn both language and ways of learning language. (Allwright and Bailey in Ivanic and Tseng 2005: 22-24)

This research is all classroom-based, and much EFL research looks at language learners not in the country of the language being learnt. This means theories tend to be more specific, whereas I see the process of taking ESOL classes, and then using your new language to go to the housing office or make your asylum case as much more messy. I want to look at the combination of acquisition and learning in and out of the classroom. Khanna et al (in Barton and Pitt 2003: 10) provided an insight to life experience when looking at motivations and learners’ attitudes to the UK, and Norton and Toohey’s (in Barton and Pitt 2003: 11) work in Canada found that learners’ communication experiences over and above their six month language course were vastly different, resulting in very different language learning results. This suggests that there is point to looking outside the classroom environment.
Refugees’ specific learning needs and barriers

Research focusing specifically on refugees’ experiences of ESOL is sparse. Work in the 1980s with Vietnamese learners highlighted refugee-specific barriers and challenges. Kleinmann (1982), working in the US, highlighted the need to address "survival, prevocational and occupation related language goals". He notes external factors affecting learning: 'Nesting Patterns' and 'Transition Anxiety' (Schuman cited in Kleinmann 1982) and suggests a reason for the lack of attention these ideas get in educational research: language specialists don't see it as their issue. He suggests ESOL delivery for refugees should develop the potential to learn language, with less emphasis on formal language rules. Research at this time also showed the difficulties of teaching dispersed refugees (Deem and Marshall 1980) and the range of abilities and educational experiences of learners. Reder's (1982) quantitative study in the US, whilst concluding that new arrivals' language skills had improved with English classes in their first year, was keen to point out that other variables such as age and pre-entry experience have a massive impact and the effects of post-entry experiences such as employment and teaching are small when compared. Hall (1981) mentions key barriers to learning: childcare (and, even if childcare is available, the reluctance of a child already insecure from flight to leave its mother); massive differences in literacy and inappropriate resources geared towards tourists. Comparisons of the differences between Vietnamese and Ugandan Asian settlement showed how differences in culture, time of arrival and the presence (or not) of a community one knows has an effect on learning. (Joint Committee for Refugees from Vietnam: 1982). This report also notes the lack of teachers' understanding of the refugee experience. Little research at the time linked classroom learning with other activities, and studies focus heavily on one community.

One’s mother tongue, and the concept of identity, can have an affect on learning. Zahirovic (2001) suggests low acquisition of English by Bosnian refugees is not only due to difficult learning conditions but also a reaction to exile. Hoffman's literary response to her own exile echoes this, speech and social environment "are not luxuries or even external necessities but the medium in which we live" so when they are gone the world becomes "a bit less vivid, a bit less lucid.” She also suggests that the process of learning a new language in your country of exile is also a culture shift, forcing you to see outside of your own culture (1999). Blake's research (2003) also suggests that training provision for refugee women is underpinned by ideologies that actually pose a barrier to learning. This suggests a
vicious circle; you almost have to understand the new language of your land of exile before you learn it.

More recent research confirms earlier theories regarding barriers, found to be: cultural difference, inappropriate resources, a lack of sensitivity, and classes too large to take into account different learning needs (Joly 1996, Carey-Wood et al 1995). Childcare and family commitments are also barriers (Dumper 2002a, Ditscheid 2003, Working Group 2000), and there is poor guidance about learners options, lack of flexibility, local courses and money for travel (Working Group 2000). Bloch reported that where there was dissatisfaction with ESOL classes, this was largely due to a "lack of understanding of the refugee experience" (Bloch 2002: 108).

Research has tended to look at the huge range of barriers faced and less focus has been on achievement of refugees and asylum seekers. Findings to do with learning have often been from a psychological perspective, as opposed to drawing on learner theory. Refugees and asylum seekers have been seen as a homogenous group, and studies of single language groups have made conclusions that may not apply to others.

**Adult learning provision in the UK**

Research from the Working Group on Post School Basic Skills (1998) and for the Basic Skills Agency (Carr - Hill et al 1996) has led to a stronger focus on adult educational needs in general and a new literacy, numeracy and language learning framework, Skills for Life (DfES 2001). The research considered basic skills in general but did eventually lead to research specifically on ESOL, Breaking the Language Barriers (Working Group 2000). The huge range of learners within this area was outlined, as were barriers to access of learning and to learning itself.

"Provision is patchy and the quality of teaching very variable, due to the lack of any coherent funding system which recognises the support functions that are necessary for effective delivery" (Working Group 2000: 12).
Home Office research found gaps in teachers' training, a shortage of classes, a lack of coordination between providers and Refugee Community Organisations and suggested that local strategies would be more appropriate than general models (Griffiths 2003). Recently the Department of Education and Skills (DfES) has funded a three-year study of effective ESOL practice undertaken by the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC). NRDC’s work has also covered basic skills in the community (Hannon et al 2003) and in the work place (Wolf et al 2003), though within these fields not specifically ESOL and not specifically forced migrants. Specific ESOL work has included a massive research review and a comprehensive set of ESOL case studies which cover a range of asylum and forced migrant learning issues. The use of in depth case studies from work with both providers and learners is illuminating, and it acknowledges forced migrants as part of a range of learners in the heterogynous nature of the ESOL classroom; this enables many-layered experience over and above simple language learning. It also found that authenticity of tasks, in particular reading materials, was important to learners even when texts carried too much meaning. (Roberts et al 2004: 10-12)

Other research is not so learner-centred: the interim report on the impact of Skills for Life reports that providers and teachers request more information on effective teaching and learning strategies, and learners goals, and yet the method only interviews providers.

**Refugee integration**

Language has been seen as a route to employment. Bloch's research covers problems with language as a barrier to work, and Employability Forum and Refugee Council research look at ESOL as part of a pathway of progression into employment (Shiferaw and Hagos 2002, Employability Forum 2003). The NRDC case studies mention the practical problems of this including the 'fiasco' of visiting the college careers adviser who doesn't have the necessary language or cultural awareness (Roberts et al 2004: 38). A skills audit of qualified refugee women shows a high proportion of teachers, nurses and doctors unable to use their skills due to a number of barriers (Dumper 2002b); and social barriers to language for women are much higher, as often they are seen as the one to keep the mother tongue and care for children. Illiteracy is often a problem too (Ditscheid 2003). Volunteering has been seen as both a
route into employment and a way to learn English (RAGU and Working Lives Institute: 2004) Benefits outlined were stronger networks, and language learning.

**Refugee learners’ experience**

Qualitative case studies have served to illuminate the forced migrant experience. First-hand accounts of learning experience by refugees from the 1930’s-1990’s, while making no conclusions, show the differences in individual experience depending on decades of arrival, status, resources you have and organisations that support you (Sunderland et al 2000). A tutor’s account outlines the outstanding learning achievement of a blind refugee studying English and law (Meek 2004) and the NRDC case studies show that learners and teachers are affected by asylum issues inside the classroom, often expanding the teachers’ role considerably and making the classroom an important hub for the asylum seeker (Roberts et al 2004). Refugee learners in London felt they would benefit from courses simultaneous with ESOL, vocational courses, were keen to learn quickly, and found that they were using other resources outside the classroom to learn ‘real’ English (Ashe et al 1997: 27). Case studies of learners seeking asylum show a need for more control of one’s life, the need to learn quickly and a desire to integrate (Roberts et al 2004: 10). Success in specific classes for refugees with post-traumatic stress was achieved in Sweden through appropriate funding, and a combination of therapy and learning (Roden 1999).

The formal ESOL setting for refugees can provide networking and opportunities for building ‘social capital’ (Dimitriadou 2003). Much of what I am interested in is what goes on outside the classroom and I think success will depend on other English speakers, not just teachers. I wonder whether this aids language learning, this ‘bridging social capital’: involving activities not requiring a shared ideology and bringing relationships outside of cultural groups (Putnam 2000).

**Conclusions**

There is a relatively small amount of research focusing on ESOL learners (Barton and Pitt: 2003) and an even smaller amount focusing on refugee learners (Castles et al 2002). There has been a tendency to focus on forced migrants’ barriers to learning, and reasons why people don’t learn. There is also a tendency to focus on the opinion of educational providers, an example being the most recent Skills for
Life review (2005) and the Home Office report (Griffiths 2003). There is a history of addressing basic skills and ESOL as a homogenous topic. Educational research focuses less on the experience of forced migrants, and has generally dealt with learner styles inside the classroom, with less emphasis on experience outside.

The NRDC research report and case studies say that more research is needed into the following: ESOL learners' practices outside the classroom; how formal teaching relates to this; how employment, volunteering and language support benefit language learning; and the learning experiences of varied styles of ESOL learner: low literacy, those with professional qualifications, and those suffering trauma (Barton and Pitt 2003, Roberts et al 2004). My research hopes to address these points and encourage a positive focus on refugee learning.
Research design

It is especially important in qualitative research to be clear about the methods and stages used. This section outlines in detail research methods used and reasons why.

