

A Qualitative Study of ESOL Provision for Refugees in Wales: Teachers' Perspectives on Challenges Faced by ESOL Refugee Learners

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interest and support in my academic journey.**

Declaration

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed: Walaa Mouma

Date: 28/09/2024

STATEMENT 1

This Dissertation is the result of my own independent work/investigation, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

Signed: Walaa Mouma

Date: 28/09/2024

STATEMENT 2

I hereby give my consent for my Dissertation, if relevant and accepted, to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

Signed: Walaa Mouma

Date: 28/09/2024

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	i
Declaration	iv
Table of Contents	v
List of Tables	viii
List of Figures	viii
Abstract	ix
Chapter 1 (Introduction)	1
Chapter 2 (Literature Review)	3
2.1 The rise of migration	3
2.1.1 Reasons refugees seek asylum in the UK	4
2.1.2 UK immigration system	4
2.1.3 The UK Government’s hostile environment to refugees	6
2.2 Refugees and asylum seekers in Wales: integration and education policies	7
2.2.1 The Welsh Government as opposed to the UK Government on refugee matters ...	7
2.2.2 Statistics on refugees and asylum seekers in Wales	8
2.2.3 Education and integration policies in a devolved Wales	9
2.2.4 Adult education in a devolved Wales	9
2.3 ESOL: Origin and development in the Welsh context	10
2.3.1 ESOL Origin	10
2.3.2 ESOL meaning and purpose in a devolved Wales	11
2.3.3 ESOL policies and funding in a devolved Wales	12
2.4 Challenges in Refugees' ESOL Journey and Teachers' Perspectives	14
2.4.1 Refugees’ and asylum seekers challenges	15
2.4.2 LESLLA Learners	16
2.4.3 Teachers’ perspectives and challenges in teaching ESOL to refugees and asylum seekers	17
Chapter 3 (Methodology)	18
3.1 Ontology and epistemology	18
3.2 Methodology	19
3.3 Research approach and design	20
3.4 Research context and focus	21
3.5 Sampling	21

3.6 Choice of semi-structured interviews	24
3.7 Data Analysis.....	25
3.8 Positionality	26
3.9 Reflexivity.....	26
3.10 Ethical Considerations.....	27
Chapter 4 (Findings).....	29
4.1 Teachers' perspectives on refugee learner challenges and teacher challenges	30
4.1.1 Challenges related to ESOL provision, system and policies in colleges	30
4.1.2 Challenges related to facilities in ESOL settings	33
4.1.3 Challenges related to the asylum system	34
4.1.4 Challenges related to the learners' profiles	36
4.1.5 Challenges ESOL teachers face related to learners' motivation	37
4.1.6 Learning from experience: Teachers' growth through challenges	38
4.2 Teachers' perspectives on LESLLA learner challenges and teacher challenges	39
4.2.1 Lack of learning skills	39
4.2.2 Challenges teachers face in supporting LESLLA learners	41
4.3 Opportunities the Welsh context presents	42
4.3.1 Wales is a refugee-welcoming nation	42
4.3.2 Welsh Government support for ESOL in formal and informal settings	42
4.3.3 Promoting bilingualism and multilingualism: Opportunities to learn Welsh and foster belonging.....	43
4.3.4 Other unique opportunities in Wales	44
Chapter 5 (Discussion)	45
5.1 The dual nature of the Welsh ESOL context: Opportunities and Challenges	45
5.1.1 Opportunities in the Welsh Context	45
5.1.2 Challenges in the Welsh Context	48
5.2 Adaptive practices in ESOL.....	49
5.2.1 Addressing the demand for fast-track options	50
5.2.2 Addressing LESLLA learners' needs	51
5.2.3 Adaptive practices: Tailored support by Learning and Skills Coaches	52
5.3 The multifaceted role of ESOL teachers in refugee integration and support	54
5.4 Limitations	55
5.5 Recommendations	56
Recommendation 1: Implementing comprehensive trauma-Informed training for ESOL teachers	56

Recommendation 2: Enhancing ESOL teacher policy awareness and asylum process knowledge	56
Recommendation 3: Increasing funding for comprehensive support services and teacher compensation	57
Recommendation 4: Implementing multilingual participatory ESOL Classes	57
Chapter 6 (Conclusion)	59
<i>RQ1: What are ESOL teachers' perspectives on the challenges faced by refugee students in learning English in Wales, and the challenges teachers face when working with them?</i>	59
<i>RQ2: According to ESOL teachers, what challenges do LESLLA refugee learners have when learning English in Wales, and what particular challenges do teachers face when working with this group?.....</i>	59
<i>RQ3: What role does the Welsh context play in this language learning journey, according to teachers?</i>	60
References	61
Appendices	74
Appendix 1 (Screenshots of Search Strategies)	74
Appendix 2	78
Participant Information Sheet (PIS)	78
Consent Form Template	83
Appendix 3 (Interview Questions)	84
Appendix 4 (A sample of colour-coded transcripts)	86
Rebecca	86
Rhian	90
Daniel	94
Samuel	98
John	101
Sarah	106
Appendix 5 (A Summary of Grouping Themes and Sub-themes)	111
Appendix 6 (Themes, Sub-themes and Quotations: A Comprehensive Overview)	119
Theme 1: Teachers' perspectives on refugee learner challenges and teacher challenges	119
Theme 2: Teachers' perspectives on LESLLA learner challenges and teacher challenges	141
Theme 3: Opportunities the Welsh context presents	146
Figures	151
Figure 1 (2019 UNHCR Global Trends)	151
Figure 2 (2023 UNHCR Global Trends)	151

List of Tables

<u>Table 1:</u> Participant profiles and interview details.....	22
<u>Table 2:</u> Research questions and corresponding themes.....	29

List of Figures

<u>Figure 1</u> (2019 UNHCR Global Trends)	151
<u>Figure 2</u> (2023 UNHCR Global Trends)	151

Abstract

This qualitative study explored ESOL teachers' perspectives on the challenges faced by refugee learners, including LESLLA (Low Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition) learners, when learning English as a second language in Wales. It also investigated the challenges teachers encounter in supporting these learners within the unique Welsh context. Six in-depth interviews were conducted with ESOL tutors from both formal (college) and informal (community-based charity) settings, and the data were analysed using thematic analysis.

The findings revealed distinctive opportunities presented by the Welsh context, including its vision of becoming a Nation of Sanctuary, its bilingual status and welcoming policies towards refugees, which contrast with the 'hostile environment' in the broader UK context. Challenges identified relate to systemic issues such as an exam-focused approach, lack of certain facilities and limitations of part-time courses.

The study highlighted the need for more tailored support, particularly for fast-track options and LESLLA learners requiring specialised literacy support. Additionally, it emphasised the importance of embracing a multilingual participatory approach that includes Welsh, reflecting the bilingual nature of the country and aligning with recent policy directions.

This research contributes to the understanding of ESOL provision for refugees in Wales and informs potential improvements in policy and practice. It provides valuable insights into the complexities of ESOL education for refugees in Wales, offering a foundation for future studies and policy recommendations in this field.

Keywords *Language Learning, English Learning, Wales, LESLLA, ESOL Policy*

Chapter 1

Introduction

The global refugee crisis has brought significant challenges for host countries, especially in education and integration. In Wales, the influx of refugees seeking safety highlights the importance of English language skills for their successful adaptation. ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) teachers play a crucial role in this process, aiding language learning and cultural integration.

This dissertation examines the ESOL landscape for refugee learners in Wales, focusing on teachers' perspectives on the challenges faced by these learners and their experiences in providing support. While it offers insights into this complex issue, this study does not attempt to provide a comprehensive answer to all aspects of ESOL provision for refugees but rather aims to shed light on key areas through the lens of teachers' experiences.

My journey to this research topic is deeply personal. As someone who taught myself English and later taught it for over five years in Syria, I developed an understanding of the challenges faced by English language learners. However, upon coming to the UK and volunteering as an ESOL tutor with several charities, I gained a deeper appreciation for the unique struggles that refugees and asylum seekers face when learning English as a second language. These challenges extend far beyond mere language acquisition, intertwining with the complexities of the asylum process and often compounded by past traumas and difficult journeys to the UK.

My experience as a Learning and Skills Coach in a Welsh college deepened my perspective, enabling me to support many asylum seekers and refugees. Additionally, my own journey through the asylum process provided firsthand insight into the refugee experience. This dual perspective, as both a language learner and a refugee, has profoundly shaped my understanding of the challenges of language learning and integration.

The contrast between my experiences in England and Wales has also informed this research. After observing limited opportunities for refugees to improve their English in England, my move to Wales three years ago opened my eyes to the unique opportunities available here. Teaching ESOL in both informal and formal settings in Wales has deepened my appreciation

for the supportive environment the country offers to refugees eager to develop their English skills. This study aims to answer three key research questions:

- 1. What are ESOL teachers' perspectives on the challenges faced by refugee students in learning English in Wales, and the challenges teachers face when working with them?*
- 2. According to ESOL teachers, what challenges do LESLLA refugee learners have when learning English in Wales, and what particular challenges do teachers face when working with this group?*
- 3. What role does the Welsh context play in this language learning journey, according to teachers?*

Following this introduction, the dissertation is structured as follows: [Chapter 2](#) presents the literature review, which provides context on migration as a global phenomenon, focusing on the UK's 'hostile environment' towards refugees and contrasting it with Wales's welcoming approach. [Chapter 3](#) details the methodology, outlining the ontological and epistemological foundations of the study, as well as the research methodology, methods and design. Chapter 3 also describes the sampling strategy, participant recruitment process, data collection and analysis methods, along with considerations of researcher positionality and ethical issues.

[Chapter 4](#) presents the findings, showcasing thematically analysed data organised into themes and sub-themes that effectively address the research questions. [Chapter 5](#) discusses these findings in relation to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, acknowledging the study's limitations and providing recommendations based on the research outcomes. Finally, [Chapter 6](#) concludes the dissertation by synthesising the key insights gained throughout the study and explicitly answering the research questions posed at the outset.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This literature review aims to explore the perspectives of teachers on the multifaceted challenges faced by refugees and asylum seekers in Wales in learning English as a second language. This review covers various themes, including forced migration as a global phenomenon, the demographics of refugees in the UK, language and education policies in the UK as opposed to Wales, the delivery and purpose of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) and the support offered to learners with low literacy skills in their first language (L1).

To ensure a comprehensive literature review, I used various search strategies, employing key terms like "refugee AND ESOL," "ESOL AND Wales," "migration," "forced migration" and "language learning." Primary searches were conducted on Google Scholar and iFind, the university's e-library, along with subject-specific databases like Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC). I also used snowballing techniques by reviewing reference lists of key articles to find additional relevant sources. To maintain transparency, I logged all search terms, databases and results, with examples provided in [Appendix 1](#). The first area of focus in this review is the rise of migration.

2.1 The rise of migration

Migration involves individuals changing their usual residence by crossing political or administrative borders (White, 2015). Internal migration, also defined by White (2015), occurs within a country while international migration involves crossing national borders (Siegel and Swanson, 2004). Migration is a global phenomenon, and the UNHCR's *Global Trends* reports annual data on forced migration, tracking shifts among refugees, internally displaced persons, returnees, asylum-seekers and stateless individuals to raise awareness of ongoing crises (Global Trends, 2024). The 2019 *Global Trends* report noted that "79.5 million forcibly displaced worldwide at the end of 2019 as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations or events seriously disturbing public order" (UNHCR, 2019, p. 2). For more details, see [Figure 1](#).

By the end of 2019, the global refugee population reached 26 million, with over two-thirds from Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar and Somalia (ibid). These figures were later cited by organisations such as The Refugee Council in the UK (2020). The recent *Global Trends* report (UNHCR, 2023) shows the number of forcibly displaced people noticeably rose from 79.5 million in 2019 to 117.3 million by the end of 2023 (see [Figure 2](#)).

Unlike populist propaganda against welcoming refugees in Western democratic countries, becoming a refugee or displaced person is not a matter of choice or a luxury that individuals willingly pursue. Forced displacement is not a choice but a complex phenomenon driven by conflict, persecution, human rights violations, disasters and climate change, and its scale and severity are linked to the intensity and duration of these conflicts (Becker, 2022).

2.1.1 Reasons refugees seek asylum in the UK

Many refugees and asylum seekers come to the UK, legally or illegally, for various reasons shaped by complex individual circumstances. Crawley (2010) noted that, for some participants in her research, the UK was a preferred destination due to the presence of family and friends and a belief in human rights protections. Some respondents, particularly from Zimbabwe, made a more deliberate choice to come to the UK, while others were influenced by opportunism, using travel documents or existing visas to facilitate their journey (ibid).

Gilbert and Koser (2006) challenge the common belief that asylum seekers come to the UK for its generous welfare system, ease of finding informal work and poor record on deporting unsuccessful applicants. Their interviews with 87 asylum seekers from Afghanistan, Colombia, Kosovo and Somalia revealed that most respondents had limited knowledge of the UK, based on general impressions rather than specific asylum policies (Gilbert and Koser, 2006). This finding aligns with Crawley's research (2010), which indicated that many participants did not actively choose the UK for asylum and often knew little about the country, with some only aware of Europe in general.

2.1.2 UK immigration system

It is essential to define asylum seekers and refugees in the UK. While an individual's asylum claim is reviewed, they are referred to as an "asylum seeker" (Right to Remain, 2023).

Asylum seekers are ineligible for public funds, generally prohibited from employment unless on the shortage occupation list, and may be detained at any time (ibid).

The Home Office, a UK Government department, has full control over immigration matters, including policies and border control. Although devolved governments in Wales and Scotland can provide input, the primary authority for immigration policy remains with the Home Office. If the UK Government's Home Office approves an asylum claim, the individual is granted refugee status, allowing them to stay in the UK for at least five years (GOV.UK, n.d.).

The UK experienced significant increases in immigration diversity following post-colonial migration in the 1950s and 1960s, particularly from the Caribbean and South Asia (Hansen, 2000). This diversity has further expanded since the late 20th century due to conflicts in the Middle East and political changes in Eastern Europe, leading to new migration patterns (Vertovec, 2007).

These individuals arrive in the UK through various legal and illegal means, and the level of support they receive often depends on their method of entry. For instance, refugees arriving through resettlement schemes are already recognised by the UNHCR and granted indefinite leave to remain and refugee status upon arrival (Home Office, 2021). They bypass the asylum application process and are matched with local community groups or authorities that provide integration support, including housing, language lessons and access to healthcare and other services (Free Movement, 2022).

An example of a UK Government scheme for legally resettling refugees is the response to the increase in Ukrainian refugees since 2022, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine (UK Parliament, 2024). The government introduced specific schemes to facilitate their entry, including the Ukraine Family Scheme (Home Office, 2024) and the Homes for Ukraine Scheme (GOV.UK, 2022). "Around 174,000 people had moved to the UK under the Ukraine Family Scheme and Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme as of 9 May 2023" (The Migration Observatory, 2023).

Unlike asylum seekers who enter the UK legally, those arriving through irregular means, such as small boat crossings, or those who enter legally but later claim asylum, must undergo the asylum application process. Their claims are assessed, and if granted, they are initially given limited leave to remain, with the option to apply for permanent status later (Lords Library, 2021). Asylum seekers often face lengthy wait times for decisions and limited access to

support services due to the UK Home Office's Hostile Environment policies (Refugee Council, 2021).

2.1.3 The UK Government's hostile environment to refugees

The UK's "hostile environment" policy, introduced in 2012 by the Conservative government under then-Home Secretary Theresa May, is a set of administrative and legislative measures designed to make life in the UK difficult for individuals without legal immigration status (Griffiths & Yeo, 2021). This policy aimed to deter illegal immigration and encourage voluntary departures by restricting access to essential services and creating a climate of fear and uncertainty (ibid). This hostile environment also has given rise to a political rhetoric that views migration as "something to fear rather than support" (Chick & Sidaway, 2020, p. 2).

Griffiths and Yeo (2021) described how the "hostile environment" effectively "deputises" citizens to become border guards, implementing immigration checks in various aspects of daily life. This approach has significantly impacted asylum seekers and refugees, limiting their access to employment, healthcare, housing and other basic rights (ibid).

The UK Government's hostile environment has led to the lowest refugee resettlement in over a decade, with only 766 refugees resettled by September 2023—just 12% of the 2017 peak of 6,348, including 4,980 via the VPRS (Refugee Council, 2024). The significant drop in resettlement numbers is part of a larger trend of diminishing "safe routes" for refugees to legally enter the UK, and this decline in legal entry options has coincided with an increase in dangerous Channel crossings by asylum seekers (ibid).

Also, as part of the UK Government's hostile environment policies against refugees, the Conservative government introduced the Illegal Immigration Bill in 2023, which bars individuals arriving illegally from staying in the UK, requiring their detention and deportation to their home country or a designated safe third country like Rwanda (GOV.UK, 2023). The Safety of Rwanda Bill (UK.GOV, 2024a) builds on this, designating Rwanda as a safe country for asylum processing, aiming to deter dangerous crossings and disrupt people-smuggling operations (Home Office, 2024).

The Rwanda plan exemplifies the politicisation of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK, reflecting the Conservative Party's "hostile environment" approach to immigration. Despite the plan facing significant legal challenges, including a November 2023 Supreme Court

ruling deeming it unlawful due to safety concerns in Rwanda (The Law Society, 2023), Rishi Sunak's government pushed ahead with new legislation and a treaty with Rwanda (Home Office, 2023). In May 2024, the Church of Scotland condemned the plan as "inhumane," with Emma Jackson, the Church's Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group Leader, noting the growing fear and tension within the asylum system, characterising the environment as "aggressive" and "dehumanising" (The Church of Scotland, 2024).

In July 2024, after Labour's election victory, new Prime Minister Keir Starmer announced the discontinuation of the Conservative government's plan to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda (Aljazeera, 2024). However, this does not indicate a major overhaul of immigration policy. Labour's approach continues to focus on border control, reducing migration, tackling illegal immigration and reducing reliance on overseas workers (Labour Party, 2024). This indicates a continued focus on restrictive measures, similar to previous administrations

2.2 Refugees and asylum seekers in Wales: integration and education policies

2.2.1 The Welsh Government as opposed to the UK Government on refugee matters

As previously highlighted, the UK Government controls immigration to England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. As a result, the Welsh Government cannot regulate the number of forced migrants sent to Wales nor maintain precise records of those who choose to live or work there (Chick, 2019). However, the Welsh Government, through its devolved powers, is responsible for various policies and services that can directly impact the integration of migrants, including housing, social care, health and education (Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament, 2024).

The UK Government's use of hostile language and policies regarding immigration and asylum frequently diverges from the perspectives promoted by the Welsh Government (Guma et al., 2019). Wales offered a warm welcome to refugees (UNHCR 2020). In 2019, after extensive parliamentary consultations involving local governments, governmental and non-governmental organisations and refugees and asylum seekers, the Welsh government announced its intention for Wales to become a "Nation of Sanctuary" (NoS) (Welsh Government, 2019b). Currently, Wales is the only region in Europe to formally align with the

sanctuary movement and pledge to become a "true Nation of Sanctuary for refugees and asylum seekers" (Welsh Government, 2019b).

The Welsh Government has also implemented numerous initiatives to ensure the well-being and integration of refugees into the community. According to Guma's et al (2019, p. 6):

Both existing initiatives such as Swansea City of Sanctuary, Oasis, etc., and the new local groups such as Bloom and Aberaid that have emerged in response to the 2015 "refugee crisis" play an important role not only in offering support to refugees and asylum seekers living in Wales but also aiming to put into practice the idea of Wales as a "welcoming place".

However, Edwards and Wisthaler (2023) contend that the Welsh Government's sanctuary approach is mainly "symbolic" and strategic. They argue that this symbolic policy enables Wales to bypass its lack of legislative authority over asylum policies, which are controlled by the UK Government (ibid). This is because unfortunately all immigration policies are still fully controlled by the UK Government. Nonetheless, the Nation of Sanctuary declaration acts as a strong counter-narrative to the UK's 'hostile environment' policy, positioning Wales in opposition to the central government's stance on immigration and asylum (ibid). Also, becoming a sanctuary nation conveys to vulnerable migrants that they will be treated with dignity and respect (Boudou, 2023).

2.2.2 Statistics on refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Focusing on refugees and asylum seekers in Wales, it is essential to synthesise available data on their numbers, distribution and nationalities. The exact number of refugees is not well-documented (Chick, 2019) since statistics are not kept after individuals are granted leave to remain, as this falls under Westminster's jurisdiction. However, data on asylum seekers at dispersal points is accessible (Threadgold et al., 2005). The Welsh Local Authorities Consortium for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (WLACRAS) reported the following distribution in November 2005: Cardiff (43.5%), Newport (15.5%), Swansea (39%) and Wrexham (1.9%) (ibid).

Also, the Welsh Government is able to keep record of ESOL participation among migrants in Wales (Chick, 2019). For example, the ESOL Policy for Wales (2014) provided historical data, noting that in 2011/12, over seven thousand individuals were enrolled in ESOL classes at further education colleges, primarily at entry level three or lower (Welsh Government, 2014).

2.2.3 Education and integration policies in a devolved Wales

The Government of Wales Acts of 1998 and 2006 devolved significant powers to Wales, covering healthcare, transport, agriculture, policing, education and the Welsh language (Jones & Scully, 2012). The National Assembly for Wales, later renamed Senedd Cymru, was established in 1999 (European Agency, 2021) and serves as the devolved legislature for these areas (Jones & Scully, 2012). Devolution has allowed for distinct Welsh education policies, such as the Learning Country strategy, which aims to tailor the education system to Wales's needs (Rees & Power, 2007). However, the British system continues to influence and create important continuities between pre- and post-devolution phases (Rees & Power, 2007).

Before 1999, all education legislation for Wales was enacted by the UK Parliament. Since then, management of education and training policies has shifted to the Welsh Government (European Agency, 2021), which now holds extensive powers over schools, higher education and further education (Reynolds, 2008). As a result, the legal framework includes both UK (England and Wales) and Welsh legislation, allowing for a unique approach tailored specifically to Wales (European Agency, 2021).

The Welsh Government has devolved powers over local government, enabling policies that promote community cohesion (Welsh Government, 2013). Integration is a key objective for resettling refugees and migrants and has sparked significant public debate (Ager & Strang, 2008). This focus on integration is evident in various Welsh Government policies and strategies (Chick, 2019), including the Community Development Programme, which supports community-led initiatives in disadvantaged areas (Welsh Government, 2013).

Devolution aimed to improve service delivery based on local needs rather than create divergent policies (Reynolds, 2008). However, in Wales, the three Welsh Assembly Governments (WAGs) from 1999 onwards have developed a 'Welsh Alternative' to policies in England and internationally, particularly in education and training (ibid). This capacity for policy innovation has been further enhanced by the Government of Wales Act 2006, which grants the power to create primary legislation (ibid).

