English language teaching and learning for adult migrants in the UK: Social and political dimensions
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ESOL: The teaching and learning of English to speakers of Other Languages who are migrants to English-dominant countries.

Immigration status of ESOL students
- Refugees & refugees seeking asylum
- People from settled communities, especially from ex-colonies
- Newly-arrived spouses or family members
- ‘Economic migrants’
- People with work permits
- EU nationals (including secondary migrants)
- People born in the UK but childhood abroad

(Baynham et al 2007; Simpson et al 2011)

More dimensions of diversity
A survey of 200 ESOL students in Leeds:
- 50+ ‘first languages’ claimed
- 66% women 34% men
- 38 countries of birth
- Average age: 32
- 16% had never been to school
- 33% left school after primary education
- 17% currently in employment
- Average time in the UK: 6 years

(Simpson et al 2011)

Superdiversity
Many of Britain’s cities are now ‘superdiverse’, to use the phrase coined by the sociologist Stephen Vertovec.

There is a growing awareness that over the past two decades, globalisation has altered the face of social, cultural and linguistic diversity in societies all over the world … the multiculturalism of an earlier era (captured, mostly, in an ‘ethnic minorities’ paradigm) has gradually been replaced by what Vertovec (2007) calls ‘super-diversity … characterised by a tremendous increase in the categories of migrants, not only in terms of nationality, ethnicity, language, and religion, but also in terms of motives, patterns and itineraries of migration, processes of insertion into the labour and housing markets of the host societies, and so on (Vertovec 2010). The predictability of the category ‘migrant’ … has disappeared.

(Blommaert & Rampton 2011)
Activity: An ESOL class in London
The following are thumbnail sketches of the learners present at the beginning of term of a lower intermediate class of ESOL – English for Speakers of Other Languages – in London.

A Spanish woman in her 30s who is working for an international voluntary organisation and wants to learn English to be able to work in Africa. She has a degree in geography and history and has previously worked in Latin America and as a social worker and teacher in Spain. She has been in London for just over a year and before that had spent time in Ireland.

A Brazilian woman in her 20s who is in London because her husband is working here. She previously worked in Brazil as an ‘administrator’. The teacher later finds out that she is an artist and is trying to make a living from that. She has been in the UK for 7 months.

A Somali asylum seeker in her 30s who also speaks Italian. She has been in the UK for two years and has not studied English prior to coming to this class. She says she has only been to school in Somalia for two years.

A French man from Paris aged between 50 and 59 who has been in the UK for 16 months. He is in the UK for ‘business reasons’; in France had been a locksmith and a mechanic. At one point he says he has been in prison somewhere in London. He dropped out of the course after a few weeks.

A Turkish woman in her twenties who has been in the UK for over 12 years, since she was 14. She attended secondary school in London for 2 years. She had come to London to be with her family and now has a young son. Her spoken English is fluent but she has been placed in this class because of her low level of writing. She dropped out of the course after a few weeks.

A refugee in her twenties originally from Chad who spent a long time in Benin prior to coming to the UK. She speaks French, Arabic and her local language. She has been in the UK for two and a half years.

A French speaker from the Congo who has been in the UK for 3 years. She left school when she was 14 and came to the UK as an asylum seeker. She says she is between 16 and 19 years old. She later moved up to the next level.

A Turkish Cypriot woman in her 50s who has been in the UK for 22 years. She came originally because of the war in Cyprus. She left school when she was 12. She is a housewife and has previously studied one ESOL course at another centre.

A Somali woman who came to the UK 3 years ago because of the problems in Somalia. She had left school at 14. She says she can read and write Arabic as well as Somali. She studied English for one year at another centre.

- What are some of the challenges and opportunities such diversity might present to ESOL teachers and curriculum planners?

Activity: ESOL materials
Look at these ESOL materials – from respectively the early 1970s, the mid 1970s, 2003, c.2010 and 2013.
- What concerns – linguistic/social/cultural/political – are they addressing, in each case?
Colonialism made the villages in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh poor. It was difficult to make a living. Many villagers sent their sons to the towns to earn money but work was hard to find. So when Britain needed workers in the nineteen-fifties people from the Indian sub-continent were ready to take these jobs.