The methodological context

There is not time or resources to compare learners in a longitudinal study, and the huge range of skill sets, experiences and cultural norms in the one ESOL classroom would make this problematic. But learning and achievement outside the classroom has been seen to be important, and I want to take it further. A small qualitative study would give me the flexibility to explore different cultural perspectives and draw on a number of academic fields including social science, applied linguistics, adult learning theory and cultural studies. The idea that there is not one 'truth' that we are looking for through research is defined as anti-positivist; the purpose of social science being to 'understand social reality as different people see it and to demonstrate how their views shape the action which they take within that reality' (Beck in Cohen et al: 2004). I wanted to find out about individuals' experience, with their varied ways of seeing: this pointed to qualitative analysis with a focus driven by participants as far as possible. Experience at a postgraduate methods seminar day confirmed my thoughts: helping me to understand the importance of the balance of power in research and, related to this, my position as a teacher.

My position

I have some strong ideas about 'what works' in teaching: an example covered in research is the usefulness of learners' mother tongue in classes (Roberts et al 2004: 16). This is something I was trained to avoid wherever possible, and I have strong opinions about keeping conversation to English, even with learners who all share a language. By involving the participants in the questions and using a strong framework of analysis I tried to avoid my training and ideologies having an unquantifiable effect on the direction the questions took. On the other hand to a teacher’s bias, I look at the forced migration experience with fresh eyes and a separate cultural viewpoint. The research attempts to see outside its own cultural perspectives, while accepting that the researcher also has a part to play.
Case studies

The NRDC case study research (Roberts et al 2004: 17) describes the aim of the case study method as "to stimulate creative thinking and disturb creative assumptions". Case studies don’t allow readers to ‘distance themselves in the same way that an abstract statistic or statement cloaked in legislative or policy jargon does’ (Esterhuizen 2004: 12). Focusing on a small number of individuals’ choices and experience in depth to create a case study shows good practice and endeavour in situations which society has made many assumptions about. It is important to remember however that these cases will not be representative of an entire group; in fact this is the reason for the method, to present a range of experience. I have aimed to produce something that stimulates new questions that could then be tackled in a more quantifiable way.

Ensuring validity and reliability

The work was completed in four months, with no funding, by one student. Designing a number of stages, with feedback from participants, allowed for adjustments within the time frame, and criteria at the outset was clear so that their and my time was not wasted.

Research perspectives which attempt to challenge ideological ways of thinking maintain that any study should keep power relations as equal as possible. In this way you create more of an exchange and keep assumptions to a minimum. Feminist research has attempted to do this by working to empower the groups being studied (Cohen et al 2004: 35). Each of my stages addressed this with presentation and communication, and the experience attempted to be an exchange of information. Being involved and not detached as a researcher helps tackle issues of power and create real, albeit short, learning relationships (Cohen et al 2004: 35). The design was also set out to be as positive as possible. Reflecting on one's own learning and achievement is, for most, a luxury. This will be discussed in greater length in the interview question design section.

Dissemination and feedback

Some criticism of educational research is the distant relationship between researcher and practitioner. Allwright suggests the positive aspects of practitioners becoming involved in research (1998: 25) and
Levin suggests that more can be made of the ‘two way relationship’ between research and practice (2005: 23). I would like to create at least a three-way relationship: the perspective of learners is vastly different to teachers and researchers. In an attempt to encourage this atmosphere of feedback all stages provided an opportunity for participants to express their opinions. This will be fed into the wider body of otherwise less refugee-oriented ESOL and learning research, by passing the dissertation to other researchers and organisations. As well as a dissertation, I have produced a website with key findings and a full copy of the project, clear and accessible. Learners are encouraged to comment on the findings using the web log, thereby using the initial seven experiences as a springboard for more participant-centred feedback.

A way of ensuring that the short time frame does not lead to badly designed or invalid research was to incorporate regular reviews, using colleagues, friends and my supervisor. Figure 1 shows the stages at which this advice was sought and incorporated.

In every stage of the research design I used a checklist of ethical considerations (Cohen et al 2004: 71). My role needed to be clear to all participants, and the voluntary nature and anonymity of the research assured. Names have been changed and neither organisations nor educational institutions are mentioned by name.

Despite taking into account different research perspectives and ways of challenging ideologies, I am still studying in a culture of academic research that is itself middle class, male and white. Participants may not wish to challenge the perceived power structures and may feel uncomfortable with me trying to do this with them. This is why every stage reiterated the concept of research, talked about why I was doing it, left time and space for questions, and interviewed people comfortable in their situation. I built a rapport with my participants, and felt satisfied that they were comfortable as I did receive feedback from a number of them in the summary check stage.
Due to time and money constraints, interviews were in English. The participants had a fair standard of English but mother tongue allows for a more lucid explanation. This was taken account of in the design of the stages.

**Participants**

In order to measure the hypotheses set out, participants needed to have learned some or all of their English in the UK, have lived here for a number of years, participated in some sort of formal language learning and feel they had improved since they had arrived. An initial questionnaire was compiled to measure this (Appendix 1) and also to give an initial idea of the participants’ previous learning experiences.

A number of organisations and individuals were contacted, figure two shows numbers of organisations and the participants that eventually took part.

Out of these contacts eighteen potential participants were identified using the initial questionnaire, by telephone or in person. Due to time restrictions and personal issues the final number of attendees for the group session was five, and the number of in-depth interviews completed was seven.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Positive Points</th>
<th>Suggestions</th>
<th>Stage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kuheli Mooherjee</td>
<td></td>
<td>You need hypotheses</td>
<td>Proposal #1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleague</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mags Bradley</td>
<td>Main points covered</td>
<td>More explicit about selection of case studies</td>
<td>Proposal #1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel Tiernan</td>
<td>Realistic; Sensitive about participants’ involvement; Clear Outline</td>
<td>Does the group session need so much input from you?</td>
<td>Proposal #1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phil Marfleet</td>
<td></td>
<td>You need Hypotheses</td>
<td>Proposal #2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutor</td>
<td>Importance of mother tongue?</td>
<td>Language more important with larger distances travelled</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Language as a key resource</td>
<td>Home environment – children, language spoken a home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brainstorm more about ideas before the group session</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris Taylor</td>
<td></td>
<td>Look at awareness of learning strategies; professions</td>
<td>Group stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIACE</td>
<td>Interpreting will be possible?</td>
<td>Look at abilities across all four skills – spikey profiles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim Donahue</td>
<td></td>
<td>Find a clear method to start coding your data; keep a record of how you have done it so you can check back</td>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleague</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### FIGURE 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Organisation</th>
<th>No. of Orgs Contacted</th>
<th>No. of Participants who took part</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational Institutions</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee Community Orgs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Orgs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Charities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee Orgs</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statutory Services</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary Orgs/Services</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chance/Friends</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure/ Research Orgs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Group session**

Five participants attended the group session. The location was accessible and friendly and there were refreshments. It had a very clear structure (Appendix 2) although discussion questions were broad to allow for change of direction and participants’ input. I attempted to explain the nature of the research by activity, as opposed to explaining. A handout (Appendix 3) showed simply the context I was working in, and two activities were designed to show through action what the research was focusing on, and enable memory jogging (Appendix 4). The structure of the session, drawing on elements of Nominal Group Technique (Knight 2002: 69) was designed to enable people to feel comfortable with me and the group before they spoke, and to make sure input was as level as possible. The sessions helped to break down any power relations, the relationships at the end were very different to the beginning. Phone numbers had been exchanged, they had signposted each other to various services and I had been able to explain about various training courses and services. There was also a clear understanding of the participants’ role, and confidentiality, and all were happy to continue to the interview stage.

Feedback within the group sessions led to us including ideas within interview questions about objects as well as situations that helped learning – they started cropping up in the group session but we hadn’t covered them explicitly. A question about ‘things’ was then included. Also control seemed less important, so we cut one of the questions touching on that.
**Interviews**

Lightly structured interviews with eight questions each (see figure 3) were held in situations comfortable to participants.

**FIGURE 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERVIEW QUESTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Five opted to be interviewed at home, two at their place of work. All interviews were private, and recorded with audio and notes. All were conducted in English, and whilst this didn’t present immediate problems, I kept questions simple in word and structure, and used active listening techniques to summarise and check understanding. It is accepted that a measure of reliability in interviews is the controlled behaviour of the interviewer (Knight 2002: 139) but due to the issues with language I did also use discretion to prompt when explanation was difficult. As effort had been made to establish rapport from the group stage and other conversation, I trusted that the environment had been created where they could tell me ‘no’ if they needed to.