2.2.4 Adult education in a devolved Wales

My primary focus in this dissertation is on adult education policies, specifically English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). Recent advancements in adult education in Wales

reflect the Welsh Government's commitment to lifelong learning and skills development. The 2017 "Adult Learning in Wales" report outlined a vision emphasising essential skills, digital literacy and work-related learning as priority areas, highlighting the need to expand access to adult education, particularly for disadvantaged groups (Welsh Government, 2017a).

Also, the Welsh Government's "Prosperity for All" strategy highlights the importance of adult education, viewing lifelong learning as crucial for improving skills, employability and wellbeing in Wales (Welsh Government, 2017b). This strategy connects adult education to broader economic and social goals, recognising its role in addressing skills shortages and promoting social inclusion. Before introducing the ESOL policies in Wales, it is important to explain how ESOL originated.

2.3 ESOL: Origin and development in the Welsh context

2.3.1 ESOL Origin

ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) education in the UK originated in the 1950s and 1960s in response to rising immigration and the need for English instruction (Rosenberg, 2007). The 1966 Local Government Act allocated funding to local authorities for the needs of new immigrant communities, much of which was used for English language training (Hamilton & Hillier, 2006).

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, ESOL provision became more organised and better funded, with classes offered in Adult and Further Education colleges and workplaces (Simpson, 2015). The field grew significantly in the early 2000s under the New Labour government, achieving a central place in England's adult education policy for the first time (Hamilton & Hillier, 2006).

In 2005, the UK Government introduced the Knowledge of Language and Life in the UK (KoLL) requirement as a statutory requirement for citizenship applications (Blackledge, 2009; Fieldfisher, 2013). This included the introduction of the Life in the UK test, requiring immigrants to demonstrate basic English skills and knowledge of British culture and history (Blackledge, 2009). In 2007, the KoLL requirement was extended to settlement applications (Indefinite Leave to Remain or ILR) (Blackledge 2009; Gov.Uk, 2024b).

Initially, applicants could meet the KoLL requirement by either passing the Life in the UK test or completing a special ESOL course focused on citizenship (Han et al., 2010; Brooks,

2013). However, a significant change occurred on October 28, 2013, under the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government, which introduced more stringent language requirements (Home Office, 2013; Morrice, 2017). The new KoLL requirement consisted of two parts: passing the Life in the UK test AND having a speaking and listening qualification in English at B1 CEFR or higher (ibid). This change effectively disconnected ESOL courses from being a direct pathway to citizenship, as completing an ESOL course alone no longer fulfils the citizenship language requirement (Lewis et al, 2023).

The political nature of ESOL policy in the UK is exemplified by the Life in the UK test, introduced by Tony Blair's Labour government in 2005 (Brooks, 2013). Despite the country's linguistic diversity (Simpson, 2015), dominant discourses on language and migration often promote the idea that societal cohesion depends on a shared common language (Simpson and Hunter, 2023). This monolingual ideology is reflected in UK policy, where language education for adult migrants is firmly focused on learning English (Simpson and Hunter, 2023). Political rhetoric frequently frames multilingualism as a potential threat to national unity (Simpson, 2015). Martin-Jones, Blackledge and Creese (2012) critiqued these approaches, highlighting how legal frameworks have historically reinforced monolingualism, even as linguistic diversity grows across the UK. Their analysis underscored the tensions inherent in UK immigration and integration policies, where linguistic homogeneity is often prioritised over the reality of a multilingual society, challenging the effectiveness and inclusivity of current ESOL provisions.

2.3.2 ESOL meaning and purpose in a devolved Wales

ESOL in Wales is defined as the “provision for learners whose first language is not English or Welsh, and who have for various reasons come to live in the UK” (Welsh Government, 2014, p.4). ESOL is crucial for integration, helping learners to live independently, fostering greater community cohesion and enabling them to pursue further education or employment opportunities (Welsh Government, 2014). It is worth noting that the Welsh Government is responsible for providing ESOL as part of Lifelong Learning. However, immigration and citizenship policy, which affects ESOL provision in Wales, falls under the jurisdiction of the UK Government (ibid).

The purpose of ESOL in Wales goes beyond language acquisition for citizenship testing, embodying a broader vision of integration and social participation. ESOL is considered essential for enabling migrants to fully engage in Welsh society and access public services. Proficiency in English is seen as critical for securing employment opportunities and contributing to the Welsh economy. Additionally, ESOL aims to equip learners with the language skills necessary for independent living and reaching their potential. Language learning is also recognised as a means of fostering understanding and interaction among diverse communities in Wales, thereby enhancing community cohesion (Welsh Government, 2014; 2019).

2.3.3 ESOL policies and funding in a devolved Wales

As ESOL is a devolved power for the Welsh Government (Simpson and Hunter, 2023), decisions on its organisation and delivery in Wales are made independently from the rest of the UK (Chick, 2019). ESOL provision involves various public, private and third-sector organisations, with the Welsh Government funding local authorities and further education institutions for mainstream delivery (Welsh Government, 2019a). Informal ESOL offerings, such as those by FAN Charity (Friends and Neighbours), create safe spaces for learners to practice their language skills and connect with their community (ibid). However, predicting demand for ESOL classes is challenging due to insufficient data on the migrant population in Wales, complicating class planning (Chick, 2019).

In Wales, ESOL is supported by the Adult Education budget, which has experienced notable funding cuts in recent years as noted in the Welsh Government's Adult Learning in Wales policy (Welsh Government, 2017a). In this policy, there is also a clear emphasis on the importance of delivering ESOL to adults in Wales among other skills: "there will be a clear steer towards improving access to Essential Communication skills; Essential Application of Number Skills, Digital Literacy and ESOL as a first priority (Welsh Government, 2017a, p. 8).

The policy also states that these ESOL courses will be offered at no cost to all learners up to the point of "functionality" (Welsh Government, 2017a). Functionality is defined as "the ability to read, write and speak in English or Welsh, and to use mathematics, at a level necessary to function and progress both in work and society. This definition equates to a robust level 1 in literacy (including ESOL) and numeracy" (Welsh Government, 2014, p. 4).

The Welsh Government has published three key ESOL policies in 2014, 2019 and 2023, each building upon its predecessor while addressing new challenges and opportunities, and each one will be explored separately. The 2014 ESOL policy for Wales was a landmark initiative that established ESOL as a key skill alongside literacy and numeracy (Welsh Government, 2014). It recognised ESOL's vital role in social inclusion and economic participation, guiding its delivery across the country (ibid).

The policy also acknowledged that some refugees and asylum seekers lack prior education and have limited literacy skills, leading to diverse abilities within ESOL classrooms (Welsh Government, 2014). The policy indicated that in 2011, approximately 72,080 adults in Wales, or 3% of the population, reported that English or Welsh was not their first language, with 16,708 having limited or no proficiency (Welsh Government, 2014). I am particularly interested in exploring teachers' perspectives on how these learners navigate language acquisition.

In 2019, the Welsh Government updated its 2014 ESOL policy to reaffirm commitments while addressing new circumstances (Welsh Government, 2019a). This revision linked ESOL provision to the broader adult education framework and acknowledged the increasing demand for ESOL classes due to a rising number of refugees and asylum seekers (ibid). The update led to the creation of tailored ESOL courses, including sector-specific training for industries like healthcare and hospitality (Welsh Government, 2019a). Additionally, the 2019 policy aligned ESOL with Wales's aspiration to become a "Nation of Sanctuary," fostering a more integrated approach to language education and social inclusion (ibid).

Also, the 2019 update encouraged providers in Wales to incorporate the Welsh language into their classes, reflecting the country's bilingual nature and the importance of language skills for social integration and employability (Welsh Government, 2019a; Williams, 2017; Lewis et al., 2023). This initiative underscores the Welsh Government's commitment to inclusive language education and the significance of Welsh, particularly in Welsh-speaking areas (Lewis et al., 2023). One outcome was the creation of "Croeso i Bawb" (Welcome to Everyone), a course introduced in 2019 to teach Welsh to migrants and refugees, developed through a partnership between the National Centre for Learning Welsh and Adult Learning Wales (ibid).

The 2023 ESOL policy review in Wales broadened the scope of ESOL provision by emphasising its role in accessing public services and addressing challenges related to remote learning and digital exclusion (Welsh Government, 2023). This update aimed to develop tailored ESOL offerings that support employment and community integration, reflecting a deeper understanding of learners' diverse needs (ibid). It also considered the availability of Welsh language learning alongside English, leading to the creation of trilingual support materials and courses that promote inclusive language integration (ibid).

The evolution of ESOL policies in Wales reflects a growing recognition of language education's importance, adapting to demographic shifts, technological advancements and societal needs. This ongoing refinement demonstrates Wales's commitment to a holistic approach that links ESOL to broader social, economic and cultural goals. The Welsh Government aims to support diverse learners, foster inclusivity and promote linguistic diversity, thereby addressing the language needs of its population while celebrating its bilingual heritage.

2.4 Challenges in Refugees' ESOL Journey and Teachers' Perspectives

My research focuses on teachers' perspectives on the challenges refugees face when learning English, as well as the difficulties teachers encounter in teaching ESOL to refugee students. I only interviewed teachers, so I can speak to their views rather than those of the refugees. However, I included two subheadings on the challenges refugees face—both general and LESLLA-specific—since they often overlap with the issues teachers encounter. Understanding learners' challenges helps contextualise teachers' difficulties, which are frequently linked to the same obstacles. The third subheading addressed unique challenges that teachers face, which may not align with those of the learners. This research aimed to fill two gaps: the lack of literature on teachers' perspectives regarding the challenges faced by refugee learners and the limited research on this topic in the Welsh context. Through teacher interviews, I sought to identify similarities and differences with existing literature.

2.4.1 Refugees' and asylum seekers challenges

While, my research focuses on teachers' perspectives on the challenges refugees and asylum seekers face in learning English in Wales, this section highlights the specific difficulties these learners encounter according to previous research. In the Discussion chapter, I will compare these challenges with insights from my teacher participants to identify similarities and differences.

Becoming a migrant in a new country introduces great hurdles. For example, adjusting to a foreign language requires learning new communication skills from scratch, which is crucial for everyday interactions, employment and accessing essential services (Simpson, 2015). Also, many refugees may have experienced significant trauma before arriving in the UK, making them particularly vulnerable and in need of additional support for learning (Welsh Government, 2014). After years in camps and exposure to conflict, the impact of health issues on language acquisition remains largely unexamined (Morrice et al., 2019). Wang's (2022) findings suggested that language is crucial for enhancing migrants' well-being, indicating that positive learning experiences can improve their quality of life. Research also showed that past trauma can reduce motivation for language learning, with refugees often less motivated than voluntary migrants (Iversen et al., 2004; Chiswick and Miller, 2001).

Therefore, it is essential for providers to create safe, supportive learning environments and ensure staff are adequately trained to address the unique challenges faced by refugee and asylum seeker learners (Welsh Government, 2014). Understanding these challenges and the potential for positive outcomes can inform policies and practices that better support these vulnerable learners in their language acquisition journey.

Refugees face significant challenges in accessing ESOL classes, such as long waiting lists and inadequate childcare (Williams, 2017), which can prevent mothers from attending. A report by the National Assembly's Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee (2017) urged the Welsh Government to collaborate with partners to provide tailored ESOL and Welsh courses while addressing these barriers.

Housing also impacts refugees' ESOL journey. Since 1999, the UK Government has housed asylum seekers in communities while they await decisions (Asylum Matters, n.d.). While they can apply for housing and support from the Home Office, they lack control over arrangements and often struggle with poverty, as support typically falls short of basic living

expenses (ibid). A review conducted from February to July 2022 assessed the ESOL policy in Wales, focusing on the availability and adequacy of provisions (Asylum Matters, n.d.). It found that unstable living conditions hinder learning, as frequent relocations disrupt education (ibid). In addition to these challenges, learners with low-literacy skills have other struggles, and this will be highlighted in the next section.

2.4.2 LESLLA Learners

The founding of LESLLA (Literacy Education and Second Language Learning for Adults) in 2005 marked a significant turning point in addressing the needs of marginalised adults with low or no literacy skills (www.leslla.org). As a professional association, LESLLA has been instrumental in advancing knowledge about this learner demographic through conferences and publications (e.g., Bigelow & Schwarz, 2010; Condelli & Wrigley, 2006; Tarone, Bigelow, & Hansen, 2007; Young-Scholten & Strom, 2006). With more than 200 contributions, the proceedings of LESLLA symposia provide an invaluable source for anyone interested in research, policies, and practices specifically for LESLLA learners (LESLLA, n.d.)

The term "LESLLA learner" has become synonymous with a specific category of learners – those with limited educational attainment and often low literacy in their first language, a convention I will adhere to throughout this dissertation (Van de Craats & Kurvers, 2008). This designation highlights the unique challenges faced by this group in second language acquisition and literacy development.

LESLLA research has significantly contributed to understanding the specific needs and learning processes of low-literate adult migrants. For example, Cowie's findings (2021, p. 426) emphasised the need for tailored support for LESLLA learners who are an "already disadvantaged group." They require specialised programmes with sufficient weekly hours to improve their basic literacy and language skills, and without this support, they risk further exclusion from valuable opportunities for skill development and the benefits that come with language and literacy (Cowie, 2021).

In terms of LESLLA support, in Wales and particularly in the college where five of my participants teach, there is a service that supports many learners, especially LESLLA learners, called the Skills Centre. The centre offers various forms of assistance from Learning and

Skills Coaches, including conversational sessions for ESOL learners (Talk Tidy), a drop-in service for English and numeracy, in-class support where coaches assist tutors and tailored one-to-one sessions over six weeks. Although there are no academic references, these examples are based on my past experience as a Learning and Skills Coach. While this service offers some assistance to ESOL tutors, they continue to have other challenges in supporting their ESOL refugee learners, and more on this is presented in the following section.

2.4.3 Teachers' perspectives and challenges in teaching ESOL to refugees and asylum seekers

While literature on teachers' challenges in teaching ESOL to refugee learners is limited, a recent study by Chamorro et al (2023) provides valuable insights into teachers' perspectives of the language learning experiences of refugees and asylum seekers (RAS) in the UK as well as the challenges their teachers face. Through informal interviews with 20 teachers and an online questionnaire completed by 72, the research identified two primary difficulties for RAS students: low English proficiency and lack of literacy in their first language (L1) (Chamorro et al, 2023).

To tackle these challenges, teachers employed techniques such as simplifying language, repetition, paraphrasing slowing speech and clear pronunciation (Chamorro et al, 2023). The study also found that some teachers, particularly those with less experience, lacked awareness of their students' cultural backgrounds and language differences (ibid). Furthermore, many teachers, especially volunteers and those in charities, reported feeling underprepared and lacking the necessary support to meet the specific needs of RAS students (ibid).

These findings underscored the unique challenges faced by ESOL teachers working with refugee and asylum seeker learners and emphasise the need for targeted research, resource development and teacher training. This study aims to contribute to this understanding, specifically within the Welsh context.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter explains my research paradigm, including ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods (Scotland, 2012). I will begin by discussing my ontological and epistemological foundations that shaped my methodology. Next, I will outline the research design, approach, context and methods used, followed by a description of the data coding and analysis process. I will also address how I remained reflexive to minimise bias and discuss the ethical considerations related to this research.

3.1 Ontology and epistemology

A social scientist's perspective is shaped by their ontological and epistemological stance (Furlong and Marsh, 2010). These positions are often implicit but significantly influence theoretical approaches and methods. Ontological claims concern the nature of social reality, including what exists and how these elements interact (Blaikie, 2000). A fundamental ontological question is: “What is the form and nature of reality, and what can be known about it?” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p.108). This research assumes that reality is socially constructed, allowing for multiple, equally valid interpretations. In refugee language education, this means recognising the diverse understandings of challenges and experiences among teachers, students and other stakeholders.

“If ontology is about what we may know, then epistemology is about how we come to know” (Furlong and Marsh, 2010, p. 171). Epistemology encompasses the ways of acquiring knowledge about social reality, asserting how the existence of things can be understood (Blaikie, 2000). The key epistemological question is: “What is the nature of the relationship between the knower and what can be known?” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 108). This study recognises that knowledge is subjective and co-created through interactions between the researcher and participants. By engaging with teachers' narratives and insights, the research aims to construct a rich, contextualised understanding of the challenges faced by refugee students learning English in Wales.

Rooted in these ontological and epistemological stances, this study adopts an interpretivist paradigm to explore teachers' perspectives on the challenges faced by refugee students learning English in Wales. Interpretivism highlights the significance of contextual factors and the creation of deeper meanings, necessitating a distinct approach in social science research (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020). This aligns with the goal of understanding the complex realities of language education for refugees, where challenges are intertwined with social, cultural and personal factors (Warriner, 2007). Ultimately, the study seeks to uncover the insights that shape teachers' views on refugees' language learning processes.

3.2 Methodology

Research methodology is a systematic approach to addressing a research problem (Kothari, 2004). "The methodological question. How can the inquirer (would-be knower) go about finding out whatever he or she believes can be known?" (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 108). The research methodology encompasses the science of how research is conducted, detailing the various steps researchers take in investigating their problems and the rationale behind these steps (ibid).

Initially, I intended to focus on Syrian refugees learning English in Wales, drawing from my own experience as a Syrian refugee. I believed this connection would offer unique insights into their challenges. After discussions with my module coordinator and supervisor, I broadened the scope to include all refugees and asylum seekers. Focusing solely on Syrians could limit data collection, as many teachers may not have worked specifically with Syrian students. Expanding the focus allows for a wider range of teacher perspectives, enriching the study.

This broader approach also captures both common and unique challenges across different refugee groups, offering a more comprehensive view of their experiences in ESOL education. While focusing on a specific nationality may work with direct refugee interviews, teachers typically work with diverse learners, making their wider experience more valuable. This shift provides a more holistic understanding of refugee challenges while still incorporating my personal perspective, helping to uncover key insights into the Welsh ESOL landscape.

Interestingly, I initially planned to recruit participants only from the college where I had worked, focusing on formal ESOL providers. However, an ESOL researcher in Wales encouraged me to include informal providers such as charities. This expanded my research to focus on ESOL provision in a Welsh city, covering both formal and informal settings.

After finalising my plan to interview teachers of refugee students in Wales, I obtained ethical approval from Swansea University. I began recruiting participants by reaching out to teachers I knew from my previous role at the college. I also contacted the deputy head at the college, who forwarded my call-for-participants email to ESOL tutors, some of whom then reached out to me directly. I provided them with a [Participant Information Sheet \(PIS\)](#) and [consent form](#) (see [Appendix 2](#)) and scheduled interviews at their convenience, offering both in-person and online options. In-person interviews were held in the HR room, while online interviews were conducted via Zoom and Microsoft Teams. Interview questions are in [Appendix 3](#). All interviews were audio-recorded with consent. I subsequently transcribed, coded, and analysed the data, which will be detailed in [Section 3.7](#).

3.3 Research approach and design

This study adopts a qualitative research approach within an interpretivist paradigm to explore the challenges faced by refugees learning English as a second language in Wales, focusing on the experiences and perspectives of ESOL tutors. The qualitative approach is grounded in interpretivism, which posits that reality is socially constructed and understood through the meanings individuals ascribe to their experiences (Bryman, 2016). Starman (2013, p.30) explained that: “Qualitative research is characterized by an interpretative paradigm, which emphasizes subjective experiences and the meanings they have for an individual”. Qualitative research is particularly suited to this study as it allows for an in-depth exploration of complex social phenomena and emphasises the importance of context and individual experiences (Fossey et al, 2002).

3.4 Research context and focus

This research examines ESOL provision for refugees in a single Welsh city through the perspectives of ESOL teachers in formal and informal settings. This focused approach enables an in-depth exploration of the complexities of teaching and learning for refugees (Yin, 2018). As Stake (1995) noted, such studies are valuable for understanding the uniqueness of specific situations rather than generalising findings. By concentrating on one city, this research provides contextualised insights into the challenges refugees face in learning English as perceived by their teachers.

3.5 Sampling

The study used a purposive sampling strategy, targeting individuals with direct experience in ESOL provision for refugees in Wales. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), qualitative research often employs a small, purposefully selected sample to enhance depth over breadth. Palinkas et al. (2015) noted that this approach allows for detailed exploration of specific phenomena, yielding rich insights that broader sampling might miss.

Purposive sampling was particularly suitable for understanding the challenges refugees face in learning English from ESOL teachers' perspectives. By selecting participants directly involved in teaching, the study gathered in-depth information from those most knowledgeable about the subject. As Kelly (2010) emphasised, this method enhances the quality and relevance of the data collected.

The study included six ESOL teachers with diverse experiences in both formal and informal educational settings. Five of the participants teach at the same college, which represents the formal educational setting in this study. Throughout this dissertation, references to 'the college' pertain to this specific institution where these five participants teach.

Of these five college tutors, one also volunteers in a charity, providing insights from both formal and informal ESOL provision. The sixth participant teaches ESOL informally in a community-based setting. Additionally, this sixth participant is also a researcher in the field of ESOL in Wales, adding a valuable dual perspective as both a practitioner and an academic to the study.

This distribution of participants ensured a range of perspectives, capturing the different challenges and strategies employed in various educational contexts. While the majority of insights come from the formal college setting, the inclusion of experiences from informal, community-based initiatives enriches the data, providing a more comprehensive view of ESOL provision in the area under study.

Table 1 below presents an overview of the participants, including pseudonyms, years of experience, gender, current teaching location, interview date and place and interview duration. This information contextualises the data and highlights the participants' diverse backgrounds.

Table 1: Participant profiles and interview details

Pseudonym	Years of Experience (This could be ESOL in colleges or charities in addition to ESL, EFL or EAP)	Gender	Current ESOL Place of teaching	Date and place of the Interview	Duration of the Interview
Sarah	(9 years in total) 4 years employed in the college doing ESOL, and before that 5 years volunteering to teach English in a church	Female	Formal/college	Wednesday 10 th July at 11 AM In college	One hour
Rhian	(15 years in total) She started as a volunteer in 2009 in a community venue for five years. This led to a paid job in the college for about a decade now.	Female	Formal/college	Wednesday 10 th July at 1 PM In college	One hour

Daniel	Two and a half years – He has not taught in any charities.	Male	Formal/college	Thursday 11 th July at 11 AM Online (Zoom)	One hour and 17 minutes
Rebecca	(17 years in total) She has been teaching ESOL as a volunteer in a charity since 2007. She took a paid-role in the college in 2009 and continued the volunteering role in parallel with that.	Female	Formal (college) & informal (charity)	Tuesday 16 th July at 11 AM In college	One and a half hours
Samuel	(30 years in total) He spent a decade teaching English abroad in various countries, followed by ten years teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP). For the past ten years, he has focused on researching and teaching ESOL as a community volunteer, as well as training teachers in ESOL instruction.	Male	Informal/charity	Thursday 18 th July at 8 AM Online (Microsoft Teams)	One hour

John	(11 years in total) Not a volunteer – always worked in paid roles – teaching ESOL since Jan 2021, and prior to that, he has taught EFL, ESL and EAP since 2013.	Male	Formal/college	Tuesday 23 rd July at 10 AM Online (Microsoft Teams)	One and a half hours
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I used semi-structured interviews to address my research questions. In the next section, I will explain my choice of interviews and the specific decision to use a semi-structured format.