I left my village in Gujarat five years ago, that was when I last saw my parents. There is no work in our village now, people are very poor. Things have really changed there, in my father's childhood people were quite well-off.

My husband came here in the 'fifties. Now we live in Hackney, my husband, our children and me. He works at a factory that makes tins for baby food. You can see what our house is like. There are holes in the wall, the roof leaks, it is damp everywhere. We are trying to get rehoused. We know other people who have been given better accommodation, but we have been waiting and waiting. We are trying to find out why.
Materials supporting the Adult ESOL Core Curriculum (2003)

2 Daily life

This unit is about daily life. You will learn how to:

Listening and speaking
- Say what you do in everyday life: 5c/El.1a, Ea, 4a, 4b
- Say what you like and don’t like: 5c/El.1c, Ea/El.2d
- Ask for information about people: 5c/El.1a, 1b
- Listen for information about people: Ea/El.1c, 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b, 4a

The Lobo family and Mrs. Baker are neighbours.
It’s breakfast time.
What time do you have breakfast?
Cleaning and Facilities Management. Entry 2 Reading. Module 2: Words at work. 

PPE is a short form of Personal Protective Equipment. It is made of the first letters of the words. This is called an abbreviation.

**Question 5** Which of the following statements is correct?
- [ ] A On becoming a UK citizen or permanent resident, you can choose which laws and responsibilities you want to accept.
- [ ] B On becoming a UK citizen or permanent resident, you will be agreeing to respect the laws, values and traditions of the UK.

**Question 6** Is the statement below TRUE or FALSE?
The daffodil is the national flower of Wales.

**Question 7** Which area of government policy is the responsibility of the Chancellor of the Exchequer?
- [ ] A Education
- [ ] B Health
- [ ] C Economy
- [ ] D Legal affairs

**Question 8** Dunkirk is associated with which TWO events?
- [ ] A Landings on D-Day
- [ ] B The fall of Singapore
- [ ] C The rescue of 300,000 men
- [ ] D Small boats coming to the rescue

**Question 9** Which is the capital city of the UK?
- [ ] A Westminster
- [ ] B Birmingham
- [ ] C Windsor
- [ ] D London
Activity: Bringing the outside in with participatory ESOL

Read this transcript from a listening activity from the Skills for Life materials.

- What are the advantages of presenting language in this way?
- The disadvantages?

Receptionist: Hello. Ashlea Surgery
Filiz: Hello, can I make an appointment for my daughter to see Dr Green please?
R: Yes. What’s the name?
F: Gulay Akpinar
R: Can you spell her first name please?
R: OK. Dr Green's next appointment is on Thursday morning.
F: Thursday. OK.
R: Right. Is 9.30 OK?
F: Yes, that’s fine. Thank you very much.

(Skills for Life materials 2003)

Now read this extract from Bryers et al 2014.

- How does the activity differ from the one above?
- How does such an activity support language development?

[How is language linked to the wider world?] This is an example of the kind of debate which will be familiar to anyone who has tried to organise politically. Would students take the risk of strong direct action? Would the less risky petition actually have an impact? These discussions show the students operating with an understanding of the potential power of student action in relation to the college authorities. [Here] they are weighing up how to protest:

R: What about we could boycott, what do you think?
D: I think it’s hard but maybe it can work...Maybe not all students accept this, what do you think? I think it’s [it’ll] work.

The deliberation continues and other forms of action are considered e.g. a strike, a letter to the local MP, a letter to management and visiting senior management. Later the students agree not on the boycott option but to organise a petition. What is interesting for us from a pedagogical point of view here is that we can see students engaged in a real life discussion, rather than a classroom activity.

(Bryers et al 2013)

An effective ESOL class reflects the lives and experiences of students. ... The participatory ESOL class itself is an important part of students’ lives and is not just a rehearsal for life outside the classroom. As such, we suggest that it can play a part in shaping the life experiences of those who participate, and importantly, this can be done ion students’ own terms.

(Cooke et al 2015.)
References and further reading


ESOL-Research email list: www.jiscmail.ac.uk/ESOL-Research

Learning English in Leeds website: www.lel.help