Special attention was taken to word questions in a positive way. As has been mentioned in the literature review and at the beginning of this section, research and individuals find it difficult to reflect positively on experience of forced migration. Neuro-Linguistic-Programming - the study of the 'structure of subjective experience' (NLP London 2004) has a lot to say about the way that we
communicate and use language to frame our experience. Appropriate positive language was used, in an attempt to focus on positive language experience.

After transcription of audio recordings and write up of notes, a detailed summary of each person’s responses was produced. Time was allowed for realistic feedback; this was possible as all had much better receptive language than productive. Comments made were added to the summaries. Unfortunately neither Sarah or Tania were able to give feedback on their summaries but their ideas have been used as so much checking of understanding was done within the interview.

**Data analysis**

Despite the small nature of this study, over 120 quotes and ideas were recorded in the checked summaries. I am hoping that this research will form potential for action, and in this way it is similar to some social research conducted for public policy initiatives. It is

> “A theory of social action grounded on the experiences – the world view- of those likely to be affected by a policy decision or thought to be part of the problem”  


Ritchie and Spencer claim that a clear understanding and critique of the method used leads to a greater confidence in that method, and a better understanding of the potential of qualitative research. They developed the ‘Framework’ method for applied policy research, and its characteristics were such that I felt it would work for my analysis. The method has key features: it is driven by the accounts of the people it is about, and each stage is flexible yet systematic allowing for a comprehensive review of all data. Moreover, each stage of the process is transparent and accessible to others. These features appealed to me: I was inexperienced and wanted to be able to ‘tweak’, yet I also wanted to make sure that I was not, as working largely on my own, guiding my results toward the direction of my own hypotheses.

Once participants had checked their summaries, I started the four stages of the ‘Framework’ process. **Familiarisation** was in a way the easiest as I had done all the interviews, most of the transcribing, and
all the summaries myself. Reading through all the work again, the stage involves picking out key themes and understanding all ideas. Particular attention was paid to key ideas as well as direct quotes: it is important as mentioned to have a clear framework for qualitative data but it is also important that fragmenting data doesn’t take away original meaning. Holloway and Jefferson (2000: 68) talk about the principle of ‘Gestalt’ – the idea that the whole can be greater than the sum of its parts. This was particularly true for my sample as sometimes the actual language used to explain was very roundabout, or didn’t make too much sense, but once we had gone over the idea and I had checked meaning and explained a few words the crux was clear. In the next section, identifying a thematic framework, I kept this in mind while finding themes in the seven summaries. I tried to keep away from the hypotheses so as to get as many ideas that had come from participants as possible. After a number of read – throughs I arrived at twenty-eight coded categories (Appendix 5) which were then indexed on paper (see also Appendix 5), and entered into an ACCESS database I had devised for the purpose. The database enabled me to choose any one of the twenty-eight coded possibilities, as many or as few as I wished, and also go back and change them. When all data was entered I was able to run queries on each category (Appendix 7), or a combination, and see categories that engulfed others and made them redundant. It also made charting, the next stage of the data analysis process, much clearer:

“Data are lifted from their original context and rearranged according to the appropriate thematic reference” (Ritchie and Spencer 1994: 182)”

This process allowed for a “distilled summary of the respondents’ views or experiences ” (Ritchie and Spencer 1994: 182) as well as verbatim text, particularly important for this set of participants’ responses.

The task was then to define concepts, find associations, and define the range and importance of different experiences. The findings from this analysis will be discussed in the next section.
Findings

Profile of participants

This section will give a brief outline of each participant, including the time they felt they learnt the most, and then move on to report general themes and their relation to the hypotheses.

Most of the participants started an English course in their first year. Tania is a notable exception, not starting formal school learning for three years. Most participants came with some prior study experience; the exception again was Tania, who was only half-way through her schooling when she arrived. Their ages now range from 20 years to 56 years; age on arrival was 11 years to 49 years. All have arrived since 1995. There are four nationalities, Kurdish Iraqi, Burundi, Bosnia, and Afghanistan. All speak at least one other language other than their mother tongue and English.

Ahmed

Ahmed arrived from Afghanistan in 2001; he was 21. He started learning English in his first year. His level when he arrived was low, even though he had studied it at school, and now he would say it is high intermediate. He has also studied IT, completing the European Computer Driving Licence. He now works in two jobs and has applied to college to do a plumbing course. He has lived in Wolverhampton, London and now lives in Cheltenham. He has shared homes with people who speak his language, and sometimes with other people whose second language is English. He also speaks Hindi, Farsi, Pashto and Dari.

He feels that the most important time of learning was when he was first here. He felt as if his learning was building momentum in that time, and because he was learning the necessary, basic language he was able to start conversations. This gave him the confidence to speak to people.

“I wasn’t shy to speak, first. What I had in my mind, it was English. I knew that, I have to say that to people. If had any day, every day, three hours, four hours, I was studying English. When I was coming from college I didn’t work for one year. I just study. I knew many people and...”
when they come to UK they start working. I didn’t work, I just continued studying.”

Ayaz

Ayaz arrived in the UK in 2000, at the age of 39, from Iraq. She started learning English towards the end of her first year. She has a degree in mechanical engineering from Iraq, speaks Kurdish and Arabic and has teaching experience. Her English was fairly good when she arrived, and has improved. She works now for a refugee organisation, where she started as a volunteer. She initially lived with relatives, and has lived in a flat on her own for the last three years.

She considers that she learned the most in 2003; she was studying English at a community college, volunteering and also doing an IT course. She talks about the benefits she found of volunteering alongside study:

“When you start as a volunteer you have lots of opportunity to find friends, to talk to people… I can say half you study, it’s not enough for learning English, but when you work as a volunteer or anywhere with other people…you can practice your language.”

Azad

Azad came from Iraq in 2001; he is now 29. He started to learn English in his first year in the UK. He speaks Kurdish and Arabic. He had learned English in Iraq and used it in some subjects at University, gaining a law degree. He considered his English to be level three, lower intermediate when he arrived, and is now using it to study Law at university. He also volunteers with a Citizens Advice Bureau. He lives on his own at the moment, and at other times has lived in houses with other Kurdish speakers.

He learned most when on a pre-access course, including literacy and numeracy. At the same time, he was also doing an NVQ in IT.
“I concentrated in my study. I was enthusiastic to learn. At that time the container was filling it was not full… generally the environment was good… The teachers were great as well and the fellow students were all good people actually. You like to go to college to see them. That means it’s very important actually your colleagues that makes you always remember what you’re doing you don’t get bored and you like to study.”

Hardy

Hardy arrived when he was 20, and is now 22. In Iraq he finished High School, studying science subjects. He speaks Kurdish, Farsi and Arabic. He started to learn English after being in the UK for 8 months; when he arrived his language was very poor ‘just yes and no’, and now he feels confident. He has studied ESOL at a Further Education (FE) College, and IT through an employment-training organisation. He now works as a chef. He has always lived in houses with other Kurdish speakers.

He feels he learnt the most between 2004 and 2005, when he was starting to feel a bit more confident to try things out. He was attending college and starting to meet more people outside of college too:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hardy</th>
<th>I try to speak with people. If you try to speak and you make a mistake, when you make a mistake next time you are going to learn.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>How did you work that out?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardy</td>
<td>The thing is when I make a mistake, people, they try to make it right. And I wrote it down and read every day.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mary

Mary left Burundi to come to the UK two years ago. She was 25, and gained refugee status within three months. She speaks Swahili, French and Kirundi. She didn’t speak any English when she arrived, and now thinks her English is fairly good. She has lived in hostels since she arrived, with a variety of different people. She is currently studying English at an FE college, and is trying to find a childcare course, in order to use her nursing experience. In 2004, when she was with an employment training organisation, she learnt the most; English classes and work placement.
Mary: I was going in the Boots to do the work placement.

Rebecca: So did your college arrange that? You did English class and work placement at same time?

Mary: No, I was told to go to class, and then Boots.

Rebecca: And that whole time was the time that you learned the most English. Class and work.

Mary: Yes, because in Boots it was so many people. And I have to speak.

---

**Sarah**

Sarah has been here seven years; she was 49 when she arrived. Coming from Iraq, she spent three months in Turkey and three months in France. She had also left Iraq as a refugee once before, leaving in 1973 and returning in 1975. She speaks Arabic and Kurdish, and has a degree and qualifications in teaching and management from her country. When she arrived her English was poor, but she had some knowledge. She started learning English after 3 months. She has done ESOL courses and a management course, and volunteered in a charity shop for seven years. In the UK she has lived for a short time with her sister, then in a hostel, then with some of her family who came and joined her. She feels that through the charity shop she has learnt the most informal English, but a specific time when she learnt the most was between 2000 and 2001, when she was doing a management course. She has had many housing problems all through her time here, and it has affected her learning, but at this time even though the housing was an issue she learnt a lot:

Sarah: Yes because I moved to that course because there was no foreigners, and the best thing to learn language is meet with the native people.