3.6 Choice of semi-structured interviews

Interviews are a widely used method for data collection in both quantitative and qualitative research, often considered "the gold standard" in qualitative studies (Barbour, 2003). They can be structured, semi-structured or unstructured, with structured interviews typically associated with quantitative research and semi-structured and unstructured interviews linked to qualitative research (Clark et al., 2021).

I chose semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method for their flexibility and depth. This approach allowed me to probe deeper into emerging areas of interest, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the issues (Bryman, 2016). Semi-structured interviews use a flexible guide with questions aimed at addressing the research objectives, allowing for a natural flow of conversation (Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik, 2021). They typically include open-ended questions and follow-up probes, making them effective for exploring complex issues while enabling participants to express their thoughts in their own words, which can reveal novel insights (Gill & Baillie, 2018).

Semi-structured interviews facilitated rapport with participants, encouraging candid insights that might not emerge in more structured methods (Smith & Osborn, 2008). This approach provided rich data for thematic analysis, keeping ESOL teachers' voices central to the study

and offering valuable insights into their perspectives on the challenges faced by refugee learners in Wales, ultimately informing recommendations for improving ESOL provision.

3.7 Data Analysis

Interviews for this study were conducted in person or via Microsoft Teams or Zoom, based on participants' preferences. Teams provided automatically generated transcripts, which facilitated initial documentation and sped up the transcription process. However, to ensure accuracy and capture the nuances of participants' responses, I manually reviewed and edited these transcripts. This careful approach was essential for maintaining data integrity and upholding ethical standards, especially given the sensitivity of the topics discussed.

I manually transcribed the recordings of face-to-face interviews to ensure deep engagement with the data while maintaining participants' confidentiality. Although transcription software like Otter.ai is available, I opted against it due to ethical concerns about data storage and privacy as it retains recordings for a period. Da Silva (2021) supports this choice, highlighting significant issues with automated transcription tools, particularly free ones, in maintaining confidentiality. For sensitive participant speech, third-party cloud services pose risks to data security and anonymity (ibid). While more time-consuming, this method ensured strict confidentiality and kept data under my direct control, aligning with best practices in qualitative research involving sensitive information.

Data analysis was conducted using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software that facilitates the organisation and coding of large datasets (QSR International, 2020). I employed thematic analysis which is “ a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun and Clark, 2006, p. 79). I followed an inductive synthesis in analysing my data. Qualitative researchers usually employ an inductive approach, constructing patterns, categories and themes from the ground up by organising data into progressively abstract units (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). This process involved continuously refining and revisiting the themes and data until a thorough set of themes was established (ibid).

To ensure the reliability and trustworthiness of the analysis, I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach of thematic analysis which included familiarising myself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming

themes and producing the report. This systematic approach ensured that the analysis was rigorous, and that the themes accurately reflected the data. The next section will discuss my unique role and positionality throughout the research process.

3.8 Positionality

“There's no enunciation without positionality. You have to position yourself somewhere in order to say anything at all” (Hall, 1990, p. 18). This quote highlights the importance of recognising the researcher’s positionality in shaping their research. Positionality encompasses the researcher’s perspective throughout the research journey and influences various aspects of the process, including framing the research question, conducting the study and publishing findings (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014). Similar positionalities and lived experiences between the researcher and interviewee can also foster rapport and empathy, which are essential for eliciting genuine responses (Yip, 2024).

In qualitative research, acknowledging the researcher's positionality is essential (Holmes, 2020). My experience as a part-time ESOL lecturer and Learning and Skills Coach (see [Section 2.4.2](#)) allowed me to witness firsthand the challenges teachers faced with refugee learners, providing an insider perspective that enriched the research process. However, this insider status required careful reflection on how my experiences might have shaped my interpretations. As Berger (2015) emphasised, researchers must be aware of how their beliefs influence interactions with participants and data interpretation. Therefore, I made a concerted effort to be reflexive, which I discuss in the following section.

3.9 Reflexivity

In qualitative research, the researcher’s deep involvement with participants introduces ethical and personal challenges (Locke et al., 2013). Therefore, researchers must acknowledge and reflect on their biases, values, and backgrounds—including gender, history, culture and socioeconomic status (SES)—as these factors influence their interpretations (Creswell and Creswell, 2017).

Therefore, in conducting this study, I incorporated reflexive thinking to ensure a transparent examination of the challenges refugees face in learning English in Wales. Reflexivity, as defined by Creswell and Creswell (2017), involves documenting personal experiences, including observations during data collection, initial thoughts on findings and concerns about participants' reactions. These reflective “memos” aid in creating codes and themes during data analysis (ibid).

During data collection, I maintained a reflexive journal to record my thoughts and observations after each interview. I noted participants' enthusiasm or reluctance to share, which helped contextualise their responses. I also documented concerns about biases related to my previous role as a part-time ESOL lecturer and my varying relationships with participants—some familiar, some friends and some new. This self-awareness enabled me to stay vigilant about maintaining objectivity and minimising undue influence on data interpretation.

To ensure reflexivity, I regularly considered how my background might shape my interpretations. My familiarity with the college's ESOL programme helped me understand institutional challenges, but I balanced this with insights from teachers in informal settings. By minimising discussions of my experiences and focusing on participants' narratives, I kept the study's content central to the analysis. This reflexive approach enhanced the study's credibility and provided a nuanced understanding of the challenges refugees face in learning English in Wales.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from Swansea University's review board. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, their right to withdraw and confidentiality measures. Written consent was collected, and data was securely stored following data protection regulations (BERA, 2018).

To protect privacy, both the college and city were anonymised. Since there is only one college in the city, naming the location could reveal the institution and compromise anonymity. Some participants, such as the Welsh champion, held distinctive roles, further increasing the risk of identification.

Therefore, anonymisation was necessary to uphold ethical standards and protect participant confidentiality despite a slight reduction in contextual detail. This approach aligns with best practices in qualitative research ethics, especially when participants' roles make them identifiable within their professional community.

Chapter 4

Findings

This chapter presents my findings organised into themes and sub-themes, focusing on teachers' perspectives of the challenges faced by refugees and asylum seekers learning English in Wales, including LESLLA learners, as well as the challenges teachers encounter in supporting them. It also explores the opportunities the Welsh context offers for ESOL refugee learners. **Table 2** below presents the three main themes, each corresponding to one of my research questions.

Table 2: Research questions and corresponding themes

Research Question	Corresponding Theme
RQ1: What are ESOL teachers' perspectives on the challenges faced by refugee students in learning English in Wales, and the challenges teachers face when working with them?	Teachers' perspectives on refugee learner challenges and teacher challenges
RQ2: According to ESOL teachers, what challenges LESLLA refugee learners have when learning English in Wales, and what particular challenges do teachers face when working with this group?	Teachers' perspectives on LESLLA learner challenges and teacher challenges
RQ3: What role does the Welsh context play in this language learning journey, according to teachers?	Opportunities the Welsh context presents

I want to highlight the complexity of analysing my data. I began with manual colour coding of transcripts (see [Appendix 4](#)) before importing the data into NVIVO, where I initially generated seven themes and approximately 70 sub-themes. After thorough sorting, I narrowed them down to three themes. For a summary of the grouping process, see [Appendix 5](#). For a detailed view, including tables of all themes, sub-themes and supporting quotations, refer to

[Appendix 6](#), which contains extensive quotes that support my analysis, though only selected excerpts are included in this chapter due to space limitations.

4.1 Teachers' perspectives on refugee learner challenges and teacher challenges

This theme examines teachers' perspectives on the challenges faced by ESOL refugee learners and the difficulties in supporting them. These insights are essential for understanding the obstacles in ESOL provision from educators' viewpoints. The findings are organised into five sub-themes related to challenges in: ESOL provision and policies, facilities in ESOL settings, the asylum process, learners' profiles and teachers' difficulties with motivating learners. All of these will be presented in detail.

4.1.1 Challenges related to ESOL provision, system and policies in colleges

From teachers' perspectives, both refugee learners and teachers face numerous challenges related to ESOL provision, systems and policies in colleges. These include viewing English as an academic subject, lack of fast-track options, expectations for learners to understand the system, variability in ESOL tutors, an exam-focused approach and the part-time course structure. Each of these will be addressed in this section.

Samuel, with a decade of experience teaching and researching ESOL¹, criticised the rigid structuring of the curriculum that views English as an academic subject. He said:

I think the organisation of ESOL understands or perceives English language education like an academic subject... after one year you are Entry level 1, after two years Entry level 2, and after three years Entry Level 3. Language is not really a straight line like that... There's no reason people can't learn the past simple at the same time as the present simple.

Samuel's critique highlighted a key issue in ESOL education which is the perception of language learning as a linear progression. He argued that this view oversimplifies language acquisition and suggested that skills like tenses can develop simultaneously. This underscored the need for a more integrated and flexible ESOL curriculum that aligns with learners' practical needs.

¹ While this highlights Samuel's 10 years of experience in teaching and researching ESOL, his overall teaching career spans over 30 years. He spent 10 years teaching English abroad, another 10 years teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and for the last decade, he has focussed on ESOL, both in teaching and teacher training. His ESOL teaching role is voluntary at a charity

Samuel highlighted another significant challenge for ESOL refugee learners which is the lack of fast-track options. Under the current system, learners often need four or five years to progress through the levels before they are deemed to have reached Level 2, which qualifies them for further study or employment opportunities. He noted, "*Why don't we fast track these over two years, for example, or three years or two and a half years? But there aren't any fast, or there are very few, fast track options available, and I think it's important to try this approach.*" This emphasised the need for flexible pathways that could support faster progression, especially for refugee learners eager to integrate quickly into society and the workforce.

While Samuel's observation about the current lack of fast-track options is accurate, John revealed that changes are on the horizon. Starting next year, the college will implement more flexible pathways. John explained:

We've tried to build in a bit of flexibility from next year, so we've got some kind of pathways for our learners, so if they want to focus on reading and writing, they can do like a half year reading and writing course. And if they want to do speaking and listening, they can do a half year course in that. So they could be at two different levels. For example, if they've failed their level one writing but pass their speaking and listening, they could go up to Level 2 speaking and listening, but then they wouldn't have the full level 1 qualification.

This upcoming initiative, while not a full fast-track option, represents a step towards addressing the need for more flexible and potentially faster routes to improvement for ESOL refugee learners.

Another challenge faced by ESOL refugee learners related to the ESOL system is the expectation to understand how the ESOL system and the broader education system work as highlighted by Rhian. She pointed out that "*some students might know what we expect of them, or what processes involve, and others don't.*" This lack of accessible information can be particularly problematic for refugee learners who may already face multiple barriers, making it difficult for them to navigate the system and meet expectations.

Another challenge ESOL refugee learners face, caused by the ESOL system, is the variability in their ESOL teachers, as suggested by Rhian. She noted that "*the teacher... can impact their second language learning*" and highlighted that differences in teachers' contracts and availability can affect the support students receive. With teachers having varied amounts of time for pastoral care and additional support outside of lesson time, this inconsistency can

hinder learners' progress and exacerbate the difficulties they face in adapting to a new educational system.

The exam-focused approach in ESOL colleges poses challenges for both teachers and learners. Rebecca noted, "*The college has become a lot more exam focused and meeting criteria,*" while John observed, "*The focus seems to be moving more and more onto exams.*" This shift affects teaching strategies and curriculum content, creating tension between practical language instruction and exam preparation. Daniel criticised the relevance of some exam questions, stating, "*There's a lot of kind of academic questions that I just don't think have any place,*" pointing out that even advanced speakers might struggle with these. For learners, especially refugees, this approach may not align with their immediate needs. Sarah explained that while "*The Pre-entry curriculum is a very relevant curriculum for refugees,*" higher levels can feel overly exam-focused: "*It feels like it's got to be focussed on the assessment requirements.*"

Despite these challenges, teachers strive to balance exam requirements with practical content. Rebecca emphasised, "*The topics that we cover in the curriculum and the scheme of work are not completely divorced from learners' everyday life.*" This exam-focused system creates a complex learning environment where both teachers and students must navigate between practical language skills and exam success.

In addition, the part-time course structure in ESOL education presents significant challenges for both teachers and learners. This system creates a complex web of issues. According to Daniel, students typically end up on part-time courses for two reasons: either they cannot commit to full-time learning due to work or other commitments, or they failed to pass their level in a full-time course and must now repeat it part-time. This presents a significant challenge, especially for refugee learners who need to improve their language skills quickly to integrate.

Limited instructional time means that, as Rebecca noted, "*The actual input for a part-time learner is not huge, especially for people who are working... their number one thing is to earn money... some are motivated and will do homework, but on the whole, they don't.*" This reduces the time available for language development. Additionally, part-time courses cover far less material than full-time ones, forcing teachers to condense lessons. Rhian explained, "*If you're on a part-time course, teachers are going to have to cut out over two-thirds of that*

book... students may not have covered certain aspects of grammar, expanded their range of vocabulary, or had much practice in speaking and listening skills."

Much of the limited time is spent on exam preparation, leaving little room for addressing broader language needs crucial for integration. Daniel emphasised the difficulty of this situation: *"You're having to get through a syllabus that actually isn't achievable"* in the limited time available in part-time classes. These intertwined challenges create a system where both teachers and learners struggle to achieve comprehensive language development within the constraints of part-time education.

Another system-related challenge for both learners and teachers is funding cuts, which reduce the available support resources. An example is the merging of the Learning and Skills team with the well-being team in the college under study, reducing the number of Learning and Skills Coaches. All five teachers interviewed who teach at the college agreed that this would impact learners and the support offered. Rebecca stated: *"I've had support in the classroom, and I know that has made a difference. I mean it can't not have an impact. It will have an impact."* Rhian explained that having sufficient learning coach hours allows for better support for students in need. She emphasised that coaches could provide a tailored plan for each student, enabling them to attend their regular ESOL classes while also receiving additional tutoring outside of class.

John commented: *"We're very lucky at the college to have the learning support team."* When asked if cutting funds to the Skills Centre affects ESOL learners, Daniel responded: *"Yeah. Yeah. Yes... You know, because there are a lot of people who do make use of it and if there is a reduction in that resource then yeah, it's going to affect them, no doubt."* These responses highlight the significant impact of funding cuts on the support available to ESOL learners.

4.1.2 Challenges related to facilities in ESOL settings

ESOL refugee learners also face significant challenges related to facilities and timetabling. Rebecca pointed out that the college *"has no crèche, no childcare facility at all,"* which especially affects female students with children and disrupts their attendance. This lack of support creates emotional strain for teachers as well. For example, Rebecca recounted a recent class with two toddlers running around, saying, *"I was at the point of saying you're going to have to leave... I don't want to be throwing them out."* This highlights the conflict teachers feel when managing disruptions while empathising with their students' efforts to

attend class. Similarly, Samuel noted that the absence of childcare facilities is often due to “no money, no money, no money” from the government, limiting available support.

Moreover, Rebecca highlighted how timetabling exacerbates challenges for ESOL learners, particularly women with family commitments. She explained, “*Women who tend to take the children to school and are expected to be in class at 9:00*” often struggle with punctuality, especially if they live far from the college and “*have to take two buses.*” Similarly, afternoon classes conflict with school pickup times. Rebecca noted, “*You have women who are literally turning up late because they're taking children to school and also because they have got no childcare.*” This inflexibility in class schedules makes it difficult for learners to balance their educational commitments with family duties, potentially impacting their attendance and progress.

Additionally, Rebecca mentioned the lack of social areas, noting that the building of the college “*doesn't lend itself to any social contact between students,*” which limits opportunities for learners to form informal networks and friendships. This absence of social spaces contributes to the isolation many refugee learners experience, impacting their overall engagement and support within the college community.

4.1.3 Challenges related to the asylum system

In addition to challenges with ESOL provision, system, policies and facilities, learners face significant difficulties related to the asylum process, such as issues with accommodation, relocation and the stress caused by the asylum process itself which can hinder learning.

Both Rebecca and John emphasised the severe impact of inadequate housing support and frequent relocations on refugees. Rebecca noted that refugees are often abruptly moved between hotels, shared houses and different cities, disrupting their routines, friendships and education. She highlighted that the 28-day notice period to vacate accommodation upon receiving refugee status often forces them into homeless centres. To maintain anonymity, the specific name of the centre mentioned is referred to generically here.

John also noted that these homeless centres serve individuals with “*very, very complex needs,*” such as drug addiction and chronic homelessness, making it “*almost impossible*” for asylum seekers and refugees to succeed academically and practise their faith. Rebecca further

emphasised that these centres cater to “*British homeless people who have very particular needs,*” which differ from those of refugees seeking safety. These insights underscore the need for stable, supportive accommodation tailored to ESOL refugee learners, vital for their educational and personal well-being amid asylum uncertainties.

Beyond accommodation, the asylum process itself adds stress for learners. Daniel recounted an incident where one of his students received a sudden relocation notice from the city where he was studying to a different city. He described this situation as “*unbelievably disrespectful*” and “*inhumane,*” explaining that it forced the student to leave behind a support network and an ongoing college course. While this represents a challenge for learners, it also affects teachers emotionally.

Daniel sought support from the college and the Welsh Refugee Council, writing a letter to highlight the student's established network and ongoing coursework. Despite his success, he acknowledged the personal toll, saying, “*I thought, well, I can't keep doing this, you know, because it would just take over your life.*” He added, “*I ended up spending hours on the phone and writing letters to prevent his move. It took a lot of my time and effort, but I felt it was important.*” This example underscores the emotional and practical challenges teachers face when advocating for students, illustrating that their involvement often extends beyond classroom instruction into complex situations affecting their students' well-being and progress.

Rebecca also noted the frequent requests for letters from educational institutions and charities to support refugees facing relocation, stating, “*I'm asked to write letters all the time.*” Despite her efforts, she expressed doubt about their overall effectiveness, saying, “*I don't think it makes much difference to the Home Office.*” She mentioned that on one occasion, a letter did make a difference, though she was uncertain whether the outcome was due to the letter or other factors, reflecting the generally limited impact of these advocacy efforts despite the significant time and effort involved.

Sarah highlighted how the stress of navigating the asylum system can hinder learning: “*Until they're really settled and have sorted out Universal Credit and housing, they're not really in a good place to focus on learning.*” These perspectives highlight how accommodation issues and asylum stress can create significant barriers to educational progress and well-being for ESOL learners.

4.1.4 Challenges related to the learners' profiles

In addition to challenges with ESOL provision, policies, facilities and the asylum process, learners also face issues tied to their individual profiles, such as educational backgrounds, varying English levels, digital skills, diverse future ambitions and past trauma and well-being.

Many participants highlighted the diverse educational backgrounds of ESOL refugee learners as a significant challenge for both learners and teachers. For instance, Rebecca noted the disparity among learners, explaining that *“people come from a great variety of educational backgrounds... some may have very little primary education,”* with some arriving as doctors or engineers while others have had minimal or disrupted education.

The disparity in learners' levels within the same class poses challenges for both students and teachers. John described the issue of *“spiky profiles,”* where learners excel in areas like speaking and listening but struggle in others, such as reading and writing. He noted the level of one of his students, stating, *“His speaking and listening were much higher than Entry 3, which was the level he was at, but his reading and writing were really pulling him down.”* This uneven skill development complicates lesson planning and individualised support, making it difficult for teachers to meet their students' diverse needs.

Moreover, based on learners' backgrounds, they may have varying levels of digital literacy skills, presenting additional challenges for both students and teachers. John explains, *“Depending on what kind of background they've come from, they may not have had much access to smartphones or modern touchscreen devices before. If they're older, it may be the first time they've had to use a mobile phone for their online portions of their classes, which can be a real struggle.”* This lack of familiarity with technology can hinder learners' engagement with online educational resources. For teachers, managing a classroom with differing levels of digital literacy complicates lesson planning and delivery, making it a significant challenge in technology-based education.

In a similar vein, Samuel highlighted the challenge teachers face in addressing diverse learner needs based on students' life experiences and ambitions. He described a situation where one ESOL teacher had middle-aged professional Ukrainian women, teenage Sudanese boys with limited life experience and retired women from Hong Kong in the same class, noting the difficulty in balancing their varying needs. This diversity creates a complex classroom

environment, underscoring the necessity for a nuanced approach that considers each learner's unique background and needs, beyond just educational and digital skills.

Other challenges tied to the learners' individual profiles include experiences of past trauma, overall well-being and health concerns. Rebecca highlighted how trauma can severely impact learning, stating, *"People very, very often say that: 'I can't remember anything. I can't learn English because there's too much going on in my head. My head is like a fridge. I think too much. I can't remember anything.'"* This reflects how anxiety and psychological stress can obstruct the learning process. Sarah echoed these concerns, noting that trauma often places learners in unstable situations, adding, *"Some come with a lot of mental health issues, physical health issues."*

These well-being concerns also present challenges for teachers as they notice some students are physically present but not fully engaged. Daniel observed, *"I have noticed that some students can get distracted, or they're not quite there."* Rebecca added, *"There's a million other things happening in their heads that are preventing them from even hearing what you're saying."* This lack of engagement impacts teaching effectiveness, as distracted students struggle to absorb information. Additionally, Sarah highlighted attendance issues which indirectly is linked to well-being, noting, *"One of the biggest issues we have with the refugees is attendance. But their attendance is poor because they are so caught up in their asylum seeking process... the whole system is very stressful for them."*

Rhian discussed the potential for ESOL classes to contribute to healing through what she referred to as *Post-Traumatic Growth*. She expressed a desire for ESOL classes to be a supportive environment where learners can experience growth and recovery, saying, *"I would love for ESOL classes to be part of that growth... and start reaching their ambitions."* This illustrates a hope that ESOL settings can aid in the recovery and personal development of learners who have experienced significant trauma.