Rebecca: Okay, so let me get this right. In 2000 your family came to live with you, you were living in a very small place, and you were doing a management course in English. That was the time you learnt the most because you were forced to speak English in that course.

Sarah: Yes. Because they give me… presentation. Which help me a lot because I have to answer my colleagues in the course, and my project which is about (Charity) and the aim of (Charity)… all this kind of stuff it needs studying. Sometimes I study
really very hard. And I did pass. Sometimes until 6 o’clock in the morning, because you know management work is difficult, it’s not easy.

Tania

Tania arrived in the UK when she was 11, on a truck from Bosnia. She is now 20, and has been here nearly 10 years. She started to learn English at 14 when she started in a school, before that she wasn’t learning English or placed in a school. She speaks Romany, Slav and some German. She had no English when she arrived, and considers now that her spoken English is near to fluent. She works part time in a refugee community organisation and is also attending classes for her literacy skills. There are eight in her family, five children, two parents and a grandmother. When they first arrived there were three children and Mother, but she has always lived in the family home.

She considers that her time when she first started volunteering, in 2000, and before that dealing with the many problems her family had were the times when she learnt the most.

“The first month I was there, he was always teaching me you know, this is apple, this is this, this is that… one time he was like having this fruit in his hand and he goes ‘what’s this?’ ‘pear’; ‘good good’! And then he goes every single one you know? And then the vegetables, I didn’t know any vegetables so then after that the vegetables came, and after the vegetables came the words to talk you know it was so nice. I had a lot of fun learning!”

“Basically how I learned English is with problems, going to job centres, housing, then after that my god, going to doctors and see if my mum is able to work, and then she was very upset because the doctor said that she wasn’t.”
Overview of themes

Interviews with just seven participants highlighted a range of learning experience. I will first outline themes that analyses of the data uncovered, and then relate those themes to the initial hypotheses.

Tools for learning

Six participants mentioned their English/English dictionary as a resource, and gave the following reasons: When you look for one word you find many more; you can find out more about that word – whether it is a noun, verb etc; it’s easier then to learn from other English speakers, to let them help you; and it gets you used to spelling. Six also mentioned television, but for two it was not useful until they had learnt at least a little language. Radio was useful for three, and Ayaz mentions a particular station:

“97.3 LBC, and it talks about everything that happen in daily life in London. From that time nearly two, three years now every night, one hour, two hour I listen to the radio. And it is very very helpful.”

Visiting the Library and reading children’s books was mentioned by three participants, and other resources mentioned by one or two were: reading and writing letters; using Word for Windows, using a Dictaphone when in class; reading the Bible, and internet chat sites; playing games. Various methods for learning words were mentioned, for example putting language up on the walls at home; and writing words down when out and about and checking them later.

People

As well as a specific question concerning this, people were mentioned throughout the interviews. Responses were in four categories; teachers, other learners, English speakers and people that speak your mother tongue.

Teachers

All participants mentioned at least one teacher, and saw their encouragement as important. This meant highlighting improvements; no pressure with mistakes; generally encouraging and focusing on
achievements; explaining problems; patience and having time to explain. Hardy and Sarah also mention the importance of other subject tutors’ understanding, Sarah talks about her management course;

“She start to explain for me and she encourage me all the time when I am writing my assignment. She just compare the first one with the second one, and she take me to one side and say how you improve, how many words you are learning, how your spelling becomes very good… she was a very nice teacher she was.”

They were important for advice and information: explaining about dictionaries, advising about the radio station mentioned earlier.

**Other learners**

Five participants mentioned learning from other learners that don’t speak their language in class. Ayaz was particularly enthusiastic about her college situation:

“Because we used to be lots of people from different countries, then we don’t have two person to talk the same language. Which, even we don’t speak good English it is still helpful, because everybody is trying to speak English.”

Two participants had negative experiences with classes that were virtually monolingual.

Ahmed and Ayaz mention activities such as trips outside the classroom, and Ahmed shared his study ideas with friends who were learning as well, but not in his class.
**English speakers**

Participants found English speakers useful. Specific friends are mentioned and these friendships have come about in a number of ways:

- Friends met randomly or through other friends,
- Solicitor who became a friend
- Friends met through volunteering
- Teacher who became a friend
- Religious activities: English speakers at the Mosque and Church
- Statutory helpers: a key worker in a hostel
- Friends in a hostel, and neighbours

Mary describes how her key worker told her about the library:

**Rebecca** Where did you find out about the library?

**Mary** My key worker help me to find everything, because she know that I don’t know English properly.

Sarah talks about the relationship with a girl living in the same hostel:

“I think we need each other, I lost my children and she lost her parents… She used to come to the room and bring the dictionary and books, she start studying with me. Reading books, children’s book, and I am doing the nice food… and we start to chat, sometime up to 11 o’clock. She was teaching me, this is a desk, this is a draw, this is a bed, and she start writing down for me and taking out from the dictionary, because I have got Arabic and English and she has got English. And she becomes like teacher…”
Azad talks about knowing his solicitor:

“One person which had a profound impact was my solicitor. Still he is my friend – we visit each other and I worked with him as well, as interpreter. I learned a lot from interpreting and translating.”

Four participants mention colleagues in general terms, at work or volunteering as an opportunity to speak to English speakers generally. Five mention English speaking neighbours, and two talk about using the garden as an opportunity to talk:

Rebecca And you live on your own?
Ayaz Yes. Which is very helpful because when I have the time I go out, I go outside and I found the people, there is a small garden in front of the house and always, especially my friend, she is called Sarah, When I saw her gardening I go out and talk to her.
Rebecca So is the garden shared?
Ayaz Yes.

Ahmed Mmm, yeah, I met some English people, was helpful. Sometimes they need help in their house in their gardens, you know? In the neighbourhood.
Rebecca Gardens, I’m finding, are really important.
Ahmed Yes, they need help in their gardens and you are talking together.

Tania remembers her fellow worker when volunteering:

“… and then he figured out that I don’t know my ABC… every morning he makes me do my ABC, and the delivery is coming the man is there and he makes me do this a,b,c,d… I say that’s embarrassing! He says learning is not embarrassing! It was good, it was very good.”
People that speak your language

People with the same language were seen as useful for two main reasons: language learning and understanding the UK. Two participants mentioned sharing study skills, four mentioned helping with other information that wasn’t language. People who had been in the UK longer would explain things: the library, the refugee organisation, dictionaries; and participants who found that they were the more experienced one would do the same. For Azad this was motivation to learn:

Azad  It encourages you. You feel some way you are responsible for these people, you have to learn… They think you know English very well – which you don’t – they bring a letter for you, you don’t understand, you try to learn… in order to…

Rebecca  But you have the skills to learn? So you had study skills, education, you have the skills to add to it? So you were continuing learning and they were learning about the system?

Azad  Of course. For example one of my friends, 2 days ago… he was charged by his bank because there was not enough credit in his account. He made a direct debit. Automatically the bank charged him. He was asking me for an explanation. I explained… (describes bank charges) Then he was happy, now at least he understood what is going on, he doesn’t mistrust the bank. He didn’t learn English but he learnt the system at least.

Hardy felt that sometimes his Kurdish friends were better for learning meanings:

Hardy  … if I don’t understand some words, I’ll ask Kurdish people if I found. If I don’t find it I go to English people. Because if one Kurdish guy tell me it is so easier to understand.

Rebecca  That’s interesting because you use an English/English dictionary…

Hardy  Sometimes, not always

Rebecca  So there is a time for explaining it in Kurdish, and there is a time for explaining it
Four participants mentioned how these people motivate and encourage you to learn by sharing their own experience in the UK, and Mary explains how her friend says ‘you have to have the effort to learn because if you don’t learn you can’t do anything here’. They also provide friendship and company, and practical help.

Despite the obvious support of friends and acquaintances that spoke their language, participants were not at all concerned about the effect learning another language would have on their mother tongue, or their identity. A couple of participants expressed concern that they had to make sure that they kept using it for when they return home, but all agreed that ‘you never forget your mother tongue’ (Ahmed).

**Forming networks**

This wide range of people, all having an effect on learning success led me to probe how these people had become part of my participants’ lives. Figure 4 shows the range of contact:

**FIGURE 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How did they meet?</th>
<th>Number of participants who mentioned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other friends (known when arrived)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chance/Random meeting</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another course</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living near</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious activities</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid workers that became friends</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Situations where language is used

Figure 5 shows the situations participants used or learnt new language:

**FIGURE 5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ahmed</th>
<th>Ayaz</th>
<th>Azad</th>
<th>Hardy</th>
<th>Mary</th>
<th>Sarah</th>
<th>Tania</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sorting Problems</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job /Work Placement</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Course</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbours</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Letters</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Volunteering</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>In ESOL Class</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Situations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housemate</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Using Computer</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Activities outside Class</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mosque</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sorting others’ problems</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Football</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church/Church Choir</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homework</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With family</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some situations are centred around specific people and have been looked at in earlier sections. Other situations were seen as particularly important by participants, and I will cover these in more detail below.

**Problems**

Ahmed and Azad wrote a lot of letters, and Azad and Sarah learnt from the letters they received. Ayaz, Sarah and Tania learnt through sorting out problems face to face; Sarah describes how particular experiences led to the widening of vocabulary:

“And by my situation, every time when I get evicted, by those letters, I force myself to take some words which is very important for use. Like ‘circumstances’, which it was very difficult for me, it takes months and months to learn that word. But because my situation, I have to know this word. Every time I write in Kurdish on my hand… Like eviction, it was very important but for me it was very difficult.”
“And every time when I am going to an interview about the houses, about my situation... homelessness I never ever heard, the first time when they kick me out, I understood what is the meaning of homelessness... and what is homeless, how there is centre to take your food free, to take your bag in... because all the situation every time you need a new word to use.”

**Volunteering**

Three people talk about their voluntary work as an opportunity to learn and use language; and all three include it as part of the time they learnt the most English. The reasons they give are many: finding friends; talking to people; practicing what you’ve learnt; helping you forget traumatic experience or problems in rest of your life; people to help you and joke with you; learning about UK; people to help you learn English; being forced to use English. Two of the three were volunteering at refugee organisations.

**Situations within the ESOL class**

Some formal classroom occasions were seen as an opportunity to practice. Reasons given were: other Students, being around English, using language learned outside, a mix of diverse learners, situations where you have to talk, but the opportunity also to make mistakes. Ayaz compares a class she had which was largely monolingual with the situation in the community college:

Its very big difference because there, I told you, you don’t use very much language... yes you learn, you are in English class but the English class is just when the teacher there and write something on the board that’s the English. When this one stops no-one speak English, I mean if you with mixed pupil it’s going to be quicker. In *the college* we are nearly twenty students but all of us from different places. We need to speak English to each other, and that’s very important.
Work

Work provided many opportunities to use and learn language: there were things expected that you had to learn, and once again situations where you had no choice but to use English. Participants also made use of social situations in breaks, and found they got to use the language they had learned in formal classes.

Ahmed:

“When I was first at the shop I said: “Please, I don’t want to lose what I learnt, please speak English with me.” They were speaking English with me, I learnt some words from them. What they did, they put me to another shop. They said: “go and manage a shop alone, because it’s good for your language. You meet people, you serve the customers. Yeah, it’s good for you. I went to another shop, I work alone, for ten hours. Because I wanted to learn English. And I was just meeting people who was speaking English. That was a fish and chip shop.”

Azad however talks about some jobs not being useful for learning however, “because we couldn’t speak, couldn’t make friends, as it was just a casual work”.

Other courses

People had positive experiences doing other courses, and learned more English through doing this. Some did them solely for that purpose. They seem to be contained often in the examples of when people learned most. Ayaz mentions a course in community development work that was helpful because many of her fellow students were native speakers:

“Even their written language was not good but their spoken language was very good. That was very helpful. And I’ve got friends that they work full time and they do this course, English people, I learnt a lot from them.”
Hardy used a computer course, despite knowing most of the computing aspect:

**Hardy** Yes. They know I am not English, and they help me sometimes. My teacher especially explains to me.

**Rebecca** And the teacher, and IT teacher, understands the language side of it?

**Hardy** Yes, of course. First time I went and explained I am not English. I know how to use the computer but I am not English.

**Motivation**

At different times in the interviews, themes came up about why they were pushing themselves to learn: some had previous study or language experience and this knowledge of what it entailed was a reason they worked hard. Ahmed Ayaz, Sarah and Azad all talk about their previous qualifications or study, and Ayaz and Sarah particularly talk about how they are used to working, and were desperate to work and be fulfilled. Ayaz explains:

“I used to work in my country. I have got a good degree, I used to work ten years. It’s not easy for me to stay here and just waiting for fifteen pounds, job centre get it to me.”

Others talk about wanting to understand their environment, having seen friends with a lack of understanding and not wanting to be like them, or seeing friends learning and being driven by that. Long-term goals were mentioned, finishing studies or settling here:

“Because I want to open my eyes, I want to open my mind because if you live in Europe you have to.” (Hardy)

Others’ needs prompted them to learn more, for example friends who needed things translating or family members they were helping to learn. Tania regularly organises her Mother and siblings into weekend practice:
“All of us we try to help each other basically, we do reading, spelling, and we do like to have fun you know, like a quiz. You have to put your hands up if you know it, not just shout it around, and then we have like shout it around… and we have like reading, and each of us reads… Now we only have it for one hour on Saturdays and Sundays, because they want to do something else, they want this, they want that…. I have to respect that! But I really like being with my mum and having these quizzes and… what I do is like I read 10 minutes, then my brother reads 10 minutes… We have a lot of fun, sometimes when they say something they start giggling and laughing!”

Others have encouragement from friends. One participant mentioned that even when she wasn’t motivated to learn because things were bad here, she still watched the news to find out what was going on back home, and learnt that way. There were specific motivations mentioned within courses too, Sarah mentions presentations:

“…Which help me a lot because I have to answer my colleagues in the course, and my project which is about (a charity) all this kind of stuff it needs studying. Sometimes I study really very hard. And I did pass. Sometimes until 6 o’clock in the morning, because you know management work is difficult, it’s not easy.”

Many motivations are linked with simply having to survive: as mentioned in the problems section, some participants learned the most just by having to. Examples are given of housing offices, benefits offices, doctors’ visits, not all positive but all resulting in learning.

Tania left school very de-motivated as she learned very little and got no support. Starting volunteering at the RCO changed this, and much of the reason seems to be the particular worker that encouraged her and pushed her.
Initiative

All the examples: how people meet, the courses taken, other students, coming up with ideas for study, putting yourself in situations where you will have to speak English, are full of how these seven participants have taken opportunities and worked on their language learning. They have worked to find situations to speak English, opportunities to use particular language, ways to learn: letters, volunteer work, other work, and situations to learn in.

All have made choices about where and how they learn: they may have chosen a course, or a place to worship, or networked through friends. They may have chosen to study with family or friends. They have chosen either to read a bible or to go for specific television programmes:

Hardy  
I am trying to watch BBC programmes not like a movie. Just regular speaking like on the street.

Rebecca  
So you decide what you watch, you make decisions about the television…

Hardy  
Yes. The travel channel, they have programmes about airline, the customer service, something like that. And how do you call the programmes, fighting at night or something?

Rebecca  
Police Camera Action?

Hardy  
Yes, that is like life as well.

Control within the classroom was perceived as less important: Mary didn’t feel she controlled what she learnt, but was happy to trust teachers for what she needed; Ayaz also was happy to follow the teacher’s plan. Azad didn’t feel he controlled his learning in the classroom, but he still sites it as the time he learned the most. Control of language learned was less important than the decision to take opportunities to use one’s learning.
Understanding the UK

Questions about a specific cultural understanding led to discussions about all aspects of how they came to understand the UK. A number found English friends useful, others friends with their own language, people at the Mosque, and some learnt in college. Volunteering was also useful, as has been dealing with practical problems, and the radio.

Ahmed visited a family and together they compared differences in culture:

“I continued to meet with them, to speak with them, from my culture, from my country, from my parents, from my brother, from my sister. What we like, what they like, what’s our country, how is UK… also I had some family movie my parents send me. I took the movie I showed them how we live, how is our wedding, how is our culture how is our party.”

He also learnt in the pub:

“We were going out together to the pubs, actually they didn’t teach me any English but I learnt from them the way of speak, the way act, the way of life in the UK. And, I ask them how the people live, what is lawful in the country what is forbidden. How is the rule in this country.”

His neighbours, English speakers, were culturally Indian and he found it useful when they explained things from a perspective he understood.

“There was an Indian family, living next to us, not the same culture but a bit close, we were interested to meet each other. And, I was helping with their garden, sometimes. He was working late with the post and he needed our help. I was speaking to him and his wife, in English, not in Hindi.”

Hardy also used English friends: his ex teacher, and English speaking Spanish friends, who were also learning English but had a European perspective.
Examples are given of learning specific cultural lessons in college. Ayaz talks about lessons concerning married life, and Mary mentions a comparison, like Ahmed and his family.