4.1.5 Challenges ESOL teachers face related to learners' motivation

Teachers face broader difficulties when working with refugee learners, applicable to both LESLLA and non-LESLLA students. A significant issue is motivating learners to engage with English outside the classroom. Daniel noted this challenge, stating, *"You can't just come to class and think you're going to learn English. You have to do things outside of class."* John also highlighted this, explaining, *"It's a real struggle to get them to do extra things outside*

class." He also emphasised the need for self-study skills, adding, "*Students often don't realise that succeeding as a student requires more than just attending classes. They need to do their own work, research, and practice outside of class, which many are not accustomed to.*"

Improving English outside the classroom involves using available resources, as John emphasised: "*It's using the tools available at the college.*" However, Rebecca noted a key challenge: "*It's difficult because people with low literacy skills and lacking in confidence often lack the motivation as well.*" This creates a cycle where "*They're failing because they haven't got the literacy, and because they're failing, they become less confident.*"

Consequently, those who benefit from services like the Skills Centre tend to be already motivated, as Rebecca observed: "*There were a group of ladies... who were friendly together and they went to the Skills Centre as well. So you know, they were motivated AS WELL.*" This highlights the complex interplay between resource availability, learner motivation and language learning.

4.1.6 Learning from experience: Teachers' growth through challenges

Teaching ESOL to refugees has spurred significant professional growth among educators, particularly in cultural sensitivity and awareness. Teachers reported increased mindfulness of cultural differences in their approaches. Daniel noted, "*I've become more aware of the things that can affect people,*" while Rhian emphasised the need to adapt materials "*to be more sensitive and to give them space.*"

Teachers have also gained a deeper understanding of learners' backgrounds and experiences, informing their practices. Rebecca noted, "*Over the last 15 years, where people are coming from has changed a lot,*" highlighting the dynamic nature of refugee populations. Sarah emphasised "*a much greater awareness of how background can affect their learning.*" Additionally, John pointed out the importance of adapting content, stating, "*It's more socioeconomic awareness,*" and avoiding topics that do "*not relate to their experience of the world at all.*" This shift reflects a more nuanced understanding of learners' lived realities.

Teachers have additionally come to recognise that their role extends beyond language instruction. Samuel reflected on this expanded role, saying, "*I think that the language is inextricably linked to everything else,*" acknowledging the need to address various aspects of learners' lives in the learning process.

Moreover, the development of improved trauma-informed approaches has been crucial. Teachers like Rhian have sought specific training in this area, noting, *"I attended some very good training around trauma-informed responses,"* which has changed the way she approached difficult topics especially regarding refugee students.

Furthermore, teachers reported becoming better at assessing learners' needs. This improvement in understanding and addressing individual learner needs is exemplified by Sarah's comment: *"I'm also much better asking the right questions when they start off their literacy experience."* This skill enables teachers to tailor their instruction more effectively to each learner's unique situation and background.

These insights reflect collective growth in understanding and addressing the complex challenges faced by refugee learners in ESOL. They underscore the importance of cultural sensitivity, integrating life issues, and adaptive teaching practices. This heightened awareness is especially crucial for LESLLA learners, who often need tailored support due to their unique educational backgrounds and learning needs.

4.2 Teachers' perspectives on LESLLA learner challenges and teacher challenges

While many of the challenges identified in the first theme—such as those related to ESOL provision, policies, facilities, the asylum system and learners' diverse profiles—apply to LESLLA learners as well, teachers also face specific challenges unique to this group. In this section, I will present teachers' perspectives on challenges that are particularly relevant to LESLLA learners and the difficulties teachers encounter when working with them. Key issues include a lack of foundational learning and study skills, difficulties with general knowledge, insufficient differentiation in teaching and struggles with understanding written language logistics.

4.2.1 Lack of learning skills

Several teachers highlighted specific difficulties LESLLA learners face in terms of lack of study skills. For example, Rebecca noted that learners with minimal formal education may struggle with basic study skills. She explained, *"Study skills that you assume people know, like understanding a table or knowing where to write an answer, are not always present."*

Rhian emphasised the cognitive demands on learners with interrupted or minimal educational backgrounds. She stated, “*Students who have minimal or interrupted education often lack the understanding of how a classroom operates. They might be learning not only a new language but also how to navigate classroom and college systems, which can be very demanding.*” She added that those who have not been to school are learning classroom norms and expectations for the first time as adults, which can be confusing and demanding.

Sarah highlighted the practical challenges, saying that illiterate or unschooled learners might not know how to organise their learning materials, and “*they don't even know what to do with the worksheet.*” She added that they might not know how to practise vocabulary effectively. These insights highlight that LESLLA learners face unique challenges with foundational skills, classroom navigation and self-directed learning, complicating their educational experience.

In addition to challenges with study skills, LESLLA learners often struggle with general world knowledge. Rebecca noted that textbooks assume a certain level of understanding. For instance, one of her students questioned the sentence “The earth moves around the sun,” prompting her to clarify the grammatical structure. However, the student clarified that his confusion was not about grammar; he simply did not understand the concept of the earth moving around the sun. This illustrates how a lack of foundational knowledge about the world and culture can create significant barriers to learning.

John also observed that the assumption of prior knowledge can lead to challenges in the classroom. He mentioned, “*You need to diagnose what knowledge students actually have because it can be much less than you might expect. For example, some students might struggle to locate places on a map of the UK, which might seem basic to someone with a different background.*” These observations show that LESLLA learners’ gaps in general knowledge affect their ability to engage with and understand educational content, adding complexity to their learning experiences.

LESLLA learners also have difficulties with the logistics of written language. Sarah noted, “*There is the logistics of understanding written language, knowing how there's a directionality, that these marks are linked to a phonetic sound. All of those just basics of knowing how literacy works.*” This shows the broader dilemma of grasping fundamental literacy concepts, which many learners may not have encountered before.

4.2.2 Challenges teachers face in supporting LESLLA learners

ESOL tutors face significant challenges in addressing LESLLA learners' unique needs, especially in mixed-ability classrooms, where these challenges are closely linked to the learners' difficulties. The lack of differentiation in educational settings exacerbates these challenges. As Samuel pointed out, *"Yeah, they are not separated at the moment in college. At present, these learners aren't differentiated at all."* This reflects a broader issue of insufficient tailored support for LESLLA learners, who often struggle with study skills, general world knowledge and understanding written language.

The presence of both LESLLA and non-LESLLA students in the same class creates a complex teaching environment. LESLLA learners typically require additional support, making it challenging for teachers to effectively cater to the diverse needs of all students. Rebecca highlighted this difficulty, stating, *"In a class of maybe 15 people, it is very difficult to devote that amount of time to one or two students who are really struggling."* Samuel echoed this sentiment, explaining, *"In a class of 10 or 15 people, there's very little I can do... other than employ other people in the class to help, and then to identify those learners with these needs and to direct them to a class specific for them."*

While Samuel noted a general lack of differentiation for LESLLA learners, Rhian described a recent initiative at the college that partially addresses this issue. They developed a specialised class for learners with literacy needs, as Rhian explained: *"We developed the idea of separating our learners who have literacy needs into a different class so that we could go at a slower pace... We were finding they felt supported by their peers who were also beginners as them. They felt supported by the slow pace."* This programme, which has been running for two years, has shown positive results. Rhian noted, *"We could see that the learners benefited from being together with each other... We saw improvement in aspects like handwriting."*

The programme has limitations; it is only available to pre-entry learners, excluding Entry 1 LESLLA students who may still struggle with literacy. Rhian noted, *"When they progress, they will then be in another class with literate learners,"* highlighting ongoing challenges in providing consistent support for LESLLA learners. While both LESLLA and non-LESLLA refugee learners face obstacles in learning English in Wales, the Welsh context also offers many opportunities, which will be explored in the next theme.

4.3 Opportunities the Welsh context presents

4.3.1 Wales is a refugee-welcoming nation

Wales stands out as a refugee-welcoming nation, with a supportive approach from its top levels of government. As John highlighted, *“I think there has always been a more welcoming kind of approach from the top levels of governments of Wales... aspires to be a nation of sanctuary.”* This welcoming stance is reinforced through national policies and events like Refugee Week.

John also contrasted the more positive social and governmental attitude in Wales compared to the UK as a whole. He stated that while there’s a *“hostile rhetoric”* in other parts of the UK, particularly under the previous government, Wales has a more welcoming environment. John adds, *“In Wales, I proudly say I teach asylum seekers and refugees,”* a statement that contrasts with his sense that in some parts of England, teaching this group might be viewed more controversially.

4.3.2 Welsh Government support for ESOL in formal and informal settings

The Welsh Government offers generous funding and a diverse range of ESOL options, including full-time, part-time and community courses, providing flexibility and choice for learners (Welsh Government, 2019a). Sarah noted, *“20 hours a week is a very generous amount to give students for learning,”* highlighting the extensive support compared to other regions. Also, At the NATECLA (National Association for Teaching English and other Community Languages to Adults) conference, which is the national forum and professional organisation for ESOL teachers (<https://www.natecla.org.uk/>), Sarah observed a stark contrast in ESOL funding across the UK. Speaking with English teachers from various regions, she said, *“we seem to have a much better funding for refugees here in Wales,”* and noted that many English teachers were surprised by the high level of provision in Wales compared to the shorter, less frequent classes common in other areas.

Access to ESOL classes is notably easier in Wales. Samuel pointed out, *“Access to ESOL classes is far easier in Wales with regard to asylum status, so asylum seekers can attend ESOL classes from day one in Wales.”* This contrasts with other regions, such as England, where access may be more restrictive. Overall, the Welsh ESOL provision is perceived as more supportive and extensive compared to other contexts.

4.3.3 Promoting bilingualism and multilingualism: Opportunities to learn Welsh and foster belonging

Wales's bilingual status presents unique opportunities for integration and cultural exchange. Samuel proposed, *"It would be wonderful to somehow get migrants in Wales into Welsh language classes with local people... refugees and asylum seekers have got two or three or three or four languages in their pocket."* This approach not only aids language learning but also helps in breaking down stereotypes and fostering mutual understanding.

Teachers who took part in this research are increasingly integrating Welsh into ESOL classrooms to reflect the bilingual nature of the country. John emphasised, *"I'd also try to just build awareness amongst our student cohort that we're a bilingual country and that they're going to see Welsh everywhere they might hear Welsh here and there."* Similarly, Sarah highlighted the importance of introducing Welsh culture and language into the curriculum: *"Trying to bring Welsh culture into the curriculum is really important... making them aware that everything is bilingual."* She added, *"Just, you know, Bore da... simple phrases that they might hear or just, you know, signs around because a lot of our signs are in Welsh... just making them aware that everything is bilingual."*

Learning Welsh can significantly enhance a sense of belonging among migrants. Samuel noted, *"The introduction of basic Welsh classes for everybody... is important for a sense of belonging... if you don't have an idea about Welsh, the history about how to pronounce it, then it's going to be another thing which makes you feel excluded."* John also pointed out the long-term benefits of Welsh language education, stating, *"If you're going to stay here... they're still going to be learning some Welsh... that over their career would give them higher earnings,"* and there are so far some positive experiences with learning Welsh.

Positive experiences with Welsh taster courses and the welcoming environment in Wales are becoming increasingly evident. John highlighted a successful initiative by Adult Learning Wales, where learners participated in a series of four Welsh taster sessions. The results were overwhelmingly positive, with *"twenty-nine out of thirty learners expressing a desire for more Welsh language, culture, and history."* This indicates a growing interest in Welsh immersion programmes, suggesting that such initiatives foster greater integration and cultural awareness.

Sarah also added to the positive narrative, noting that many refugees she has spoken to have had encouraging experiences in Wales, stating that *"people are friendly and helpful."* She

contrasted this with larger cities like London, where refugees might not have the same opportunities to practise English or engage in casual conversations with locals.

4.3.4 Other unique opportunities in Wales

The Welsh context presents distinct differences compared to non-Welsh settings, particularly in terms of collaboration, policy and social attitudes towards refugees and asylum seekers. Samuel emphasised the advantage of Wales's smaller size, which allows for greater collaboration across regions. He highlighted the REACH hub, where cities like Swansea, Cardiff and Newport work together with third-sector providers. He noted that while not perfect, this collaborative approach facilitates sharing resources such as assessment materials. Samuel contrasted this with England, where collaboration is less evident and pointed out that *"we have an ESOL policy; England doesn't."*

It is worth noting that the interviews revealed varying familiarity with the ESOL policy in Wales among tutors, with most showing limited awareness of its content and impact on their teaching. Daniel remarked, *"I can't really comment on that. I haven't really looked into it at all,"* while John admitted he lacked *"intimate knowledge of the policy."* However, he was able to offer insights into its practical implications, saying that requirements for learners to focus on numeracy and additional skills at higher levels can frustrate some students. This highlighted the policy's structured framework but also its potential rigidity. In contrast, Samuel, who participated in the 2023 policy review, demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of its content and implementation. The differences in policy awareness among participants were a notable finding.

In conclusion, this section has highlighted the unique opportunities in the Welsh context for ESOL provision, including its status as a refugee-welcoming nation, generous government support and promotion of bilingualism. The three themes presented—teachers' perspectives on challenges faced by both refugee and LESLLA learners, as well as the challenges teachers encounter when supporting them and the opportunities offered by the Welsh context—will serve as a foundation for the discussion chapter on how Wales can better address these challenges.

Chapter 5

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the teachers' perspectives on the challenges faced by ESOL refugee learners in Wales as well as the experiences of ESOL teachers working with them. It highlights both the challenges and opportunities unique to the Welsh context. The findings underscore the strengths of Wales's ESOL provision alongside ongoing difficulties. This chapter will discuss these findings through three key themes: (1) The dual nature of the Welsh ESOL context: Opportunities and challenges, (2) Adaptive practices in ESOL and (3) The multi-faceted role of ESOL teachers in refugee integration. These themes will be linked to existing literature, and their implications for ESOL policy and practice in Wales will be discussed. The chapter will conclude with limitations and recommendations.

The organisation of themes in the discussion chapter follows a deliberate narrowing of focus, starting with the overarching Welsh ESOL context. This theme serves as a foundational framework, encompassing both the opportunities and challenges inherent in the Welsh system. From this broad perspective, the discussion then narrows to examine what I call 'adaptive practices' (which will be explained later in the chapter) employed within this context, highlighting how specific challenges are addressed. Finally, the focus further narrows to the individual ESOL teacher, exploring their multifaceted role that extends beyond classroom instruction. This structure allows for a comprehensive analysis that moves from the macro-level Welsh context to the micro-level of individual teacher experiences and responsibilities, providing a logical and cohesive narrative that ties together the various elements of ESOL provision for refugees in Wales.

5.1 The dual nature of the Welsh ESOL context: Opportunities and Challenges

5.1.1 Opportunities in the Welsh Context

The Welsh ESOL context presents three distinct opportunities that set it apart from the rest of the UK. Firstly, Wales's commitment to becoming a "Nation of Sanctuary" (NoS) (Welsh

Government, 2019b) creates a unique ESOL environment, as discussed in [Section 2.2.1](#) in the literature review. This initiative appears to wield a ‘symbolic’ power (Edwards and Wisthaler, 2023) that positively influences teacher attitudes and experiences. As John noted: *"In Wales, I proudly say I teach asylum seekers and refugees."* This statement not only reflects John's personal pride, but also suggests a broader cultural shift in how ESOL teaching for refugees and asylum seekers is perceived in Wales.

This symbolic power of the NoS initiative aligns with research showing teachers' attitudes significantly affect students' motivation (Omolara & Adebukola, 2015). While this finding is not specific to refugee or migrant education, it underscores the importance of fostering positive teacher attitudes in creating a welcoming and inclusive learning environment for all students, including refugees and asylum seekers. The impact of this commitment extends beyond policy, fostering a more positive and supportive environment for both ESOL teachers and learners.

Secondly, Wales has adopted a more holistic and inclusive approach to language education for migrants. While ESOL in the broader UK context originated in the 1950s and became linked to citizenship requirements (Rosenberg, 2007), as discussed in [Section 2.3.1](#), Wales has forged its own path. Following the UK Government's 2013 decision to uncouple ESOL provision from citizenship (Home Office, 2013), Wales published its first ESOL policy in 2014, a pioneering move that predated similar initiatives by other UK Governments (Lewis et al., 2023). This policy defines ESOL broadly as adult language provision for learners whose first language is neither English nor Welsh, emphasising its crucial role in fostering integration, independent living, community cohesion and access to further education and employment opportunities (Welsh Government, 2014). By explicitly including community cohesion as an aim, Wales recognises language learning as a tool for building stronger, more inclusive communities.

The 2023 ESOL policy in Wales emphasised the opportunity to learn Welsh alongside English, aligning with the Welsh Government's vision of Welsh as a “powerful integration tool” (Welsh Government, 2023, p. 5). The development of Welsh for Speakers of Other Languages (WSOL) programmes, such as "Croeso i Bawb" ("Welcome to Everyone"), reflects this commitment to a multilingual approach (Lewis et al., 2023), as discussed in [Section 2.3.3](#). Most teachers interviewed in this research shared this vision, recognising that Wales's bilingual status enhances ESOL provision. This inclusive strategy not only honours

Wales's bilingual heritage, but also fosters deeper community engagement for migrants, supporting the policy's goals of community cohesion and social integration.

My findings support Wales's advocacy for a multilingual and multicultural model in ESOL provision. This approach, integrating both English and Welsh, challenges the UK's generally monolingual integration strategy (Simpson and Hunter, 2023), as outlined in [Section 2.3.1](#). By valuing linguistic diversity, Wales counters narratives that view it as a threat to social cohesion (Simpson, 2015) and aligns with contemporary understandings of bilingualism's benefits (Mallea, 1984). This stance challenges historical frameworks reinforcing monolingualism (Martin-Jones, Blackledge, & Creese, 2012) and demonstrates how Wales leverages its bilingual heritage to foster an inclusive integration process for refugees and migrants.

This research found that ESOL teachers demonstrated significant interest in incorporating elements of Welsh language and culture into their curricula. For instance, John, serving as the Welsh Champion for the college under study, developed a guide to assist teachers in this endeavour. This initiative aligns with policy recommendations and reflects the Welsh Government's commitment to developing Welsh for Speakers of Other Languages (WSOL) programmes and embedding Welsh language within ESOL provision (Welsh Government, 2023).

The inclusion of Welsh in ESOL programmes serves multiple purposes. Proficiency in Welsh can be a valuable asset in the workplace, potentially enhancing employment opportunities for migrants (Lewis et al., 2023). Moreover, it can facilitate “social integration”, particularly in “predominantly Welsh-speaking communities” (Lewis et al., 2023; Williams, 2017), where language skills are crucial for community participation and building social connections (Lewis et al., 2023). As Samuel noted, the visibility of Welsh in everyday life can create feelings of exclusion for those unfamiliar with it. By incorporating Welsh language elements into ESOL provision, learners are better equipped to engage with their surroundings, potentially enhancing their sense of belonging.

However, questions remain about the consistency of Welsh language integration across various ESOL providers in Wales. Implementation may differ between formal settings like colleges and informal community programmes. Further research is needed to evaluate the extent of Welsh integration in ESOL and its impact on learners' cultural awareness and

integration. Despite the opportunities offered by Wales's approach to ESOL, significant challenges persist, highlighting the gap between policy intentions and practical realities.

5.1.2 Challenges in the Welsh Context

This study's findings revealed tensions between practical language needs and test preparation in ESOL provision, echoing Cowie's research (2021). The 2023 ESOL policy review for Wales highlighted the challenges posed by frequent assessments, noting that learners must repeat an entire year if they fail any element of the final exams (Welsh Government, 2023), which negatively impacts learner motivation and college funding. This exam-centric approach creates an administrative burden for teachers, who must navigate complex requirements to ensure student success. Daniel expressed concerns about the stress this places on educators, noting the constant fear of making mistakes due to time constraints and the lack of compensation for administrative tasks. This aligns with Chick and Sidaway's (2020, p. 15) observation of "demanding quantities of paperwork" that ESOL teachers often complete during unpaid hours. Overall, these findings highlight the broader systemic challenges in ESOL provision that affect both learners and educators.

The financial pressure on colleges likely contributes to their exam-focused approach. Sarah highlighted the content for pre-entry learners aligns with everyday language needs, and Rebecca emphasised that exam preparation is not entirely divorced from learners' everyday needs. However, some educators such as Daniel questioned the relevance of certain exam components to real-world communication skills. This debate highlights a key challenge in ESOL education, particularly for refugees, where balancing immediate communication needs with exam requirements can be problematic.

Furthermore, the current ESOL system struggles to address the diverse needs of learners, a challenge highlighted by many participants, such as Rhian and Sarah, in this research in their observations of ESOL classrooms. These classrooms often include a wide range of learners with varying backgrounds, goals and motivations. Chick (2019) supports this observation, emphasising that ESOL classes serve multiple purposes beyond exam preparation, including providing social opportunities and practical language skills for daily interactions.

The diversity of learner needs starkly contrasts with the rigid academic structuring of the curriculum, which Samuel critiqued. This aligns with Larsen-Freeman's (2015, p. 508) view that "Learning is not a linear, additive process, but an iterative one." This tension highlighted

the conflict between the exam-focused system and the non-linear learning needs of ESOL refugee learners. The mismatch between the structured curriculum and the iterative nature of language learning creates significant challenges for both educators and learners. These findings collectively underscore the need for a more balanced and flexible approach to assessment and administration in ESOL provision, one that prioritises a “person-centred language education” over bureaucratic demands and can better accommodate the diverse needs of learners (Chick, 2023, p.4).

Additionally, part-time ESOL course structures present significant challenges that have been largely overlooked in recent Welsh ESOL policies (Welsh Government 2014; 2019a; 2023). The contrast between the efficiency-driven approach of part-time courses and learners' actual needs is particularly evident in the limited contact hours. Part-time courses offer only 4 to 10 hours per week, compared to full-time courses providing 450 hours annually (Welsh Government, 2014). This reduced instructional time significantly impacts teachers' ability to develop learners' language skills comprehensively.

Educators like Rhian noted structural inefficiencies, stating, *"Our learners are expected to do that twice,"* referring to part-time learners covering the same material as full-time students but with only a third of the instructional hours. This places unfair demands on both teachers and students as educators struggle to cover essential material within the limited time allocated. The 2023 ESOL policy review states that learners "must repeat a whole year if they fail one element of the final year exams" (Welsh Government, 2023). However, teachers found that failed full-time learners often repeat the level part-time, leading to a cycle of repetition that hampers motivation and language development, particularly for refugees and migrants seeking rapid integration.

5.2 Adaptive practices in ESOL

The Welsh ESOL context requires innovative and flexible approaches to support refugee learners. This is what I refer to as "adaptive practices," which are responsive teaching strategies designed to meet diverse learner needs by moving beyond traditional methods. This section highlights a shift towards learner-centred approaches, focusing on two areas: fast-track options and literacy support for LESLLA learners, showcased through innovative college projects.

5.2.1 Addressing the demand for fast-track options

The need for fast-track options in ESOL provision emerges as a critical adaptive practice in response to the challenges faced by refugee learners in Wales. The current system's prolonged progression timeline, as highlighted by Samuel, where learners often require four to five years to reach Level 2 proficiency, stands in stark contrast to the urgent integration needs of refugees. This mismatch echoes the 2014 Welsh Government policy projection that learners on minimal hours could take up to 14.5 years to reach Level 1 proficiency, underscoring a significant gap between provision and learner needs (Welsh Government, 2014).

This prolonged language learning journey aligns with findings from other contexts. For instance, Morrice et al. (2019) observed similar struggles among refugees facing extended language acquisition periods, highlighting a broader systemic issue in ESOL provision. The absence of fast-track options not only delays integration, but also potentially impacts motivation and engagement, as learners may feel trapped in a system that does not align with their immediate needs and aspirations.

However, the upcoming initiative at the college under study that John described represents an emerging adaptive practice in response to these challenges, as discussed in [Section 4.1.1](#). The introduction of flexible pathways, allowing learners to focus on specific skills and progress at different levels simultaneously, marks a shift towards a more learner-centred approach. This aligns with Simpson and Whiteside's (2015) emphasis on the need for ESOL provision to be responsive to the diverse and often urgent needs of refugee learners.

While this initiative is a step in the right direction, it falls short of a comprehensive fast-track option. It does, however, demonstrate an awareness of the need for more flexible and potentially accelerated learning pathways. This adaptive practice reflects a growing recognition of the limitations of the current 'one-size-fits-all' approach to ESOL provision as highlighted by John.

The introduction of flexible pathways in ESOL provision for refugees in Wales represents a positive step towards addressing diverse learner needs but also raises important questions about balancing rapid language acquisition with sustainable skill development (Baynham et al., 2007). While these adaptive practices show promise, they also highlight ongoing challenges in ESOL provision, particularly for groups like LESLLA learners who require more specialised support beyond traditional and flexible pathways.

The experiences of these learners and the evolving practices developed for them offer valuable insights into the changing landscape of ESOL provision in Wales. Future research should explore the outcomes of these flexible pathways, assessing their effectiveness in meeting urgent needs while ensuring robust language development, and consider how to better integrate support for learners with specialised needs like literacy acquisition.

5.2.2 Addressing LESLLA learners' needs

The challenges faced by LESLLA learners in Welsh ESOL provision reflect broader concerns in ESOL education. Teachers reported significant difficulties for learners with limited prior L1 literacy skills, a situation acknowledged in Wales's ESOL policy (Welsh Government, 2014, see [Section 2.3.3](#)). These learners often lack basic literacy concepts and study skills, creating a complex learning environment and diverse abilities within ESOL classrooms.

Teachers in this study noted that LESLLA learners often struggle with tasks that might be considered basic for other students, such as understanding table formats or knowing where to write answers. This observation aligns with Baynham et al.'s (2007) findings, which emphasised the substantial difficulties adult ESOL learners face when acquiring second language (L2) literacy without a foundation in L1 literacy.

Additionally, the challenges extend to gaps in general world knowledge, as highlighted by Rebecca's example (see [Section 4.2.1](#)). Educators reported the need to carefully assess students' background knowledge, which often falls below expected levels. This complexity is compounded by the diverse needs within ESOL classrooms, a situation described by Zhilong (2020) as challenging for curriculum development due to varying language proficiency levels.

Teachers face significant challenges in mixed-ability classrooms, particularly for LESLLA learners, with a general lack of differentiation noted. This issue aligns with Kings and Casey (2014), who argued that efforts to address both low-literacy and high-skilled learners often fail to meet the needs of either group. In response, some adaptive practices are emerging, such as the college's initiative to create a specialised class for learners with literacy needs. This aligns with Furlong and Hunt's (2009) recommendations to tailor ESOL provision to individual needs or integrate it into other programmes.

The college's literacy programme illustrated both the potential and limitations of targeted interventions for LESLLA learners. Its strengths include a supportive environment, tailored pacing, increased repetition and multi-sensory approaches, aligning with Cowie's (2021) findings that slower-paced classes are effective for acquiring foundational skills. This approach has led to noticeable improvements in literacy skills like handwriting and phonics recognition, as highlighted by Rhian (see [Section 4.2.2](#)). However, limitations such as restricted access for only pre-entry learners and a lack of follow-up support highlight the need for more comprehensive, long-term strategies for LESLLA support across all ESOL levels.

This initiative, while promising, also underscored the need for specialised teacher training. Chick (2019) pointed out that many teachers feel unprepared for the challenges of teaching literacy skills in ESOL classrooms. This aligns with Baynham et al.'s (2007) recommendation for specialised training in beginner L2 adult literacy teaching.

In conclusion, while the college's initiative is a positive step for LESLLA learners, more comprehensive support is needed across all ESOL levels. This includes expanding specialised programmes to Entry 1 learners, developing a continuum of support and providing targeted professional development for teachers. Future efforts should focus on creating flexible, long-term structures to support LESLLA learners throughout their language journey. These adaptive practices are essential for fostering inclusive and effective ESOL provision that meets the diverse needs of all learners, especially those facing significant literacy challenges.

5.2.3 Adaptive practices: Tailored support by Learning and Skills Coaches

Among the adaptive practices emerging in ESOL provision, the Learning and Skills Centre at the college under study stands out as a particularly valuable resource. This centre represents an innovative approach to addressing the diverse needs of ESOL learners, especially those requiring more individualised support. According to Rhian, the centre offers a flexible model of assistance, providing both regular coaching sessions and drop-in opportunities for English practice. This adaptability allows learners to access additional help in a way that best suits their schedules and learning styles.

The Learning and Skills Coaches play a crucial role in providing supplementary tuition outside of regular ESOL classes. This collaborative approach between ESOL teachers and Learning and Skills Coaches facilitates a more holistic understanding of each learner's needs,

allowing for targeted interventions and consistent support across different learning contexts. Rhian emphasised that effective communication between tutors and coaches can enhance the overall learning experience, ensuring that students receive comprehensive support tailored to their individual challenges.

However, this study revealed a concerning trend: the planned merger of the Learning and Skills Centre team with the Well-being team will reduce Learning and Skills Coaches. Rhian emphasised that this cut could significantly affect support for learners who rely on individualised assistance. This is particularly troubling for vulnerable learners, especially those lacking first-language literacy or digital skills, who may struggle to advocate for themselves without adequate support. This issue is echoed in Cowie's (2021) research, which showed that reduced funding for Additional Learning Support in London's further and adult education has led to less assistance for both educators and low-literacy students.

This situation highlights the need to prioritise funding for learning support services. Rhian advocated for maintaining and expanding tailored support in the college to help all learners, especially those facing significant barriers. The findings strongly recommend allocating more resources to increase the number of Learning and Skills Coaches, essential for enhancing the support ESOL learners need to succeed.

It is worth noting that cuts to Learning and Skills Coaches in Wales reflect a broader trend of funding reductions in the UK education sector, particularly impacting ESOL and adult education (Refugee Action, 2019). From 2010 to 2016, the ESOL budget fell from £203 million to £90 million, leading to a decline in learner numbers to 90,000, a nearly 60% cut in real terms (Marsden, 2018; Electronic Immigration Network, 2017). Refugee Action found that these funding cuts have resulted in a significant shortfall in ESOL courses (Electronic Immigration Network, 2017) relative to demand across the UK, including Wales. This context illustrates that the planned merger and reduction of Learning and Skills Coaches is part of a larger, ongoing trend in the education sector.

In conclusion, while the Learning and Skills Centre is a positive adaptive practice in ESOL provision, the trend of reducing these services is concerning. It is essential to maintain and expand tailored support to create an inclusive and effective ESOL framework that meets the diverse needs of all learners, especially those facing significant challenges. Adaptive practices like fast-track options and tailored support for LESLLA learners illustrate the evolving nature of ESOL provision in Wales. These developments signal a broader shift in

ESOL education, especially regarding refugee integration. It is clear that ESOL teachers have a vital role beyond traditional instruction, leading to the third theme: their multifaceted role in supporting refugee integration.

5.3 The multifaceted role of ESOL teachers in refugee integration and support

ESOL teachers in this research play a vital role in language education, cultural mediation and social support for refugees. Their responsibilities have expanded beyond language instruction to facilitating broader societal integration, reflecting the complex needs of refugee learners and evolving educational expectations.

The study revealed significant professional growth among ESOL teachers working with refugees, aligning with broader trends in ESOL education (see [Section 4.1.6](#)). Teachers reported enhanced cultural sensitivity, echoing Simpson and Whiteside's (2015) emphasis on culturally responsive teaching. This multifaceted role resonates with Karmi's (2019) observation that effective English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers serve as cultural mediators and facilitators. While Karmi's (2019) insights pertain specifically to EFL contexts, they are particularly relevant for ESOL teachers supporting refugees, as these educators help bridge cultural divides and assist learners in adapting to new environments.

The teachers' enhanced understanding of learners' backgrounds and experiences, as noted by Rebecca and Sarah, reflects what Morrice et al. (2019) described as the need for a holistic approach to refugee education. This approach recognises that language learning for refugees is inextricably linked to their broader integration experiences and challenges. The socio-economic awareness highlighted by John aligns with Phillimore's (2011) argument that effective refugee integration support must consider the multifaceted nature of refugees' needs and experiences.

Samuel's reflection on the expanded role of ESOL teachers, extending beyond language instruction, resonates with Baynham et al.'s (2007) observation that ESOL provision often involves supporting learners in navigating various aspects of their new lives. In a similar vein, The improved ability to assess learners' needs, as reported by Sarah, reflects a growing recognition in the field of the importance of individualised and learner-centred approaches in

ESOL education (Chick, 2019). This skill is particularly crucial when working with LESLLA learners, who often require highly tailored instructional strategies.

Additionally, Capstick (2018, p. 60) observed that "language learning classes are increasingly seen by many agencies as a potential space in which to deliver psychosocial support." This aligns with Rhian's emphasis on trauma-informed approaches in ESOL education for refugees. The evolution of ESOL classes to address both language and psychosocial needs reflects the complex challenges faced by refugee learners and their teachers. This multifaceted approach supports Bajaj and Bartlett's (2017) research on the significance of trauma-informed practices in creating safe learning environments for students with trauma histories. These findings underscored the expanded role of ESOL teachers as they transition from traditional language instructors to cultural mediators and social support providers.

The multifaceted role of ESOL teachers in refugee integration goes beyond traditional language instruction. As cultural mediators, social support providers and advocates, they need skills in cultural competence, trauma-informed practices and knowledge of the asylum process. This evolution necessitates a re-evaluation of teacher training programmes and ongoing professional development, focusing on the complex social and political contexts of refugee experiences. It also highlights the need for adequate support and resources for teachers navigating the emotional demands of their work with refugee learners.

5.4 Limitations

This study has several limitations due to time and space constraints. Firstly, institutional diversity is limited, with five out of six participants working at the same college. While one participant from the informal sector (community-based ESOL teaching) was included, and another participant teaches in both college and charity settings, there is not equal representation between formal and informal ESOL provision. This imbalance highlights an area for future research.

Also, the in-depth interviews primarily reflect experiences from one college, suggesting this study could serve as a starting point for more extensive research, such as the planned PhD project. Additionally, the teachers who participated in this research were those who willingly and passionately agreed to be part of the study, which may introduce a potential bias towards more engaged or motivated educators.

Another limitation is the reliance on teachers' perspectives of challenges faced by refugee ESOL learners, rather than direct accounts from learners themselves. While teachers' insights are valuable, they represent only one side of the story. Future research, particularly the planned PhD study, could address this by including interviews with refugee learners to provide a more holistic understanding. These limitations underscore potential areas for future research and highlight the opportunity for this study to serve as a foundation for more comprehensive investigations into ESOL provision for refugees in Wales.

5.5 Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Implementing comprehensive trauma-informed training for ESOL teachers

This study recommends implementing comprehensive trauma-informed training for ESOL teachers working with refugee learners. Current research and training in English language teaching, refugee studies and trauma psychology are fragmented (Palanac, 2019), highlighting the need for a unified approach. The proposed training would enable educators to create safe learning environments, understand students' emotional needs and address sensitive topics effectively. Prioritising trauma-informed practices enhances support for refugee learners, promoting their successful integration into new communities amidst the challenges of displacement and complex asylum processes (Chick, 2023). Additionally, based on teacher recommendations, strengthening links with mental health services is vital for addressing students' well-being and past trauma.

Recommendation 2: Enhancing ESOL teacher policy awareness and asylum process knowledge

A key recommendation from this research is to establish regular training sessions for ESOL teachers on current ESOL policies in Wales and updates to the asylum process. The study revealed significant gaps in policy awareness among tutors, with many unfamiliar with the content and implications for their teaching. This disconnect between policy formulation and classroom implementation underscores the need for regular training. By ensuring that all ESOL teachers are informed about relevant policies and changes affecting their learners, this

initiative would improve alignment between policy intentions and classroom practices, leading to more effective support for refugee learners.

Recommendation 3: Increasing funding for comprehensive support services and teacher compensation

This study recommends increasing funding to improve support services and raise compensation for ESOL educators working with refugee learners. Additional resources should go towards expanding programmes like Skills Centres for individualised academic coaching. A revised pay structure is needed to account for the time ESOL tutors spend on non-instructional support. Teachers should also receive paid preparation time to create culturally sensitive, trauma-informed lessons tailored to refugee learners.

While acknowledging the challenging financial climate and potential constraints on government funding, alternative sources should be explored. This could include applying for grants from charitable organisations, seeking partnerships with private sector companies interested in supporting refugee integration, or exploring crowdfunding options within the community. These financial investments, regardless of their source, support research emphasising comprehensive support for refugee students, fostering better educational outcomes and integration.

Recommendation 4: Implementing multilingual participatory ESOL Classes

This study advocates for implementing multilingual, participatory ESOL classes where learners support one another, shifting from exam-focused models to a holistic, person-centred approach, as highlighted by Chick (2023). Research indicates that this collaborative pedagogy, centred on student decision-making, is especially effective for refugees (Simpson, 2016; Chick, 2023). Cox (2021) further emphasised the benefits of multilingual approaches in fostering empowerment and confidence during refugees' initial arrival. By focusing on real-life experiences like employment, trauma and cultural adjustment, this model promotes meaningful language use, integration and community connections. It requires flexible, learner-centred curricula rather than rigid syllabi, providing a more effective means of refugee integration than traditional exam-based systems.

In the Welsh context, this multilingual approach should incorporate elements of Welsh language and culture, reflecting Wales's bilingual nature (Williams, 2017). This aligns with

the Welsh Government's recent vision, which since 2019 has called for the integration of Welsh language into ESOL classes (Welsh Government, 2019a). The inclusion of Welsh can enhance employability skills and facilitate social integration, particularly in “predominantly Welsh-speaking communities” (Lewis et al., 2023). This multilingual, culturally inclusive approach supports the Welsh Government's ESOL policy (2019, 2023), which emphasised the role of both English and Welsh in fostering social bonds, bridges and links for migrants in Wales, promoting a distinctive Welsh approach to welcoming and integrating refugees.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This study has successfully addressed the research questions it set out to investigate, providing valuable insights into both the experiences of ESOL teachers working with refugee learners in Wales and their perspectives on the challenges these learners face. The findings offered a comprehensive picture of the challenges, opportunities and unique aspects of the Welsh context in ESOL provision for refugees. Here is a summary of how each research question was answered.

RQ1: What are ESOL teachers' perspectives on the challenges faced by refugee students in learning English in Wales, and the challenges teachers face when working with them?

From the teachers' perspectives, refugee learners face a multi-faceted set of challenges in learning English as a second language in Wales. These include systemic issues in ESOL provision such as a lack of fast-track options and an exam-focused approach, practical challenges like the absence of childcare facilities and issues related to the asylum system. Teachers also identified challenges stemming from learners' diverse profiles, including varying educational backgrounds and digital literacy skills. Most of these challenges are mirrored in the difficulties teachers face in trying to meet their refugee learners' needs. Importantly, the research highlighted how teachers have grown through these challenges, developing increased cultural sensitivity and trauma-informed approaches.

RQ2: According to ESOL teachers, what challenges do LESLLA refugee learners have when learning English in Wales, and what particular challenges do teachers face when working with this group?

Teachers identified specific challenges for LESLLA learners in acquiring English as a second language, including a lack of basic study skills, unfamiliarity with classroom norms and difficulties with general world knowledge and written language. From the teachers' perspectives, these challenges are compounded by a lack of differentiation in mixed-ability

classes and insufficient tailored support, which also represent significant challenges for teachers in effectively supporting this group of learners.

RQ3: What role does the Welsh context play in this language learning journey, according to teachers?

Teachers' perspectives highlighted several positive aspects of the Welsh context, including Wales's status as a refugee-welcoming nation, generous government support for ESOL and opportunities for bilingualism through Welsh language learning. From the teachers' viewpoint, these factors create a supportive environment for refugee learners, contrasting with more 'hostile rhetoric' elsewhere in the UK, and provide unique opportunities for both learners and teachers in the ESOL context.

In conclusion, this study underscored the critical interplay between the challenges faced by refugee learners and the perspectives of ESOL teachers. The findings revealed that while teachers are acutely aware of the multifaceted obstacles their learners encounter, ranging from systemic issues and practical challenges to the complexities of individual learner profiles, they also experienced similar difficulties in meeting these needs effectively. This dual perspective highlights the importance of fostering a supportive environment that addresses both learner and teacher challenges.

Moreover, the positive aspects of the Welsh context, such as its status as a refugee-welcoming nation and supportive government policies, present unique opportunities for enhancing ESOL provision. By recognising and addressing these interconnected challenges, stakeholders can implement targeted strategies that not only improve language learning outcomes for refugee learners but also empower teachers in their vital roles. Ultimately, this study emphasised the need for ongoing support and adaptive practices within the ESOL framework to facilitate successful integration and learning experiences for all involved.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 (Screenshots of Search Strategies)

The screenshot shows a Google Scholar search for "forced migration". The search bar contains the text "forced migration" and a magnifying glass icon. Below the search bar, it indicates "Articles" and "About 4,170,000 results (0.06 sec)". On the left side, there are filters for "Any time" (with options: Since 2024, Since 2023, Since 2020, Custom range...), "Sort by relevance" (with option: Sort by date), "Any type" (with option: Review articles), and checkboxes for "include patents", "include citations", and "Create alert". The main results area displays four entries:

- Forced migration** by HE Reed, B Ludwig, L Braslow. International handbook of migration and ..., 2016 - Springer. ... numbers of **forced migrants** are high in human terms, **forced migrants** per se – following the definitions above – comprise a small proportion of the over 232 million **migrants** estimated to ... [PDF] academia.edu
- The international politics of forced migration** by S Castles. Development, 2003 - Springer. ... Stephen Castles focuses mainly on issues of **forced migration**, and asks the question: is there a 'global **migration** crisis'? He concludes that the so-called **migration** crisis arises because ... [PDF] socialregister.com iGett@Swansea
- Towards a sociology of forced migration and social transformation** by S Castles. sociology, 2003 - journals.sagepub.com. ... empirical research and analysis on **forced migration** as it is to ... **forced migration** is linked to research on economic **migration**, ... **Forced migration** needs to be analysed as a social process ... [PDF] migracionydesarrollo.org iGett@Swansea
- The economics of forced migration** by I Ruiz, C Vargas-Silva. The Journal of Development Studies, 2013 - Taylor & Francis. ... impacts of **forced migration**. The literature is divided into two parts: impacts on **forced migrants** and impacts on host communities. Studies exploring the impact of **forced migration** due to ... [PDF] refugee-economies.org iGett@Swansea

The screenshot shows the Swansea University iFind search interface. The search bar contains "forced migration" and a magnifying glass icon. Below the search bar, it indicates "0 selected", "PAGE 1", "1-10 of 566 Results", and "Save query". On the left side, there are filters for "Sort by Relevance", "Availability" (Full Text Online, Held by library, Open Access, Peer-reviewed Journals), "Author/Creator" (Historical Society Of Pennsylvania (10), Roundtable On The Demography Of Forced Migration (10), Iwata Sonoko (7), Joseph L Mailman School Of Public Health Program On Forced Migration And Health, Asian Development Bank (4), Show More), and "Language" (English (536)). The main results area displays three entries:


- Forced migration and global processes : a view from forced migration studies** by Crépeau, François. International Association for the Study of Forced Migration. International Conference 2003 : Chiang Mai, Thailand) c2006. Available at Singleton Park Library Main (HV640 .F57 2006) >
- Forced migration & mortality** Roundtable on the Demography of Forced Migration. ; National Research Council (U.S.). Committee on Population. ; National Research Council (U.S.). Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education ; Reed, Holly. ; Keely, Charles B. c2001 ; 1st ed. Online access >
- Forced migration review.** University of Oxford. Refugee Studies Programme, issuing body. ; Global IDP Survey, issuing body. ; University of Oxford. Refugee Studies Centre, issuing body. ; Flyktningrådet (Norway), issuing body. 1998- PEER REVIEWED OPEN ACCESS Online access (Coverage: From 1998) >

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1  **BOOK**
Adult language education and migration : challenging agendas in policy and practice
 Simpson, James ; Simpson, James, 1967- ; Whiteside, Anne.
 2015 ; 1 ed.
 OPEN ACCESS
 Online access >

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Since 2023	2
Since 2020 (last 5 years)	3
Since 2015 (last 10 years)	9
Since 2005 (last 20 years)	10

DESCRIPTOR

English (Second Language)	15
Refugees	11
Second Language Instruction	11
Second Language Learning	10
Foreign Countries	9
Adult Education	5
Interviews	4
Social Integration	4
Access to Education	3
Higher Education	3
Immigrants	3

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SOURCE

ProQuest LLC	2
ESL Magazine	1
European Education	1

"I Feel Integrated When I Help Myself: ESOL Learners' Views and Experiences of Language Learning and Integration"
 Court, Jill – Language and Intercultural Communication, 2017

This paper describes a small-scale study conducted in England with a group of adult migrant and refugee ESOL learners. The study explores how participants conceptualised integration, and their perceptions of the relationship between learning English and integration. The findings highlight that the extent to which a person feels integrated, for...

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Descriptors: Foreign Countries, Student Experience, Student Attitudes, Migrants

Examining Community-Based ESOL Teachers' and Tutors' Conceptualization of Culturally Responsive Teaching

Lynne Von Glahn – ProQuest LLC, 2024

Community-based organizations offer English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) support to community members due to a severe shortage of trained and certified Teaching English Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) teachers (Sutcher et al., 2019). Many of these organizations rely on volunteers to teach and tutor students enrolled in the programs they...

[Direct link](#)

Descriptors: English (Second Language), Second Language Instruction, Second Language Learning, Teaching Methods

Female Asylum Seekers and Refugees' Experiences of ESOL

Holly Dono – Online Submission, 2023

This research sits within the wider field of emergent research considering how foreign nationals experience ESOL education in England, exploring how these particular experiences are understood through a gendered lens. It identifies how women from different ethnicities have varied experiences and opinions on equal access to ESOL provision. In...