Mary  For me it was important. Like, he took the China country and they compare the student. “In that country, they don’t have freedom, in this country the child have the freedom” and it’s good, because in that time you know what happen in China, and what happen in England! And then they say “And in your country is like that?” “No, its not like that.” And I said in my country the children have the freedom but not like in this country.

Rebecca  So in this example you found that you learnt about other countries, and about England as well. So you were doing both?

Mary  Yes. And they teach you how to use the map…how to ask everything, how you can make the friends in English, things like that.

Mary also had a particular friend from her country who explained a lot:

Mary  Because when I came here I found one friend and she was showing many things. Because in my country there is no train, there is no buses like double buses... and when I was coming here it was hard for me. I didn’t know how to use the train, how to buy the tickets in English, and my friend was helping me, like “Can I have one ticket please...!” When we go to a restaurant my friend is telling me go to command the food… I don’t know how to command the food!

**Multicultural host environment**

It seems that understanding was made easier by the multicultural nature of the UK. Most of the participants have spent all their time in London; others have been in other cities or large towns. Ahmed was able to reason with his employers in Farsi to speak English with him. He was also able to talk English to the Indian family, while still having similar cultural perspectives. Hardy discovered quickly that no-one spoke ‘proper’ English and that gave him confidence. Mary speaks explicitly about how Londoners are used to hearing different accents and language with errors.
Conclusions of findings

There were a number of factors that I believed would have affected the participants’ learning. I will address these one by one.

Having control over what they learn and how they learn it: in most areas of their life they have lost control

This was a complicated idea and the answers have really divided the statement into three parts: control over what you learn, how you learn it, and control over the rest of your life. Control over what was learned wasn’t considered important: so much of learning happened outside the classroom that they either controlled it anyway or it was absolutely necessary; for example Tania and Sarah picking things up as they sorted out problems, and Sarah learning through action by becoming homeless. How they learned relates to their tools and methods – and some participants had taken control of this, by deciding their own methods. Ahmed’s internet chat is a sharp contrast to Mary’s Bible reading, and also Mary’s church choir and Azad’s community within the Mosque. Within the classroom the important thing seemed to be the opportunity to use language, and not the method in which it was taught. Having control in the rest of their lives, whilst not being a question that was answered with much interest, seemed to me to be a factor. All had made life decisions that had enabled them to use their language in their own way. It appeared that they had some control, and they were making decisions about learning. Ahmed and Hardy by meeting people socially, Azad and Mary had used their places of worship, and Sarah, despite many housing problems, had found volunteer work in the charity shop not long after arriving and it was her stability. However of more importance seemed to be the decisions they had made to accept any incoming language and take opportunities where they arose.

Relevance of what they are learning to their day to day experience

In experience of ESOL, some classes were relevant and some not. This wasn’t important for all; the lessons in culture were useful and appreciated, but the lack of relevance of other classes wasn’t considered important. In terms of other courses, the language was automatically relevant as they were courses the participants had chosen themselves. Participants were positive about these courses. Language learned outside the classroom, was automatically relevant; needing to be learnt for whatever problem was being solved.
**Positive cultural learning experiences outside the classroom**

There were a number of experiences noted in which people learnt about the UK, but not all were positive and some were inside the classroom. They were only mentioned because people learnt from them, so it seems that they were all learning experiences. Sarah’s difficult beginning to her volunteering, and Tania and Sarah’s experiences with statutory bodies were not positive and all resulted in them knowing more English and more about the UK. There are many positives experiences; Ahmed’s exchange of culture with the family and the culture lessons in mentioned in class show that culture definitely needs to be learned, it doesn’t seem to matter where as long as the opportunities are there to interact. Also important is the role that people who speak your language have in helping you understand, and the multicultural environment you are part of. Hardy’s confidence grew when he realised so many others didn’t speak fluently and Mary comments about how Londoners are used to hearing foreign accents.

**Informal learning situations**

Tania and her family practice together, Sarah and her friend in the hostel studied together, and Ahmed and his friends shared study ideas. They have all found numerous situations in which to learn: using television, the radio, the Internet, the Bible, children’s books and so on.

**Positive social interaction**

There are numerous examples of opportunities to interact, with both specific friends and groups: the choir, Mosque, friends, neighbours, other volunteers, other learners, work.

**The presence of an English speaker that you trust, as a guide that increases learning**

There have been multiple English speakers, taking different roles. The presence of a network of these people seems important. Teachers were named often, along with many others. As important has been someone that you trust with your own language; in language learning, understanding the UK and general well being.
Other issues of interest

The way participants saw their identity and their mother tongue did not seem to affect their motivation or their ability to learn English; whilst it was an important aspect of identity there was no question of losing it.

It was difficult to see anything significant regarding living arrangements, there were conflicting opinions such as Mary finding it hard making relationships in the hostel and yet Sarah making one of her friendships there. Different living situations were complex, and some participants had changed arrangements a lot.

It was impossible to look at differences in learning strategies according to cultural background; I had not adequately defined culture, the sample was not appropriately wide in background or size and I didn’t have enough knowledge of participants’ countries of origin.
Participants felt they had achieved success in the following ways:

**Having learning resources and learning opportunity:**

- Having relevant learning material to day-to-day experiences
- Learning culture; inside and outside the classroom
- Studying subjects of interest using English
- Solving practical problems using English

**Being around many and varied English speakers, and speakers of their own language:**

- Having positive social interaction with English speaking groups and individuals
- Having informal learning situations
- Making informal learning partnerships
- Having a positive and encouraging teacher
- Having someone that could explain things in their own language
- Having someone they trusted who spoke their own language

Also by:

Living in a multicultural town or city where people speak varied English, many others are learning too, and people are used to hearing learners speak

Using initiative – making choices and taking opportunities to use their language and meet people
Discussion

The importance of reviewing my work

I have looked fairly closely at a small number of forced migrants, looking at individual experiences of learning language. To achieve understanding of the project it is essential to see where it fits with existing ideas in the area, and its significance with current and future thinking (‘sense making’ and ‘claims making’, Knight 2002: 20) It is also important to ensure that readers, as well as having access to all the methodology, should be made aware of “the reflections of the researchers on their role in the study” (McQueen and Knussen 2002: 212). In qualitative research one must provide clear indications of how the work may have been weakened or strengthened by the researcher. Nothing can be universally surmised from my findings but there are a number of areas that, as they raise more questions, it is apposite to suggest further research on. There are also areas that could have been improved, or could strengthen the case of previous research.

The participants and their circumstances

A number of barriers were noted to be affecting women more than men, often availability of classes and the need to be emotionally and physically caring for children and in the home (Ditscheid 2003). The women I spoke to either had no children or had initially arrived alone; so ways of overcoming these barriers could not be addressed in this study. Illiteracy is also a barrier, yet all my participants are literate in their first language, and have some study experience. They also speak at least one other language so have previous experience of language learning; and I am not aware of any learning or physical difficulties preventing their learning. This means a range of people with potentially far more barriers have not been included.

The participants all have aspects of the ‘good language learner’ (Ruben, Stern, Naiman in McDonough 1999): personal styles of learning, an active approach to the task, a tolerant approach to the target language, and technical language-learning know-how. They are constantly searching for meaning, are willing to practise, and willing to use the language in real communication, although it should be noted that this hasn’t always been the case. They also, and this is highlighted by the use of English/English
dictionaries, are developing English as a ‘separate system’ (McDonough 1999: 1). Something not noted in the outline of a good language learner is the use of speakers of one’s own language, something many of my participants found useful. One aspect of a good language learner is mentioned to be an ‘empathy with its speakers’. I wonder if this means something akin to my cultural knowledge idea, or a ‘socio-cultural knowledge’ (Roberts et al 2004: 14). It is hard to pinpoint how this dual learning takes place. Now my participants are all ‘good language learners’, is it because they have this understanding? If so, how did they get it with not much language? The socio-cultural aspect is often treated as a separate subject to English but the language is needed in order to understand. My participants’ activities outside the classroom were a key to a lot of this understanding even though cultural lessons were mentioned: a lot of learning was happening through context. Culture is a confusing issue however and needs to be looked at further. Perhaps it would be a good idea to focus on two specific language groups, in a comparative study.

It is interesting to think about how this sample came about after a wide search. Initially some of the people interested were mothers with young children but they weren’t able to commit, possibly the barriers mentioned earlier played a part. I tried to include as many nationalities as participants but this was difficult. All had refugee status, and as far as I know none of the participants had been in detention. As mentioned also, all were literate. For many of them ESOL classes came within the first year, thus avoiding some isolation and loss of confidence. A better understanding of socio-cultural norms in countries of origin, a longer study, and a wider group of countries of origin could lead to better research in the area of how cultural experience affects learning. A longer study and a strategy for reaching ‘hard to reach’ learners would shed some light on the learning achievements of more isolated, less literate and experienced learners. I know that there are examples of achievements in these areas but it has been difficult for me to contact students I have had in the past and find other learners.