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Descriptors: Females, Refugees, English (Second Language), Second Language Learning

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AND ESOL in Anywhere except full text – NOFT

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...refugee-led community center (RCC) providing adult ESOL. Findings indicate that... cuts to formal ESOL for people seeking sanctuary in the UK. Such cuts are just... that teachers held critical perspectives on the "refugee crisis" and state...

Abstract/Details Preview - PDF (2 MB) Full text - PDF (3 MB)

2 **Examining Community-Based ESOL Teachers' and Tutors' Conceptualization of Culturally Responsive Teaching** Full Text

Von Glahn, Lynne. University of San Francisco ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, 2024. 31235486.

...ESOL work the participants did with school age youths with refugee backgrounds. ... (ESOL) support to community members due to a severe shortage of trained and... ..play an invaluable role in providing ESOL support and instruction, but many lack...

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Debates in ESOL Teaching and Learning: C... Pitt, Kathy. Oxford, GB, Oxford: Taylor & Francis Gr ...

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 ... This study seeks to contribute to knowledge about the role that university **ESOL** programs play in shaping inservice **teachers'** work with ELLs. Our subjects were a group of ...
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HA Linville - Tesol Journal, 2016 - Wiley Online Library
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SURR ZAHID - scholarsmentoringcompany.co.uk
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S Abdelghany - 2023 - theses.gla.ac.uk
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Appendix 2

Participant Information Sheet (PIS)

Participant Information Sheet for **The Challenges of Learning English as a Second Language for Refugees in Wales: Teachers' Perspectives**

Getting started

SU Logo on all documents Header Short title, IRAS number and version number Footer Page Number and Date
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General Content

The content of your Participant Information Sheet (PIS) should describe clearly what a potential participant should expect if they agreed to take part in your study. You should simply provide sufficient and appropriate information on which they can base an informed decision. We would suggest that you consider covering the following areas in your PIS. These areas are designed to act as a framework, not a rigid template

1. **Title**
2. **Invitation and Summary**
3. **More details of what is involved**
 - a. **Explanation:**
 - b. **What would taking part involve?**
 - c. **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**
 - d. **What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**
4. **Supporting information**
 - a. **What will happen if I do not want to carry on with the study?**
 - b. **What will happen to the results of this study?**
 - c. **Who is organising and funding this study?**
 - d. **Who has reviewed this study?**
 - e. **Dissemination and publications information**
 - f. **Will my information be kept confidential? GDPR statement**
 - g. **Who to complain to for Data/Management/Health issues?**
 - h. **Further information and contact details**

Student Project

This is a student project and the Funder is ESRC WGSSS.

In More Depth

Title: **Understanding the Challenges Faced by Refugees when Learning English in Wales: Teachers' Perspectives**

Invitation

The Applied Linguistics department at Swansea University would like to invite you to take part in our research study. Joining the study is entirely up to you, before you decide we would like you to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. The researcher, Walaa Mouma, will go through this information sheet with you, to help you decide whether or not you would like to take part and answer any questions you may have. We'd suggest this should take about 60 to 90 minutes. Please feel free to talk to others about the study if you wish. The first part of the Participant Information Sheet tells you the purpose of the study and what will happen to you if you take part. Then we give you more detailed information about the conduct of the study. Do ask if anything is unclear.

Summary

This study aims to explore the perspectives of English as a Second Language (ESOL) teachers on the challenges faced by refugee students from diverse nationalities during the process of learning English in Wales. Understanding these challenges is important for improving language education and support services for refugee communities, facilitating their integration and empowerment.

The research will focus on the experiences of ESOL teachers working with refugee students, particularly those with limited literacy skills in their first language. It will investigate the specific difficulties these students encounter in language acquisition, the impact of cultural differences, and the teaching strategies employed to support their learning.

Participants will be invited to take part in a one-on-one interview with the researcher, lasting approximately 60-90 minutes. During the interview, they will be asked questions about their experiences teaching ESOL to refugee students, the challenges observed, and their insights on how to better support these students' language learning needs. Eligible participants for this study are ESOL teachers who have recent experience (within the last 2-3 years) teaching refugee students from diverse nationalities, including those with limited literacy skills in their first language. The study will involve 3-4 participants from educational institutions in Cardiff and the surrounding areas.

The research is expected to commence in June 2024 and conclude by September 2024. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and participants can withdraw at any time without consequence.

Explanation:

The purpose of this research is to gain insights into the challenges faced by refugee students from diverse nationalities during the process of learning English as a second language in Wales. While there is an understanding of the general difficulties faced by language learners, little is known about the specific experiences and barriers encountered by refugee students, particularly those with limited literacy skills in their first language. This study aims to explore these challenges from the perspectives of ESOL (English as a Second Language) teachers who have direct experience working with refugee students. By interviewing these teachers, the research will help uncover valuable information about the difficulties these students face, the impact of cultural differences, and the teaching strategies employed to support their language learning needs. The research does not involve any interventions or deviations from standard educational practices. It is primarily an educational study focused on gathering insights and experiences from

ESOL teachers to inform and improve language education and support services for refugee communities. The study will involve a total of 3-4 participants who are ESOL teachers with recent experience (within the last 2-3 years) teaching refugee students from diverse nationalities, including those with limited literacy skills in their first language. You are being invited to participate in this research because of your relevant experience and expertise in teaching ESOL to refugee students. Your perspectives and insights would be invaluable in understanding the challenges these students face and how to better support their language learning needs.

What would taking part involve? This should cover:

Taking part in this research will involve:

- Participating in a one-on-one interview with the researcher, which is expected to last approximately 60-90 minutes.
- The interview will be scheduled at a time and location convenient for you, either in person or via a video conferencing platform.
- During the interview, you will be asked questions about your experiences teaching ESOL to refugee students, the challenges you have observed these students facing, and your insights on how to better support their language learning needs.
- The interview will be audio-recorded to ensure accurate transcription and analysis of the data. However, all recordings and transcripts will be kept confidential, and any identifying information will be removed or anonymized.
- You may be asked to provide some general background information about your teaching experience, qualifications, and the educational institution you are associated with.
- The interview will not involve any sensitive or personal questions beyond your professional experiences and observations as an ESOL teacher.
- Participation in this research will not affect or interfere with your regular teaching duties or responsibilities.
- There are no plans for long-term monitoring or follow-up after the initial interview.
- The research study is expected to last approximately 3 months, from June 2023 to September 2024, but your involvement will be limited to the one-time interview session.

Please note that your participation in this research is entirely voluntary, and you will be providing information and insights based on your professional experiences and observations. The data collected will be used solely for the purposes of this research study and will be handled with strict confidentiality and anonymity.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Potential indirect benefits of taking part may include:

- Gaining a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by refugee students in learning English, which could inform and enhance your teaching practices.
- Feeling more supported and valued as an educator by having your experiences and insights closely examined and documented.
- Contributing to the development of improved educational strategies, resources, and support systems for refugee students, which could benefit future students and communities.
- Ultimately, the most significant benefits are likely to be experienced by others in similar situations in the future, as the findings from this research may lead to positive changes and advancements in language education and support services for refugee communities.

Your participation plays a crucial role in advancing knowledge and potentially improving outcomes for refugee students and their language learning experiences.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

While this study does not involve invasive procedures, there are some potential risks to consider. The primary risk is the possibility of experiencing psychological discomfort or distress when discussing challenges faced by refugee students, as recounting difficult experiences may evoke emotional responses. Additionally, the time commitment required for the interview may also be an inconvenience for some participants.

However, the likelihood of significant harm is low. The researcher will make every effort to minimise risks and ensure the well-being of participants throughout the study. If any concerning information arises during the interviews, appropriate steps will be taken, including referral to relevant support services if necessary.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and participants have the right to withdraw at any time without consequence. The researcher is committed to conducting this study ethically and with utmost care for the well-being of all participants.

Supporting Information

a) What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?

- Participating in this research is entirely voluntary, and you can change your minds at a later stage.
- You are free to withdraw at anytime. If you decide to do so, all your relevant data will be deleted.

b) What will happen to the results of this study?

- 1) The findings from this research will be compiled into a master's dissertation, which may be published or made available through academic channels such as institutional repositories or research databases. Additionally, the results may be presented at conferences or submitted for publication in relevant academic journals.
- 2) However, it is important to note that all data and information collected from participants will be anonymised and kept strictly confidential. No identifiable personal information will be included in any reports, publications or presentations resulting from this study. Your privacy and anonymity will be fully protected.
- 3) If any individual health-related findings or concerning information arises during the interview process, appropriate steps will be taken to address them, which may include referral to relevant support services or authorities, if necessary. However, such instances will be handled with utmost care and confidentiality.
- 4) The overall outcomes and findings of the study will be made available to participants upon request, once the research is completed and the dissertation is finalised.

c) Who is organising and funding this study?

Wales Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP)

d) Who has reviewed this study?

The research also passes through a Research Ethics Committee, to protect the participants. This study has been reviewed and given favourable opinion by Swansea University Research Ethics Committee.

e) Will my information be kept confidential? GDPR data confidential

Yes

f) Who to complain to for Data/Management/Health issues?

- **Data issues** GDPR IOC contact details
 - The data controller for this project will be Swansea University. The University Data Protection Officer provides oversight of university activities involving the processing of personal data, and can be contacted at the Vice Chancellors Office: dataprotection@swansea.ac.uk Your personal data will be processed for the purposes outlined in this information sheet

- **Health issues** Health watchdog contact details. The full details recommended by the NHS trust R&D office'
 - Example
 - SBU Community Health Council
 - First Floor, Cimla Hospital, Neath , SA11 3SU
 - Tel: 01639 683490 <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/902/home>

- **Management issues:**
Supervisor: Gwennan Higham
g.e.higham@swansea.ac.uk

If you have any concerns about the study and your involvement in it, feel free to contact my supervisor.

Appendix 3 (Interview Questions)

Background and Experience

1. How long have you been teaching ESOL, and have you been involved in ESOL volunteering with charities in Wales?
2. How do you determine or recognise if your ESOL learners are refugees or non-refugees, and does this distinction influence your teaching approach?

Challenges in Learning English

3. From your experience, what are the major challenges faced by refugee students in learning English as a second language?
 - How do the challenges differ for refugee students with limited literacy skills in their first language?

Teaching Strategies and Support

4. What teaching strategies or approaches have you found effective in supporting refugee students' language learning?
5. How do you adapt your teaching methods to accommodate ESOL refugee students with varying literacy levels and educational backgrounds?
6. How do you balance the need to prepare refugee students for assessments with the need to address their real-life concerns and integration needs, given the bureaucratic and exam-focused constraints of the current ESOL system?
7. What kind of additional support or resources do you think would benefit refugee students in their language learning journey?

Impact of the Welsh Context

8. In your opinion, how does the context of ESOL delivery in Wales differ from other parts of the UK, particularly England?
9. What are the unique challenges or opportunities that the Welsh context presents for refugee students learning English?

10. How do policies, funding or community support in Wales impact your teaching experience?

Personal and Cultural Factors

11. How do you think the role of culture influences your teaching practices? Do you adapt your teaching practices to address the cultural differences of refugee students?

12. Have you observed any changes in your refugee students' confidence, self-expression or integration into the local community as they progress in their language learning?

Additional Insights and Recommendations

13. In the past five years of teaching, have you observed any changes in your teaching practices specifically tailored to refugee students?

14. Based on your experience, what are the most significant barriers or challenges that need to be addressed to improve the language learning experience for refugee students in Wales?

Is there anything else you would like to share or highlight regarding the experiences of refugee students learning English in Wales?

Appendix 4 (A sample of colour-coded transcripts)

Purple – interview questions

Green - themes

Yellow – details

Blue – something special about this particular participant

Challenging question/finding/interesting answer – grey

Recommendations - olive

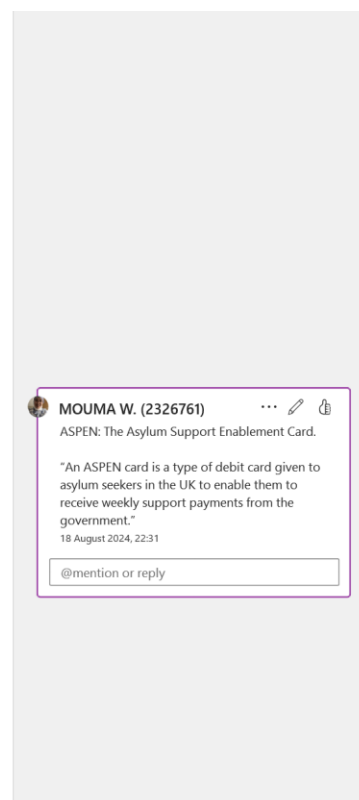
Rebecca

Walaah

Right. Thank you for that. Let's move to the section about **challenges in learning English**. So **from your experience, what are the major challenges faced by refugee students in learning English as a second language?** I know this is a very broad question, but if you mention anything, we might be able to touch on it in our next questions.

Rebecca

So I suppose the problems are well manifold, but I suppose **in two different groups of problems. The first group of problems, I suppose, are their social and their own psychological problems.** People very, very often say that: "I can't remember anything. I can't learn English because there's too much going on in my head. My head is like a fridge. I think too much. I can't remember anything." I think I mean that is **a huge barrier for people's learning that there's just so much anxiety and so much going on in their head. So, I mean that's bad enough if you have just arrived. You've left all your family. You're worried about your family. Your accommodation here is uncertain. Your position in the country is uncertain. Your ASPEN card perhaps doesn't work, so you've got no money and all sorts of problems with that. There are difficulties in the place that you're living in, the shared accommodation, so you may or may not get on with the people that you're living with. There might be all sorts of stuff going on in the house, so you're not sleeping. You're nervous about what's going on in the house. You've maybe got these huge interviews coming up or court cases which are going to determine the whole course of your life and your whole family's life.** So as you're sitting there, you know, talking about, you know, travelling on the bus and you know, a bit of vocabulary about I come to college **ON foot** or I walk to college. You know, **there's a million other things happening in their heads that are preventing them from even hearing what you're saying,** so I hear that a lot, a lot. So, accommodation is a huge issue. People are moved from one place to another. They might, you know, hotel, they might be moved to a shared house. **At the drop of a hat, they'll get a letter to say they're being sent to Swansea or Newport or Plymouth or Glasgow and just all of a sudden, everything that you know, perhaps they have established, a group of friends, they've come to college, all of that some sort of structure and stability in their lives is suddenly then throwing up in the air, and they're back to square one again.** So that's the



fact that they lose stuff because of all this moving around or maybe not having accommodation. Then they lose papers, they lose work, you know, they don't have anywhere to keep work, so all of that on that sort of social side for people, I think it's very difficult.

On an educational front, people, of course, come from a great variety of educational backgrounds and there will be doctors, engineers, oil engineers, accountants, but also people who have not had more than the very basic primary education, if that. So, if you've been brought up in **Darfur, your maybe your whole life has been on the move and very little primary education**, so reading and writing in your own language is maybe non-existent. Kurdistan, I think some of the men, **Kurdish men I've had in class, you know, are probably in their 30s, 40s, and again, I think their education has been very, very sparse and they may not be literate in their own language**, so that's quite a barrier. And just sort of **the study skills** that you assume that people know about a table that everything in this column is the same thing or those sorts of bits of information that you would nearly take for granted, but if you've never been to school, you don't necessarily know how to read that or the fact that the line underneath the writing is where you should write your answer. So some of the very basic things maybe for Pre-entry and Entry 1 students, those sort of study skill things aren't there. Let alone doing homework, I suppose. I don't have big expectations for homework. And then, if they have been to school, you know, perhaps, you know this better than I do, and I've talked to maybe **Syrian people, in particular, the education is a lot more... Is it didactic**? Is that the word I would use? You know, so getting the right answer is very important. You know, to just to complete the sheet, whether you understand anything or not, and I'm sure you've seen that in class, is immaterial as long as you have the right answer, and I mean OK, if I thought they were going home to have a look at it again, yes, it's important that the right answer is there, but I suspect not. I suspect it's just that it has to be a perfect sheet with the right answers. They have been taught in a much more rigid way, and what education here is that **you should be working out the answer for yourself and not learning things by rote**, you want to know why you did that, so, **yes, those educational things as well.**

Walaa

Thank you so much. So, basically you talked about two different types of problems. **The first one is the social psychological one, and the second one is the educational background, and you clearly talked about the study skills being like a major barrier** for people who came from a background where they didn't receive formal education. Thank you, because by doing that, you touched on my next follow-up question. Thank you.

The one interesting thing... I tell you an interesting story though.

Walaa

Yes, please.

Rebecca

There's a whole sort of background of general education. In textbooks, they do assume that people have a knowledge of the world, and, you know, just various things like we're doing weather, so: "*Today it is very cold. It is freezing in the Antarctic.*" Nobody has heard of the Antarctic. Nobody has any idea on the whole of where that is. And one guy, he was from Sudan, from Darfur, and he showed me... It was actually at the charity. He said, you know, here's a sentence: "**The earth moves around the sun, so it was it moves around the sun.**" So I said yeah, so **IT** and then it's got **an s** because he/she/it rule..., and he says no no what does that mean? And so the whole concept... It was the concept of the earth moving around the sun. No, not that we're teaching geography or anything like that, but I it's just an illustration that there is **that whole background of education of subject matter or just basic understanding of the world and culture in this country,** all of that is a whole barrier as well. And I explained to him. I did all the different diagrams about the earth and the sun and everything. And you know he looked at it and he just said: "WOW". And it was a wonderful moment. Actually it was. It was great. It was great!

Walaa

Yeah, it is really interesting that like you said in terms of like words themselves, he does understand what the sun and the earth are, but the concept of the sun moving around the earth is something that needs to be taught, something that they should have prior knowledge of.

Rebecca

YES! So There's a lot of stuff in textbooks I think that people have not got any idea of what you're talking about just because of that lack of basic education which is OK, so it's good and it's not good because you don't necessarily want to dumb things down because people need to know that stuff. So, but yeah, when you're teaching, you suddenly realise they don't have the notion of what you're talking about, this thing that they've never heard of before because of that lack of education.

Thank you very much. And so now moving to the next section about teaching strategies and support. **What teaching strategies or approaches have you found effective in supporting refugee students' language learning?**

Rebecca

Well, that's. That is more tricky.

Rebecca

In some senses, they're not hugely different to other people other than there's maybe a greater proportion of people who haven't got the basic literacy skills. It's quite obvious, you know, **all the Ukrainian refugees who came in, of course, had a huge level of education, most of them**, so concepts of grammar were not new to them. **You know that a verb is an action word. You know, all of that is second nature**, I think to most of the Ukrainians who came just by way of contrast. So, I think just not making assumptions. **I don't make assumptions that people understand anything about grammar. I try and pace things pretty slowly.** I mean, we all know about scaffolding, but it yes, that is. With a capital S You just need to go step by step building, building. Whereas somebody with a little you know with more education who has maybe learned another language formally, you can go with bigger steps. But I just think, you need to go quite slowly and repeat stuff. Repeat, yeah. **During COVID, I decided I was going to try and learn a bit of Arabic. And I have to say that reinforced me the benefit of repetition.** You know, because sometimes in class, I think this is boring, you know, but I think, oh, no, no. You do need to repeat, repeat. So yeah. So just, yeah, **slowly, the scaffolding and not assuming that people know what you're talking about.**

Wala

Yeah, right. So like in general, you talked about like, not assuming that people know everything and then going slow pace do a lot of repetition. Previously we talked about some learners were particularly maybe disadvantaged because they have low literacy skills in their first language. So is there something else that you do to support this particular group of learners? Do you follow for example certain approaches to accommodate this group of learners other than going slow pace and doing the repetition?

Rebecca

I mean, if I have a learner that is clearly struggling with things, I would I suppose **differentiation** comes into it. I would provide them with a little bit easy material to work on whereas somebody who is going faster, they can complete the exercise. But yeah, if

Yeah. And so to go back to the question about accommodating teaching practices for the varying literacy levels in their first language, you kindly mentioned you would give easy different materials that differentiation to help them with like a slower pace. But is there something really specific for them because they have low literacy skills? So say for example, they get a text that is easier than the rest of their colleagues, but they are still unable maybe to decode it or something like that. So is there something else that you do?

Rebecca

No, I really can't say that I do because in a class of maybe 15 people, it is very difficult to devote that amount of time and you know, X fell into that, but for different reasons in some ways that. It is very difficult to devote the time to one or two students who are really struggling.

Walaa

Yeah. So as part of my former role as a Learning and Skills Coach, we used to get sent to certain classes to do in-class report. So like you said, teachers haven't got time to devote to one or two learners who are struggling, so you we used to sit down with one or two learners who struggled the most and then give them that extra support that the teachers are unable to give to every learner. Do you think we need more of that in classes?

Rebecca



Well, yes. I mean I have had in-class support with an Entry 1 class, who sat with some of the learners, and it does make a difference. I mean, it does make a difference. And that cohort of learners also were motivated. There were a group of ladies and you know who were friendly together and they went to the Skills Centre as well. So you know, they were motivated AS WELL.

Walaa

Yeah.

Rebecca

It's difficult because people with low literacy skills and lacking in confidence often they lack the motivation as well because it's sort of chicken and egg, you know. They're failing because they haven't got the literacy because they haven't got the confidence, and because they're failing, then they become less confident. It just becomes on spiral whereas. If you can get a group of students or people who will be motivated and go and use what it is on offer or has been on offer, shall we say it may not be in the future, to go to the

MOUMA W. (2326761) ...  
She referred to a student we both know.

@mention or reply

MOUMA W. (2326761) ...  

This theme that maybe having less number of coaches would not make any difference to learners who already do not use the support

@mention or reply

MOUMA W. (2326761) ...  

So in-class support is helpful particularly with learners who are already motivated.
24 August 2024, 12:47

@mention or reply

Rhian

Teaching ESOL now for about a decade in the college.

Walaa

So my second question is how do you determine or recognise if your ESOL learners are refugees or non-refugees, and does that distinction influence your teaching approach?

Rhian

Interesting question. We have information gathered for us as teachers by the REACH department who find out a student's immigration status which could include refugee or asylum seeker, or another status. That information is stored electronically and available to teachers if we want to find it. I approach my teaching as if all of my class have experiences that set them apart from a class who grew up in the UK or another safe country, but I don't always know the individual immigration status of my learners unless they talk to me about it, or unless I try to find that information out. And we do have students who live in the UK for a long time. They may have arrived as asylum seekers, become refugees and then got British citizenship so sometimes somebody could actually be considered British and yet also a refugee in their background which is important to factor in as well because I don't think a piece of plastic or a government document can tell us everything about a student.

Walaa

Thank you so much. That's really interesting, right. So the second section is about the challenges in learning English so from your experience, what are the major challenges faced by refugee students learning English as second language? I know this is a very wide question, but we will follow up on things later.

Rhian

OK. There are many thinking from the top of my head. A challenge that I can think of is an expectation for students to know how our systems work and how our education system works which is not universally understood. So some students might know what we expect of them, or what process involves, and others don't know that information. That information is not easily accessible or easily available for them.

Background education, I think, can impact a learner's learning experience. For example, if somebody has been through an education system in their own country, they may be able to apply their understanding of that when they start learning here. Whereas if they didn't go to

school in their country, that may really impact their understanding of how our education system works and our expectations of students.

Other major challenges include trauma in people's backgrounds which isn't only something that refugees face, but a lot of refugees are more likely to have faced trauma. I tend to approach my classes, imagining that everyone who walks through my door has been through some sort of trauma in their life, therefore trying to create a safe space for everybody. I may not ever understand what somebody's really been through, but I can definitely try and make sure I don't readtraumatise people and try and create a classroom community, that is empowering and inclusive and understands the needs of the students.

Other main challenges outside of class, students will be faced with difficulties in wider society in terms of accessing adequate housing and appropriate healthcare. Perhaps they have children who go to school, or perhaps they have a job. That they have to factor into their life alongside learning, and these all impact students.

Other major challenges include the teacher. Who their teachers are can impact their second language learning. Every teacher has a different approach and where we are, the teachers are all on different types of contracts, so they have different amounts of hours available to help with any pastoral needs to meet the student and talk to them outside of lesson time. That's a lot.



Walaa

Yeah. Yeah, that's really interesting because I haven't thought about the teachers being one of the challenges in terms of the contracts they are on. Thank you. That's really interesting. This leads us to the follow up question. I know you mentioned things about their education and background, but particularly how do these challenges differ for refugee students with limited literacy skills in their first language?

Rhian

In my experience, this group of students are severely lacking the support that they need. So students who have minimal educational experience or interrupted educational experience in their home countries or on their journeys have a different learning profile than those who had been through an education system and perhaps have literacy in another language in the probably in the primary language. Those who don't have that are really limited in their ability to engage in the lessons right from the beginning because so much of our system involves print literacy and digital literacy. Students who have been to school, even if for a limited time, we'll understand how a classroom works and what behaviours are expected,

understand what homework means. They will have an understanding of how to interact with other students, not shouting out all the time, for example. There's a fantastic writer called Mary Curry who talks about this idea of **classroom participation competence**. And that's the idea that we people who have been to school know how to do school. They know how to act, and people who haven't been to school are learning that for the first time as an adult, and it may take them a while to learn those expectations. It may be very confusing for them because there are lots of social norms or social cues that they may not have understood yet, or that they're picking as they go along. It's very cognitively demanding for those learners because they're not only learning a new language, but they're learning a new system to use that language with which is literacy. They may also be learning how to navigate the college and learning what systems exist in the college. And how to interact in the classroom with the students and with the teacher, so it's very cognitively demanding. I think it's a lot.

Walaa

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, because one could just immediately think about when it comes to learning about phonics and things like that, but it's a lot bigger than this. It also involves navigating the college as a whole.

Rhian

Yes, yes.

Walaa

Thank you very much.

Rhian

You are welcome.

Walaa

The next section is about teaching strategies and support. So what teaching strategies or approaches have you found effective in supporting refugee students' language learning?

Rhian

OK so on a broader sense, I have found it very useful to make contact with the organisation called LESLLA who are literacy and second language learning for adults, and they are a transnational organisation of researchers and practitioners who study this group of learners and discuss this group of learners in detail so that we can better understand how

Rhian

Yes. I noticed over many years of teaching Pre-entry and Entry 1, I noticed there were a small number of students in my Pre-entry classes who were who were taking longer than other students who maybe were LESLLA learners, but hadn't been identified as such. And they needed more support in the classroom. They didn't have strong study skills, and perhaps they were still working out how class worked, this idea of classroom participation competence. And I observed that over several years they would, they would be withdrawn in themselves. Their personality would change because they weren't really getting their needs met as a learner. They were unable to interact and engage with the with the materials at their own pace. **And we spoke to our manager, and we developed the idea of separating our learners who have literacy needs into a different class so that we could go at a slower pace.** We could use tailored resources to help build the foundations of literacy for them, and we could give them a lot more individual attention. In a mixed pre entry class or beginner ESOL class, you might have very different levels of education, educational background, **but it meant that some students were always answering the questions some students knew what to write on the paper. Some students were progressing, you know, quite fast and our LESLLA learners were always kind of feeling demoralised by that or left behind. But when we put them in a group with each other, and we changed the pace of the class and we involved an awful lot more repetition. We were finding they felt supported by their peers who were also beginners as them.** They felt supported by the slow pace. They didn't mind the repetition where some learners with more educational background, you know who'd been to school and or maybe who had professional qualifications in another language wouldn't want so much repetition. They would want to move on to faster pace, whereas our LESLLA learners preferred the repetition and they preferred the slow pace. And you know, we did lots of multi-sensory approaches in our classroom as well, so using as much as we can, using as many senses as we can to repeat the same topic or the same set of words, or the same phrases, trying to kind of encourage a bit more a bit more long term memory there for some learners who struggle with that. **We definitely saw results in certain aspects as well, like handwriting.** Some of our learners who maybe found it uncomfortable to hold a pen or pencil in the beginning of the year. And perhaps we're writing with very large letters by the end of the year, we could see that with some focus on handwriting and giving them tips along the way, they'd massively improved their handwriting over the space of the year, and they found it much more comfortable to hold their pen. You know, and to or pencil and write. With some learners being able to go back to phonics and explicitly teach the sounds of the letters helps them to then blend letters


I agree. I absolutely agree. I don't know how other teachers do it, but as I mentioned before, I would like ESOL classes to be a safe space for people when especially those who've been through trauma. I learned this phrase, which I find fascinating and wonderful, called **Post-Traumatic Growth**, which essentially is where people who have been through a lot of trauma and maybe experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder can feel supported and nurtured and empowered by good things happening in their life and experience post-traumatic growth. In other words, healing their brain from their negative experiences. And I would love for ESOL classes to be part of that growth to be part of the process that enables people to, you know, leave negativity behind them, things that have, you know they've experienced behind them and move forward and start you know reaching their ambitions. I would love that. I don't know if we will ever change the model that we have in FE because ESOL is seen as another department of a very large college that has many departments in it. It is seen as by those who think of it in terms of funding, it is seen as a bunch of numbers. That numbers maybe revenue or maybe thought in terms of funding and revenue, it's not thought in terms of our individual students and their needs. That can only come from management and teachers, in my opinion. And it is very hard to balance the students' needs. I think, having a good relationship with your class, with your individual students can make a difference, because if we know that the student has extenuating circumstances around the time of their exams, but they are very capable and ready, we can recommend for them to progress even if they hadn't passed all of their exams. I know that that can't happen in every case, but we are in a lucky position to be able to make recommendations at any point in the year if a student is deemed ready to progress up to another level.

I don't know that we're going to move away from the model of exams anytime soon. It's here. It's not going anywhere. If that's the way the college makes its money for ESOL students, they're not going to stop assessments. And as teachers, we are under pressure to prepare students and prepare them to pass those exams. Some of my colleagues say the type of exams we're doing might be the reason why it feels like we have to spend longer preparing students for exams. So they would argue that the exam company needs revisiting and that if we used a different exam company, that might actually put less pressure on our students. I don't know. I don't know. Yeah.

Wala

You mean the Ascentis.

Rhian

 **MOUMA W. (2326761)** 2:14
Sarah also brought up this idea of possibly trying a different assessment board.
28 August 2024, 03:32

Daniel

 **MOUMA W. (2326761)** 2:14

All right. Thank you very much. And in case they revealed it to you, does that distinction influence your teaching approach?

Dan 2:25

No, I would say my teaching approach is pretty much the same regardless because there are certain subject areas you know which I'd try. I have to think about the course materials I'm using because so many people have been through so much trauma, you know that you don't want to remind them of that, you know, so it's fine to talk about Eid or something that is culturally significant which of course might not exactly upset people, but they, you know, they miss their home. Of course. You know, in many cases.

 **MOUMA W. (2326761)** 3:10

Yeah.

Dan 3:14

So sometimes, you can upset people unwittingly just because of a positive sort of subject area that you that you go into, but yeah, I try to avoid going into anything that is, you know, going to remind people of potential trauma.

 **MOUMA W. (2326761)** 3:41

All right. Thank you so much for that.

And the next section of questions is about challenges in learning English. So from your experience, what are the major challenges faced by refugee students in learning English as a second language? I mean, what sets them apart from any other ESOL learners?

Dan 4:05

Refugees...

Well, I mean it could be the reason that they are a refugee in the first place. So

because obviously there is some sort of trauma or reason why they're in the country. I have noticed that some students can get distracted, or they're not quite there. Sometimes, they can have anxiety and so on. So there is that. But other than that, that the main problems that tend to present themselves are you know... It wouldn't matter whether you're a refugee or not. If somebody has come from Sudan, for example, it's not unusual for them to not be literate in their own language, you know, let alone English. So you tend to find in countries like Sudan that somebody from there is going to struggle with their writing more. Not always, but quite often it happens. Whereas you know, obviously we've had a lot of Ukrainians over here in the last couple of years. With everything that they're going through at the moment and you know that their handwriting, it is always brilliant, and that's because they've got an education behind them that many people in Sudan, to go back to that country, I mean, there are other countries like Sudan, of course, but just as an example, you know, many people haven't had that educational background and so it means that even though you get the two students could be in the same class, there's a huge diversity of ability based on what they what their previous educational experience was.



MOUMA W. (2326761) 6:17

Thank you very much. Very compelling answer actually by your answer, you touched on my next question, which is the challenges for people with limited literacy skills in their first language. So you kindly mentioned that the case with the Ukrainian students, maybe because the alphabet is more or less similar, not necessarily the same, their handwriting is better whereas people who come from Sudan or the other parts of the Arab world, they might struggle with writing. But can you think of any other challenges particularly for refugee students with a limited literacy skills in their first language?

Dan 6:57

Well, yeah. I mean, it can present problems with reading as well. I mean it's usually less of an issue because you know I do learn languages myself. You know, in fact I'm

I've never come across before, I know straight away how to pronounce them, you know, because I'm familiar with the letters and it has the advantage of being a phonetic language anyway, unlike English.

Sorry, I'm wandering around here but with English as well, it's not a phonetic language and that is a huge problem to readers. And if they're not familiar with the alphabet either, you can see them very often. Just sort of say what they think the word the next word might be based on the words they've already read, rather than what's actually in front of them. Yeah. And of course they're reading very often back to front because if you're an Arabic speaker, then yes, you'll start from the right and work to the left. And I see people construct letters in the same way where they obviously the flow of English has to start from the left and go to the right. But I can see the way they form letters, quite often they'll get to the letter and they'll go to the end of the letter and work backwards a bit, and then they'll jump forward. This kind of thing. So the flow, basically it is a problem in writing because of that, and I think the phonetics create a huge problem when you're reading at or trying to spell.



MOUMA W. (2326761) 9:12

Right. Thank you very much for that. Another colleague said that she has a bit of background of the Arabic language and that does help sometimes with the learners who speak Arabic as the first language. You mentioned you are learning Italian, have you had any Italian students and that helped at all?

Dan 9:25

No, I've had one or two Spanish ones. And there are similarities between Spanish and Italian so that can help a bit. I would like to know more Arabic. I really would because I have so many Arabic speakers, you know and people teach me the odd phrase here and there, but I, you know, it's literally a handful of things, like, Salaam Alaikum and Walikum Alsalam.



MOUMA W. (2326761) 15:33

Right. Thank you. Now, following up on what we said previously that some refugees who come here with low literacy skills in their first language, you kindly said they might struggle with writing and reading. So my next question is **how do you adapt to teaching methods to accommodate ESOL refugee students with varying literacy levels and educational backgrounds?**

Dan 16:00

Yeah, that is enormously difficult. You know, I mean, **sometimes you have to differentiate** as best you can, but it can be a problem because, for example last year, I was seeing two classes. **They only learnt for two classes a week, for a total of 6 hours a week. That's all I was seeing them for, and so there's a real limit to what you can achieve in that time.**

Obviously, I try to give them, you know homework and tasks outside the lesson, but there is a limit to how much I can actually devote, you know, direct time to them myself within that class time. We do however, have other places within ~~the school~~, as you probably know. **So we can send them to the Skills Centre where if they if they need additional assistance with something, and it is usually writing, but not always,** then they can go and do that. The problem is some students could be any of them, whether they're refugees or not, you know, are really diligent. They want to learn and they understand, and I'm always telling them this, that you can't just come to class and think you're going to learn English. **You have to do things outside of class. You have to watch English TV, you know, with subtitles, or you have to go to a chat group or whatever it is. If you've got kids, then brilliant. You can talk English to them and some do, but some just don't,** and they just they kind of turn up and you feel like they haven't moved on since the last lesson, you know. And that can be quite **frustrating,** and I don't have an answer to that one because if the student doesn't want to learn obviously you try and stimulate them and tell them how important it is, and ask them how they see that they can move forward, but a few of them, that kind of turning up and they're not really. What's the word?

on a part time one, so that could be anything between 6 and 10 hours a week. But it does present more of a challenge because, you know, I will be going through the scheme of work, which is the same scheme of work for a full time student as it is for a part time student, and not all of the part time students have already done that year before and failed, if you see what I mean. Some of them could just be arriving at college for the first time. So you're having to sort of get through a syllabus that actually isn't achievable.

MOUMA W. (2326761) 21:04

Yeah, I see what you mean. I remember another colleague mentioned that if the student has failed after doing a full time course, they're moved to a part time course, but they're not doing exactly the same like they're not getting the same syllables repeated again, it's just shortened and reduced, so maybe they'll fail again.

Dan 21:26

Maybe, maybe yes. And if for example, writing is their issue and they're not doing any practice outside class and they're not taken advantage of the Skills Centre, which is free to them as well, if they haven't done these things and they're just turning up to class for six hours a week, then probably it's not going to solve the problem. And even if it does, they will start next year on the back foot because they will be with other students who are much better than they are.

MOUMA W. (2326761) 21:51

Yeah. Yeah, I see. Thank you for that. My second follow up question on this is, you mentioned that some students do go to the Skill Centre. I myself was a Learning and Skills Coach and now I'm aware that they're doing the merging with the well-being team and therefore reducing the number of the coaches. Do you think cutting funds on the Skills Centre affects ESOL learners?



MOUMA W. (2326761) ...

A challenge with part-time students.

MOUMA W. (2326761)
Maybe they need to separate part-time students so those who failed the year before can be grouped together.

@mention or reply



MOUMA W. (2326761) ...

This also indirectly shows the importance of the Skills Centre.

@mention or reply

Samuel

My second question is like I understand that you volunteer with the Welsh Refugee Council, so it's very likely the students are refugees, but if you teach ESOL at a university, then how do you determine or recognise if your ESOL learners are refugees or non-refugees, and does this distinction influence your teaching approach?

Sam 3:08

Well, firstly I don't teach ESOL on the university campus. I teach teachers to be ESOL teachers on university campus, so I only teach ESOL in the community in places like the Refugee Council. Somebody's status, whether they be an asylum seeker or a refugee is something we often talk about in the classroom. That's OK, because these are things which are of real concern to the individual. The individual who is speaking English may be, you know, at a very low level doesn't really understand the difference between refugee and asylum seeker. I wouldn't understand the government policy in Iraq or Syria or Spain. One doesn't know, so it's almost always very, very clear in the classes the status of the individuals.

MOUMA W. (2326761) 4:18

Thank you so much.

Sam 4:20

So for example on that, Mouma, it's really important for the people in the classroom very often ESOL teachers are told they have to teach about employability. And but it may be the case that if you're in the asylum system, you're not allowed to work. And so to make a real connection in the classroom, a real understanding, I think it's important for the both the teachers and the learners to acknowledge that fact.



MOUMA W. (2326761) ...

This is very unique compared to what other teachers said. So maybe in the college, there does not seem to be much focus on individuals'

@mention or reply

MOUMA W. (2326761) 7:14
Thank you for raising up this example. Now, regarding the challenges in learning English, **from your experience, what are the major challenges faced by refugee students in learning English as a second language?** I understand this is a rather broad question, but hopefully in the follow-up questions and next questions, we'll focus on detailed things.

Sam 7:37
OK and again, you can see this the longer answer in the ESOL review really. I guess in brief, **I think the organisation of ESOL understands or perceives English language education like an academic subject** where you put bits of knowledge and bits more knowledge and after one year you are Entry level 1, after two years Entry level 2, and after three years Entry Level 3. **Language is not really a straight line like that.** There's no reason people can't learn the past simple at the same time as the present simple. It's just -ed with regular verbs, etcetera, etcetera.

So I think to be clear, sorry, I think on one hand it's the organisation of ESOL as if language was like any other academic subject. Like you learn more history, and then you become more expert in history. Language doesn't really work in the same way. **Language is far more messy** and recursive it goes round in circles and you feel good one day and not so good the next day in the new language. So I think that's one issue and another issue is **the absence of fast track policies: fast track option.** So for example, again, it's not the same for everybody, and it's a really complicated field, but for a certain proportion of learners, perhaps younger learners were highly motivated to keep them like four or five years until they are deemed level 2, now you can do another qualification. Why don't we fast track these over 2 years, for example, or three years or two and a half years? **But there aren't any fast or there are very few fast track options available, and I think it's important to try this approach.**

And then the final point for now is when you talked about the different needs. Of some people are in more vulnerable situations than others, then I think that that's it, which are not focused on passing exams, but are focused on welcoming and

important teacher. You are the learner, and more in a welcoming multilingual environment that appreciates the learners themselves and doesn't put them in this position of being in deficit just because they don't speak English. **And I think we need to look at how language classes can be designed to be more in this sort of multilingual participatory perspective rather than an academic subject where you need to pass all the exams all the time.**

MOUMA W. (2326761) 11:20
Yeah, I completely agree with you.
And thank you for that. And my next question is **how do these challenges differ for refugee students with limited literacy skills in their first language?**

Sam 11:39
Yeah, **they are not separated at the moment in college.**

MOUMA W. (2326761) 11:44
Yeah.

Sam 11:44
And, you know, really now for a learner she, she or he may be literate in their first language, but know nothing about, for example, the Latin alphabet system, or they may be, as you say, not literate in their first language nor in the new language. **At present, these learners aren't differentiated at all.**
In fact, **we even have learners who are not familiar with the English alphabet in the same class as people who are familiar with the alphabet but still don't know any English.** You know, and this makes the job of the teacher almost impossible. She can't, or he can't really focus on this learner or that learner. And so I think that there's two things. One, we need to better identify the classes where basic literacy needs to be taught, and two, we need to better educate the teachers because it's really rewarding, but it's really quite, very different type of teaching compared to teaching Entry Level 3, you know discussion class. It's almost like a different job.



MOUMA W. (2326761) ...
He is the only one who brought this up so far.



MOUMA W. (2326761) ...
This is a KEY that summarises the problem!

and support. What teaching strategies or approaches have you found effective in supporting refugee students' language learning?

Sam 13:50

Well, I guess you know what I'm gonna say is that.

The teaching strategies that I use that I believe are effective because of, you know, observation and time spent with students are absolutely not connected to course books or pre-published materials, so you it would be called task-based learning, participatory-learning, Dogme, teaching unplugged, materials light, call it what you will. I've never used a course book but I'm old and experienced, so it's easier for me to do that type of teaching than a new teacher. You know, it can be difficult for a new teacher to teach without materials. And again, it depends on the level of the class. But It seems to me that we, it seems obvious and there's nothing new in this. There needs to be a mix of types of classes, some classes you know, more focussed on reading and writing, and some classes more focussed on discussion and to be able to deal with language points as they emerge rather than pre-planned.

I've just seen so many classes where people are bored, you know, because half the class know the language, point half the class, don't know it. If we think about the classroom as the most important thing being about the learners and what's going on amongst the learners. If we think that's more important than what the teacher is transmitting, then the whole atmosphere changes. And if, for example, a grammar point emerges, let's say how to make questions in the past tense, somebody wanted to ask and maybe we've got 15 learners and five of them know this and ten of them don't. Because with an ESOL all class, we've got people from all different learner backgrounds and experiences. And then if we can employ group work and get people to teach one another and ask one another and test one another, suddenly the whole atmosphere of the class is everybody involved in trying to understand something in this new language using their first languages very often in order to better understand whatever language issue is being discussed.

Right. So my next question is what kind of additional support or resources do you think would benefit refugee students in their language learning journey?

Sam 30:26

While that we've just talked about that for one.

 MOUMA W. (2326761) 30:30

I know you don't. You don't like the textbooks, but do you ever, like, say to the learner? Oh, this is something additional that you can do, for example on your own or something.




Sam 30:41

Sorry, let me clarify.

The first one, there's lots of things we can do. One of the things we've just spoken about tailored classes. Oh, there's so many things. Well firstly though, when I said I don't, I don't use textbooks. That's particularly because of the context in which I teach. I'm not expected to prepare people for exams. I've got this freedom or to do whatever I want. And by the way, I think that that freedom to base classes on learner's needs and interests, I think all teachers should have that built into part of their teaching maybe 50% or 30%, you know, based on the students and what they bring. I think that would change the mindset of a lot of people. However, I understand the need for material for input. I mean I'm a learner myself. Of course, Spanish and Welsh, and my Welsh is far lower than my Spanish, but certainly, the two things, is the opportunity to speak to use the language which would be covered in more participatory group-based type classes, but also we need make sure that learners have access to readers.

Sam 32:13




I mean this is my graded readers for Welsh, for example they exist. I think I'm only Entry level 2 useless.

 MOUMA W. (2326761) ...  

"Dogme is a communicative approach to language teaching that encourages teaching without published textbooks and focuses on conversational communication among learners and teachers."

30 August 2024, 01:34

@mention or reply

 MOUMA W. (2326761) ...  

Suggestion for useful materials

@mention or reply




John

John 1:22

Hmm. Yeah, good question. So I believe you've worked at the department, haven't you, briefly, you worked at the college for a little while, so you know what a big department it is and how many learners we have. So yeah, how do I determine... if I'm completely honest, it's not always the first consideration. I think my default assumption is that the majority of our learners will either be a refugee or an asylum seeker. I suppose if I'm the assigned class tutor, then that's going to be a question that I ask in the initial call that I'll make to the learners at the start of the year. So I'll normally do a one to one call in the first week or two to introduce myself, get the learners settled in, usually it's online like we're doing now. And yeah, I might ask that. I'd probably ask that as a question. We have a database called EBS which you may have used when you were with us, and that holds information. It's not always 100% correct because it's human data inputs, and it can go out of date quite quickly. So that should tell us whether the learner is a refugee or asylum seeker. Usually, that would be a question I would ask them in the one to one conversation. However, I don't have time to have that conversation with every learner because some learners join us a month and a half into the course, and we just dive them straight in. You know, I might go and sit with them in the class for a few minutes and make sure everything is OK with them, but I don't have time to do the 20 minute chat by the time we're six weeks into the course. So sorry, all of that is a bit of a muddled way of answering the question, but where possible, I ask them directly.