It is for issues such as this that another stage would have been useful. The interviews raised more questions, such as definitions of socio-cultural understanding, and issues of control, and another group stage or individual discussions would have enabled us to explore them. Including a web log and a website in the design of the research goes some way to extending and understanding experience a little better than can be achieved in five months.
Participants’ motivations seemed to echo those of adult learners mentioned in the literature review (Cantor 1998; Barton et al 2004), particularly making relationships, advancing oneself and accessing provision. I would widen the final point to dealing with practical problems; for example fighting an asylum case, finding a home and other survival necessities. A lot of learning also seemed to be happening in the way described by ‘social learning theory’: through observing others. Much of learning came from class instruction and instruction from peers too.

**The importance of the teacher**

Research has already been mentioned that stresses the importance of the teacher for asylum seekers studying English (Roberts et al 2004) and for adult learners in general (Barton et al 2004). My participants mentioned the attitude of the teacher more than the role they play; in previous research teachers have talked about how the role expands when practical problems need to be dealt with, and when students talk about their experiences.

“For us, as teachers, perhaps the most important aspect of our project is the awareness we have gained of learning processes and social processes in the classroom” (Dam & Gabrielsen 1988 in Allwright 1998)

It would be difficult to analyse teacher behaviour as this is so often a very personal issue of rapport but it seems fairly clear that encouragement and an approachable quality is very important, as is the feeling of having time.

**The importance of a task**

It seems that many of the classroom tasks that Vanegas (1998) has mentioned as important for learning, for my participants took place outside the classroom. Task- based learning requires the learner to be independent from the teacher (Vanegas 1998); often they have received strong guidance in the classroom, but tasks completed outside class have led to learning as well. This leads us to wonder whether activities and interaction in the classroom should depend on life situations outside. The definition of a task:
“a piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others, freely or for some reward. Thus examples of tasks include filling in forms, buying a pair of shoes, writing a cheque etc. In other words, by ‘task’ is meant the hundred and one things people do in everyday life, at work, at play, and ‘in-between”’ (Long 1985 in Vanegas 1998)

In a classroom the role of the teacher is to enable learner centred, real communication. This is certainly important and in my experience practicing real situations before an inexperienced speaker goes off into the great unknown is very useful. But my findings imply that these tasks are ongoing in ESOL students’ lives, and that should be taken into account too. Perhaps lessons should involve planning for tasks in the outside world, increasing motivation and confidence. Formal learning should encourage successful contextual learning outside the classroom.

Other courses are a great example of realistic task based learning. Tower Hamlets College have noted the success of their ‘embedded’ English courses, and in a NATECLA workshop talked about the benefits vocational and ESOL Tutors planning together. In this way the tutors know what real language is needed of the students week to week, and this has helped to raise the awareness of the vocational tutors. (Dudley and Daisley 2005)

The use of ICT in learning English, with clearly understandable packages where only the language needs to be learnt, was an obvious benefit in my findings. Surprisingly it isn’t mentioned as a factor in recent research looking at the role of ICT in adult learning, including ESOL (Mellar et al 2004).

Available resources

The usefulness of realistic resources has already been noted (Vanegas 1998; Roberts et al 2004). It was not a surprise to me that a dictionary is a useful language tool but it has been beneficial for learner-centred research to state this. My experience has often been that learners are reluctant to believe that English/English dictionaries are incredibly useful. My findings also suggest the importance of peers in influencing learning; so the fact that my participants are also ‘peers’ lends the findings weight when talking to learners. This could apply to all resources that participants found useful.
Using your own language

Very little research looking at the importance of someone who speaks your language was looked at in the literature review. The comparison of Vietnamese and Ugandan Asians noted that the presence of an established community did aid settlement, but not necessarily language learning. (JCRV 1982) None of my learners were living within a particularly established community, but all had friends and acquaintances that they had called on. This is an area which research could take further, perhaps through mentoring projects or hosting schemes.

The use of one’s own language to learn the new one, especially word meanings, was mentioned in the case of Tamil students in monolingual classes (Barton and Pitt 2003), but little has been looked at in terms of informal learning.

Mother tongue influence as Zahirovic has studied seems not to have been a problem with my participants. I would suggest that this has a lot to do with their prior language learning experience, and with less experienced learners these worries of loss of identity may be greater.

Networks and social capital

Participants had formed relationships according to need and interest. Putnam’s ‘bridging social capital’ (2000) seems to have aided the learning of both language and culture, in forming relationships across cultural boundaries. They had all found some sort of a hook, a point where they needed people and were in turn needed. And this had happened through class relationships too, as Dimitriadou also found in FE classes (2003). It had also happened through volunteering, and work. Recent research was mentioned in the literature review about volunteering as a route to employment, but it had specifically looked at women (Working Lives and RAGU 2005). Research, including a broad literature review, looking at the benefits of volunteering for excluded groups doesn’t mention refugees as a specific group who could benefit and doesn’t mention one of the benefits as being language or cultural learning. (Institute for Volunteering Research 2003) I know there are a number of work placements and volunteering initiatives running alongside ESOL classes and it would be useful to monitor those, in terms of successful language learning. Important to note is that two of the three participants who mentioned volunteering as being useful in language learning were with a refugee community.
organisation. It would be interesting to look at support and understanding of forced migrants in more mainstream organisations.

**The issue of control**

“If we, in our zeal to be humanistic, become too learner-centred with regard to ‘control’, we undermine the learner’s most basic need, which is for security” (Stevick 1980 in Allwright 1998: 13)

The NRDC case studies certainly note that asylum seekers wanted more control of their lives, but at the same time stress how well received the teacher-centred approach has been (Roberts et al 2004). An example is given of a positive classroom culture:

‘Teacher centred, language task oriented and well structured, with strong protocols for politeness, punctuality and attendance is underpinned by a strong teacher empathy for both the social and learning needs of the students’ (Roberts et al 2004: 31).

Examples are however given of students bringing their own materials into the classroom, suggesting a balance is needed. Perhaps, when it comes to control, learners feel they need to improve their English in order to gain control of the rest of their lives? It is a complex issue that should be explored.

**Further research**

If research is to have an affect on the learning of forced migrants, it is important that teachers and researchers gain a ‘collective memory’ that doesn’t continually reinvent ideas in a cyclical manner. (Baynham 2005). A relationship between practitioners and researchers is important, as is a relationship with the learner. Allwright (1998) suggests ‘Exploratory Practice’ – integrating research into classroom practice and the work of the teacher. With this in mind, areas that could be covered are:
The role of the friend who speaks your language in learning language and culture

The role of mentoring or befriending in learning language: English speakers and your own language

The role of volunteering in learning, with refugee and mainstream organisations

Work with learners who are de-motivated, or who have learning difficulties

Home circumstances – do they affect learning? Is it better to be happy and speaking your language, and getting practice elsewhere, or around English speakers and finding it hard to speak?

Embedded ESOL courses and vocational courses – their role in language learning.

**Continuing this research**

As well as this dissertation, findings are published on the website [www.forcedmigrantslanguagelearning.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk](http://www.forcedmigrantslanguagelearning.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk). A web log is linked to the site so that participants and other learners can add their thoughts, and a link has been sent to all those who suggested participants, and researchers working in this area.
Research Conclusions

I started this research because I wanted to see how learners had succeeded. Through it I have discovered that the way people learn is not based on a collective ‘common sense’, but there are some common issues affecting the diverse participants. Teachers are incredibly important in the lives of asylum seekers and refugees and are also integral to good educational research and should be encouraged to take more of a part. I have also discovered that in educational research generally learners need more of a voice, especially forced migrant learners. I am a teacher and trainer, but don’t teach ESOL at the moment. I was more detached while doing this research than I would have been if I was teaching, which has been useful for an objective study. However I think my knowledge and empathy of the classroom situation has been invaluable too, and I think that the only way we can learn and continue to learn from the bulk of research is to incorporate it into classroom practice. There are issues of time but so much of the research I have looked at, over 30 years, has said that teachers don’t know enough about the refugee experience. It’s the reason I tried to understand more by doing research. I definitely gained an understanding of the refugee experience, and something more: an insight into what successful forced migrant learners can do to frame future learning. They can both explain their experience to teachers and providers, shaping courses and integration programmes; and they can help less experienced or literate learners understand the strategies and methods appropriate to them by using familiar language and cultural reference. Refugees and asylum seekers achieve remarkable feats of learning on a daily basis and have been doing this for years; we need to see how this happens, acknowledge the achievement and enable learners to pass their skills and knowledge on to others.
Appendices

Appendix 1: Questions For Participants

These are personal questions, it is important to ask them to get a wide range of participants. The information will be confidential and is only for my research as a student at University of East London. Please ask me if you are unsure rebstully@blueyonder.co.uk  07793 825848

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Phone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Were you forced to leave your country?

What country were you forced to leave? Did you come through another country?

How old are you? How old were you when you arrived in UK?

When did you start to learn English in a classroom situation?

In the first year in UK after 2 years in UK after 5 years in UK

Do you speak other languages?

What level was your English when you arrived in London? (Consider speaking, writing, listening and reading)

| poor | fluent |

What level is your English now?

| poor | fluent |

What are you doing now? (Studying, working, children etc)

Did you have a profession or qualifications before arriving in the UK?
# Appendix 2: Group Activity Plan: First Half Hour

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Group Activity</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Resources Needed</th>
<th>Why?</th>
<th>Interview Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>Outline session, explain confidentiality, establish ground rules, explain voluntary nature and freedom to leave/come back at any time.</td>
<td>Nothing leaves the room; You can leave at any time; respect what is true for other people</td>
<td>Participants should feel in control and aware; and should understand the boundaries of research</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Explain 'Research' and answer questions</td>
<td>Be careful about levels... Don't bore people but check understanding</td>
<td>What is research?</td>
<td>It's important for participants to understand my cultural frame of reference before commenting on it.</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Explain specific research fields leading to my research</td>
<td></td>
<td>NRDC and other research reports, Info about related Research</td>
<td>Specific knowledge, participants then have a motivation for giving me their ideas - they see how it relates to their experience</td>
<td>Tell me about your network map. Home situation, important English speakers etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Social Situations and Learning</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Example done by me; paper, pens</td>
<td>To help participants remember language learning relationships and identify important figures</td>
<td>How important were other people in your learning? Groups, teacher, someone in particular? Why were they important?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3: Group Session Handout
(Originally on two pages)

What is Research?

People always want to find out why things happen, and how they happen. Scientists do this by testing things, making rules, proving hypotheses (ideas).

Social scientists look at people - and argue whether you can make rules about what is 'true' for human experience.

Is there only one truth? Or is there something that is true today, that will not be true tomorrow?

Some researchers say that you can still say what is 'true' about human behaviour, others (including me!) say that different things are true at different times, in different cultures.

'Normal' is always changing. In English society we don't put an unmarried woman in a mental asylum now for having a baby, but we did less than 100 years ago.

But how do we measure it?

Quantitative - numbers, statistics
Qualitative - how, what did you think, getting an idea of a situation

My research is asking about the experience of a small number of people, and is asking how they feel about the issues. This qualitative work may help to identify ideas for learning, and encourage other research to focus on these issues over a longer period and with larger groups of people.

What is happening in Research about learning and refugees?

- How do people learn
- How do people learn a second language
- Is your mother tongue part of your identity?
- Refugees' identity in host countries
- Refugees' identity in UK
- How does refugee status affect you?
- How does being forced to leave your country affect you?
- How does detention affect you?
- How does trauma affect you?
- My research - Refugees' success learning English in London
- What stops refugees from getting employment and training?
Appendix 4: Timeline and Map Activity Examples

THIS IS A TIME LINE, YOU CAN USE IT TO REMEMBER WHEN THINGS HAPPENED THAT HELPED YOU LEARN ENGLISH OR STOPPED YOU LEARNING ENGLISH
Appendix 5: Coding Categories And Example of Coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category Talked About</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Category Talked About</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contact with RCO</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Practical Problems</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control of learning</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Reasons you can’t lose mother tongue</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courses - not ESOL</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dictionaries</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Study skills learnt in own language/home country</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English speakers</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Taking initiative</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English speaking neighbours</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Teachers’ behaviour</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESOL lesson content - other than English</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Teachers’ roles</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How people meet</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Tools that help study and learning</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping your mother tongue</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Understanding the UK</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libraries</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Voluntary work</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation to learn</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>When you learnt the most</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural society/used to hearing foreigners</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Work</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities to practice/use</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Work placements</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other learners</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>ESOL course</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People with your language/from your country</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

She mentions the encouragement she received from the teacher at the community college, highlighting her improvements, not to worry about mistakes, comparing how good she would be at learning a language with Ayaz.

On thing that was important was her English/English dictionary, and her teacher helped her see this.

“I can use dictionary in my language but she say the better thing for you is to use the English to English is very very important because in the time you find one word, you can read a lot about in English which is very important! For example one word like radio, it tells you if it is a noun or if it is a verb, that’s very good information, and then how you describe the noun, and the verb, like to do something...”

5. Did you have to learn about culture alongside language? What came first? How did you go about learning it?

She learned first of all with subjects in class at the community college. She gives an example of a class about married life, which was necessary and interesting because the whole process of meeting someone, living with them etc was entirely new to her with her experience of arranged marriage.

She also talks about learning through housing problems, and how hard this was. She didn’t use an interpreter, preferring to talk, and just went to as many people as possible asking about what she could do. Through a Kurdish organisation she was then put in touch with another homelessness organisation, who she felt treated her more like a friend. Even thought they were working, she felt they were really trying to help her.

6. How important is your first language to maintain your identity? Do you think this has ever made it harder to learn another language?

She doesn’t feel she can ever forget her language but thinks that this may depend on age. She keeps her language by watching programmes on satellite, and wants to speak and learn English, and has noticed that English words creep in when she is talking to her brother, as it is sometimes easier.
Appendix 6: Database Query of Category Three

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who</th>
<th>What</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ahmed</td>
<td>He also talks about the two different IT courses – One that he didn’t continue, and one that he passed:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I want to study BTEC National. It’s level 3 in IT. I did it for 4 months. I found it hard. Why I found it hard is because it’s all theory. I have no experience. Nothing to do with practical. That was why it was my mistake. I didn’t know what is computer. I did it for four months, I was okay, I had a few assignments. I did it, my teacher liked it. But, I didn’t continue because I didn’t like it, I found it boring. I had to do it for 5 years. Two years at college and three years at university. And after that I would get a degree but it was too long course. I continue ESOL, I did that in London.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayaz</td>
<td>It was in 2003.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Before then, she had problems with homelessness, and benefits, and no status. She also didn’t start on English course until 2001, and only started at the community college in 2002. By 2003 she was studying English at the community college and volunteering at the Refugee Organisation, and also doing an IT course. It was when she was doing these things combined that she felt she learnt the most.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayaz</td>
<td>She also mentions a course in community development work that was helpful because many of her fellow students were native speakers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Even their written language was not good but their spoken language was very good. That was very helpful. And I’ve got friends that they work full time and they do this course, English people, I learnt a lot from them.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azad</td>
<td>He learned most at Croydon College, when on a pre-access course to learn English. The classes before had been elementary English so had just been a reminder. It was academic so it was useful. At the same time that he was doing the pre-access, which included literacy and numeracy, he was also doing an NVQ in IT for 3 hours a week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azad</td>
<td>I concentrated in my study. I was enthusiastic to learn. At that time the container was filling, it was not full… generally the environment was good although in the end it was not. I moved to another area I had to travel 2 hours each way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rebecca: Did that have an affect?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azad</td>
<td>Yes. I a lot more confident I could learn much more. The teachers were great as well, and the fellow students were all good people actually. You like to go to college to see them. That means, it’s very important actually your colleagues, that makes you always remember what you’re doing, you don’t get bored and you like to study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardy</td>
<td>He added some information, about a computer course he is now doing at a training organisation, he understands computers well from learning in his country but he is using Word for grammar and spelling and the computer course is helping him with his English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardy</td>
<td>Yes I had a computer course in my country but because my English is not good…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>And are you still doing this? You find that okay?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardy</td>
<td>Yes. They know I am not English, and they helped me sometimes. My teacher especially explains to me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>And the teacher, and IT teacher, understands the language side of it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardy</td>
<td>Yes, of course. First time I went and explained I am not English. I know how to use the computer but I am not English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>It was her son’s idea to do the management course, and he encouraged her. She feels she controls what she learns at the moment, being strong and having patience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>She talks about the same management course, and how understanding the teacher was.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I explain for her. I am not keen to be a manager in here because I know this is difficult, because of the age. And she understood I am just keen about the language. She helped me a lot.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher understood Sarah’s language needs and incorporated some support into class situations, for instance if Sarah needed something read out loud she would simply do this in a situation. Sarah felt that the teacher was doing it for her benefit, but not singing her out. She also took time to explain words which were too confusing to work out from the dictionary, helped her look for work after the course, wrote letters on her behalf, and was encouraging.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>She starts to explain for me and she encourage me all the time when I am writing my assignment. She just ...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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