I don't think it changes my teaching style hugely because as I say, the presumption is that the majority of our learners are either a refugee or an asylum seeker. So I try and treat the entire class with some sensitivity. There might be certain topics that might be approached a little differently, so for example, I did a lesson a couple of years ago, and I'm probably going to repeat it again next year about the **Tryweryn Valley in Wales**. I don't know if you know that story. It was a valley that was flooded to make a reservoir, and all of the local inhabitants were basically forcibly removed from the valley, and they flooded the reservoir to make water for Liverpool in England, so it was a big political controversy back in the 1960s. So I started that lesson by asking



 **MOUMA W. (2326761)** ...  

Again maybe this needs to go to the recommendation bit because we need more paid time to be given to ESOL teachers to better

.....

@mention or reply

John 6:44

Yeah, not hugely. I think my assumption is that even if they're an economic migrant and they've come to the UK and they've come here through a standard, you know, job, visa, work, visa process rather than an asylum seeker visa, even in that situation it probably isn't what they initially imagined for their life. You know, the reason they sat in my classroom probably isn't that the best thing they would have chosen for themselves in life. **They're probably there by necessity for one reason or another. So it's either out of danger that they've come to us, or it's out of economic necessity.** They aren't able to earn the money that they need to support their family in their own country, so they're with us because they're able to earn more and often send that money home. So whatever way, I tend to use that as my starting point, you know, everybody's here because they have to be here, and we are playing our part in kind of making that as smooth as possible and helping them to achieve the goals that they need to achieve, but the starting point is that nobody's here on a study holiday. It's very different from the EFL and ESL which I did before where you'd have wealthy Chinese, wealthy Saudis, you know, people who were on a bit of a jolly really. You know, they would be travelling every weekend and going off all over, doing the tourist trips, going to Oxford and London and North Wales and things, and had a huge amount of disposable income. So it's a very different group of people that we're dealing with.

 **MOUMA W. (2326761)** 8:42

Thank you. That's really interesting. Right. So the second set of questions are about challenges in learning English. I know this is a very broad question, but hopefully WE'll touch on more details and the follow up questions. So the question is, **from your experience, what are the major challenges faced by refugee students in learning English as a second language?**

John 9:04

OK so. There's a whole range of challenges which can go back much further than when they have their first contact with us, **so it goes back to how much of a formal**



MOUMA W. (2326761) ...

I like this idea. It is similar to what Rhian thinks that everyone must have been through something in their lives. Here, Robin is stating that even a non-refugee ESOL learner might not think this is what they initially imagined for their life.



Another comment is in progress

education. So between the age of 0 and 18, he'd only had a year and a half of education. He'd spent most of his life travelling through and living in various refugee camps across Middle East, North Africa and then Europe before finally making it to the UK. So he'd never had really any formal education. So he was very fluent in his speaking and listening. He'd watched a lot of TV in English, and he could speak really fluently, but his handwriting and spelling were incredibly childlike, you know not much different from my 4 year old daughter, so he had a spiky profile. If you know what we mean by a spiky profile, you know, his speaking and listening were much higher than Entry 3, which was the level he was at, but his reading and writing were really pulling him down. So that's often a big problem is having that spiky profiles, people who have a well-developed skills on one hand and very poorly developed often the more traditional literacy skills on the other hand, so that's one issue.

Tied up in that is also digital literacy skills. So depending on what kind of background they've come from, they may not have had much access to smartphones or, you know, modern touchscreen devices before especially actually, if they're older. So if they're an older refugee or an asylum seeker, it may be the first time that they've had to use a mobile phone for their online portions of their classes, which can be a real struggle. I'm doing in-class activities that require the use of their phones. You know, you can really struggle.



MOUMA W. (2326761) 11:54

Thank you.

John 11:56

So digital literacy is a big one. Then just general study skills. So, the kind of understanding that just being in the class and doing what we give them to do in the class alone probably isn't going to be enough for them to really succeed as a student that they need to be doing their own work, doing their own research, doing their own extra practice outside of the class. So that's often just not something that they're really aware of, or training those kind of self-study skills.

first language. So could you please tell me about what teaching strategies or approaches you found effective with supporting refugees in general and also with accommodating students with low literacy skills in their first language?

John 18:01

In general, I think coming back to all of the issues that I talked about in the previous question, it's really important that you know what your learners are and are not capable of. It's much harder to make assumptions. I think with the refugee asylum seeker class than it is with the EFL/ESL class. So you have to do good quality screening at the start of the year because all of those things that I mentioned before the flip can also be true. We can also have people coming into the classroom who have much higher level qualification than I do. You know, we have people, especially from Syria for example and Iran, you know, where the education system is pretty good, and then Ukraine as well recently where a lot of people have a high level of education. Yeah, we'd often have people coming into the class who have very

advanced and very well developed academic skills. They may have come from an academic environment, you know, I've had a number of teachers, university lecturers, engineers. I had one gentleman who used to captain one of the ships in the Syrian Navy. He was like a lieutenant or something, and we were making him do Level 1 numeracy. And he said: "This is ridiculous. My math skills are like, you know, master's level. My whole job was calculating trajectories of you know, ballistics and things like that. You know, I'm very high level math student". Yet he had to do a day a week of maths at a much lower level than he was expecting. So coming back to how you

John 25:29

Yeah, absolutely.

Everything about it is frustrating because there's a nub of a good idea in there, and as with many things since I joined the College in 2021, it's been reduced and it's been cut back funding. You know, I think funding was really beefed up during COVID. So there's a lot of extra funding given to colleges and schools to help learners, students, pupils who needed that extra support because they weren't having the face to face daily contact with their teachers. So I came into the college thinking, oh, this is the norm. And then you realise, no, this was this was a couple of years, which was an aberration. You know, this was not how it's normally done. And yeah, everything seems to be kind of paring back now to its it's more slimmed down level of support. So yeah, absolutely, it's going to have an effect. There are fewer tools in our toolkit to be able to recommend and refer people to different services, so that's going to have an understandable impact. The learners have found it very useful. The ones who've engaged with it. Welfare as well, they do some really good work, but there aren't enough of them. The tools that they have at their disposal are limited, but just having that extra person who can signpost and have a chat from a position of a more mental health perspective or physical health perspective is great because that reduces some of the burden and some of the pressure on the tutor. I'm not a mental health professional, I'm not an expert. I've done my skills Gate Training courses, but you know, it doesn't make me a professional in that field by any means. So anything that you can refer on to get support from other teams where they have that specialism where they have that expertise is great, and any cutting back of that service is absolutely going to, you know, is going to affect our learners who are amongst the most vulnerable in society and amongst the most vulnerable in the college. So yeah, it's, it's a sad state of affairs, but yeah, I'm hoping there'll be some more money made available under the new government, but we'll wait and see.



MOUMA W. (2326761) 27:55

Yeah.

OK.

Sarah

My second question is how do you determine or recognise if your ESOL learners are refugees or non-refugees, and does this distinction influence your teaching approach?

Sarah

So when we have a new class in September, we usually ask them if they are asylum seekers or refugees. It helps us to know where they are in their processing of their status because of their asylum seekers, their status is not stable, so that it's really useful to know that and they could get moved and then when they get their refugee status, they have to move housing. they change their funding. They have to then apply for Universal Credit, and there's a lot of stress on them in that, so it's good to know if they are in that process. And then if they are refugees, you know, you've they've been here a while. They've been through that process.

Walaa

So when they seek asylum, they're asylum seekers until a decision is made about their status and then the funding changes if they become refugee. But in that case, does this this distinction influences how you teach, how you approach them with your teaching practices?

Sarah

Not really how I teach, but it would affect perhaps my understanding of if they're missing lessons, if they're distracted, but also it would affect how we teach in terms of asylum seekers tend to be new to the country, so you're explaining lots of new things to them, whereas refugees have been in the country a while, so that could affect your teaching.

Walaa

Right. So if we are to use the term refugees as an umbrella term for refugees and asylum seekers, yeah, does that make a distinction with non-refugees learners in terms of how you teach, like you approach them with your teaching practices?

Sarah

I'm just thinking that through because it's such an umbrella term, so you can have Ukrainian refugees, you can have Arab refugees, their situations are different. The for Arab refugees, they have to go through the asylum seeking process, but Ukrainians they don't.

Walaa

So from your experience, what are the major challenges faced by refugee students in learning English as a second language?

Sarah

OK, so for a lot of them there is just the trauma of coming here has put them in a place of not really being in a stable situation where they can learn. Some come with a lot of mental health issues, physical health issues, so there's those sort of physical challenges. And then there's the whole system is very stressful for them. So wherever they are in that system, asylum seeker, or they've got their refugee status, until they're really settled, have got Universal Credit sorted out housing, they're not really in a really good place to focus on learning.

Walaa

Yeah.

Sarah

And they've often got family issues going on, either their family is here, or they're trying to bring family over. So you're trying to teach them, but actually there's so much going on in their life. It's hard for them to really focus.

I think another very big challenge is that, as I said earlier, their background. So if they've had a strong education, so for example, Ukrainians, they don't have any problems with literacy, they already know English phonetic, English alphabet, slightly different, but you know they've got a good starting point whereas if you have illiterate learners who, or even unschooled learners, they don't even know how what to do with the worksheet. They just put it in the bin at the end of the lesson because they don't know how to organise their learning.

Walaa

Yeah. Ohh, thank you very much. Actually, you touched on the point from the following question. How do the challenges differ for refugee students with limited literacy skills? So you did mention like if they haven't got any schooling or limited literacy, so is it only the idea that they can't comprehend what's on the worksheet so they put it in the bin, what other sort of challenges?

Walaa

So does that then help you because you know that you wouldn't need to give that same support to every learner?

Sarah

Yes.

Walaa

Right. Thank you so much. My next question is **how do you balance the need to prepare refugee students for assessments with the need to address their real life concerns and integration needs, given the bureaucratic and exam focussed constraints of the current ESOL system?** I'll try to paraphrase it so you know, like unfortunately the way of how funding works is that learners have to pass exams and then they'll receive that funding and then they can continue. But this means that teachers unfortunately need to take so much of their classroom time to dedicate for exam preparation. And this sometimes doesn't give them enough time to focus on other things that the learners need. What do you think about this situation?

Sarah

I think there is a distinction between the Pre-entry classes, and the Entry 1 above levels. And I think Entry 1 and above, there is a constraint or a pressure on teachers to teach, not teach to the test, but ensure you're equipping them to pass the assessments.

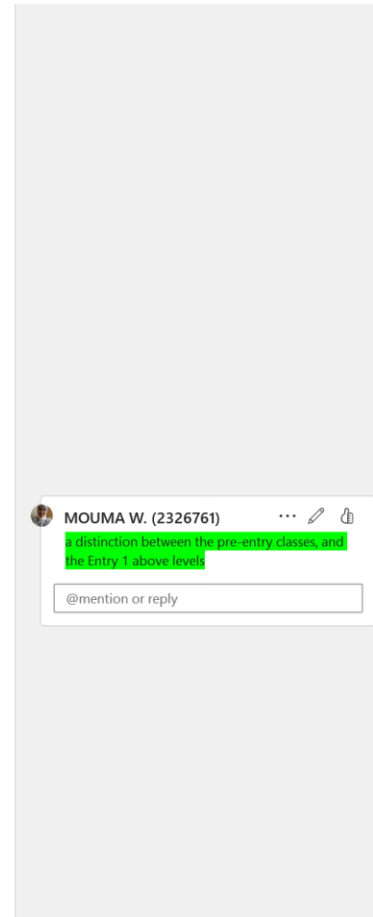
Walaa

So is this not the case with the Pre-entry?

Sarah

So for Pre-entry, we do what's called a **Agored steps**. And they're much more practical. They tend to link much better with the things that students want to learn anyway. So speaking and listening, we do making an appointment at the doctors, talking about illness, very practical topics that they want to learn anyway. So I feel like the Pre-entry curriculum is a very relevant curriculum for refugees, especially. It's language, they will need to cope in their everyday life. And the literacy, it's reading, you write, read, you know, write your name, days of the week. It's all very useful literacy content.

Walaa



Walaa

Yeah. Thank you very much. That's really, really interesting.

Now the final section, we have here two questions. The first one is in the past four years of teaching, have you observed any changes in your teaching practises specifically tailored to refugee students?

Sarah

I think it's just a growing understanding of the process and where they are in the process will affect how focussed they are.

Walaa

So would you say like maybe when you first started teaching, you might have not been very much familiar with that compared to how you are like now?

Sarah

I think because I've worked with refugees before, I knew the process but hadn't really thought through how much that affects their ability to not just come to class, but be focused in class.

So yeah, I think just a greater understanding, but I think I'm also much better asking the right questions when they start off their literacy experience or their learning experience previously. I think, yeah, just having a much greater awareness of how background can affect their learning. And just looking for those signs when students are struggling and perhaps then digging in to find out why. So I think two years ago, I had a learner with additional learning needs, probably on the autistic spectrum, and I think having him in my class helped me realise you need to adapt teaching to different needs.

Walaa

Hmm, interesting. So was that the only situation when you had an ALN student?

Sarah

He was particularly struggling. In every class, there'll be one or two who struggle, and sometimes we just say, well, he's struggling, but actually to look into those reasons why they're struggling, but this one student his needs stood out so dramatically that I couldn't help but adjust all my teaching to be able to support him.

Walaa

Sarah

I focus quite a lot on that, the sort of more Arabic. I feel like I don't really know very much about Ukrainian situation because it's their whole process is so different and their needs are very different. But I feel I haven't had a lot of Ukrainian students. I haven't really. I feel like I'd like, need to learn more a little bit more about their situation and understand that the mainstream situation there.



Walaa

Yeah. Thank you. Sorry, Wendy, how many years have you lived in the Middle East?

Sarah

7 years.

Walaa

Wow!

Sarah

Just being an Arabic speaker and having learned Arabic, I kind of have that linguistic awareness of, you know, why do they say the weather sunny? Because in Arabic, it is **الحر** **حلو**.

So it's that linguistic awareness is really useful sometimes. So you know, in Arabic you don't need that verb **is** but in English, you must have **is**.

Walaa

Yeah. So you think knowing the learner's first language or a little bit about it?

Sarah

Yeah. Really helps. Yeah. And even just the pronunciation sounds that p & b.

So for Ukrainians, they won't struggle with the ABC, but they might struggle with some sounds within that they don't have in Ukrainian.

Walaa

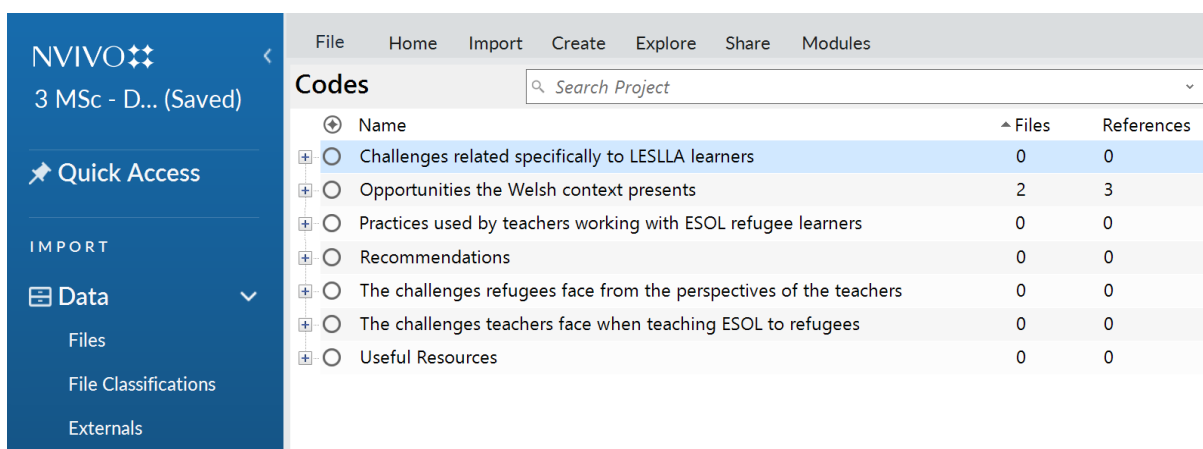
Yeah.

Appendix 5 (A Summary of Grouping Themes and Sub-themes)

I organised my findings into themes and sub-themes, explaining their significance. In this reflection, I will start with a brief overview of how I developed these themes and a more detailed account of my data analysis than provided in the methodology chapter. Next, I will present a table with selected themes, sub-themes and representative quotations, and these will be presented by comparing and contrasting them to views on the same topic put forward by different participants.

As part of getting myself familiar with the data, I first read and re-read each transcript several times. Then, in each transcript, I colour-coded the content for clarity: research questions in pink, themes in green, additional details in yellow, unique participant insights in blue, findings in grey and teacher recommendations in olive green. A sample of this colour coding is represented in [Appendix 4](#).

After importing the transcripts into NVIVO, I organised the emerging themes and sub-themes more efficiently than with the initial colour-coded transcriptions. NVIVO allowed for easier consolidation of themes and sub-themes, which was challenging in the initial manual process. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach to thematic analysis, I completed the first three phases—familiarising with the data, generating initial codes and searching for themes. The remaining phases—reviewing, defining, naming themes and producing the report involved refining the initial set. I started with seven themes and approximately 70 sub-themes as demonstrated below which I streamlined to a more concise set that better aligns with my research questions.



Name	Files	References
Challenges related specifically to LESLLA learners	0	0
Opportunities the Welsh context presents	2	3
Practices used by teachers working with ESOL refugee learners	0	0
Recommendations	0	0
The challenges refugees face from the perspectives of the teachers	0	0
The challenges teachers face when teaching ESOL to refugees	0	0
Useful Resources	0	0

Codes		
Name	Files	References
Challenges related specifically to LESLLA learners	0	0
Difficulties with understanding general knowledge	2	4
Lack of learning skills	4	8
Not differentiated-separated	1	2
Teachers cannot devote direct time to them	3	3
The logistics of understanding the written language	1	1
Opportunities the Welsh context presents	2	3
A refugee-welcoming nation	1	2
An opportunity to learn Welsh - it helps with a feeling of belonging	3	6
Bilingual country that encourages bilingualism and multilingualism	2	2
Cymaeg 2050	1	1
Differences to non-Welsh context	2	2
Generous ESOL provision	2	2
Many settings available to learn English both formally and informally	1	2
Positive experiences	2	3
The Welsh government supports ESOL provision	2	3
Unlike England	1	1
Practices used by teachers working with ESOL refugee learners	0	0
Appreciating the role of culture	6	22
Awareness of content of ESOL policy in Wales and whether it influences teachers' approach	3	3
Bringing an element of Welsh to the ESOL classes	3	7
Differentiation	2	2
Drawing their attention to spoken everyday English	1	2
ESOL is very different from ESOL-EFL	1	3
Familiarity with some learners' first language and learning the odd words in their languages	3	9
Improvements implemented to support ESOL learners	0	0
Literacy course for pre-entry learners	2	5
Speaking and listening Vs reading and writing only courses for Entry 3 and Level 1	1	4
Knowing the learner's status - Mixed views	2	4
It is important	2	5
not essential	2	2

Codes		
Name	Files	References
Learners' status is not the only factor to determine the level of support they need	1	2
love for teaching ESOL	2	3
Teachers' reflection on how their ESOL teaching has changed over the past few years	1	2
A greater awareness of approaching sensitive topics - the things that can affect people	3	5
A greater awareness of how learners' background impact their learning	2	3
A growing understanding of the asylum process and refugees' own situation	3	5
A realisation of that a teacher's role goes beyond teaching	1	1
Attending training	1	1
Becoming better at asking the right questions during initial meetings with learners	1	1
Less reliant on educational publishers	1	1
Teaching strategies and support	1	3
Adjusting teaching practices	3	3
Approaching some topics through the lens of what might be the learners' personal experiences	1	2
Constant communication with the teaching team to support learners	1	2
Good quality screening tests	1	1
Managing expectations	1	1
participatory learning	1	4
Recommending useful resources	1	1
Referring learners to the Skills Centre & its importance	2	2
Repetition and pacing things slowly	1	2
Recommendations	0	0
Better pay for teachers so they can support ESOL learners	2	6
Building learners' digital skills	1	1
Creating links with mental-health and wellbeing service - links with other institutions as well	3	5
Creating more opportunities to practise English with speakers of English	3	3
Different ESOL pathways	3	5
Encouraging multilingual participatory classes	1	1
In terms of strategies to support ESOL learners	0	0
More support with digital skills	1	2
More tailored classes whether for literacy or other skills	4	11
Using graded readers	2	3
Increase opportunities to learn Cymraeg	1	2
More engagement officers	2	2

Name	Files	References
More fund to support services like the Skills Centre in colleges	5	6
More thinking into exam board used	4	6
More training for teachers	2	2
Moving away from an exam-focussed model	1	1
Offering transportation to learners	1	2
Regarding policies	2	2
Showing rather than telling	1	1
The challenges refugees face from the perspectives of the teachers	0	0
Absence of fast track policies	2	2
accommodation	3	7
ESOL buildings do not have social areas	1	2
ESOL is considered as an academic subject	1	1
expectation for students to know how our systems work	1	1
Lack of creche in ESOL settings for women and timetabling	2	5
Lack of good digital skills	1	1
Spiky profiles	1	1
the asylum process - does not apply to all refugees	3	9
Their educational background - different across nationalities	5	12
Their teachers	1	1
trauma, well-being and mental health issues - Social and psychological problems	4	6
The challenges teachers face when teaching ESOL to refugees	0	0
approaching learners with low digital literacy	3	3
Big challenges intertwined with part-time courses	4	6
Emotional involvement when students are moved to a different place	1	3
exam focussed approach in colleges	5	7
not all exam-related content is divorced from learners' everyday needs	2	2
Some exam content is not really useful	2	3
Yet not the same approach for all levels	1	1
Getting the learners to practise the language outside the classroom	2	3
Getting the learners to use the services available	2	2
Lack of certain services such as creche can sometimes cause teachers to feel bad	1	2
Learners' attendance	1	1
The disadvantage of exams	1	1

Name	Files	References
Big challenges intertwined with part-time courses	4	6
Emotional involvement when students are moved to a different place	1	3
exam focussed approach in colleges	5	7
not all exam-related content is divorced from learners' everyday needs	2	2
Some exam content is not really useful	2	3
Yet not the same approach for all levels	1	1
Getting the learners to practise the language outside the classroom	2	3
Getting the learners to use the services available	2	2
Lack of certain services such as creche can sometimes cause teachers to feel bad	1	2
Learners' attendance	1	1
The disadvantage of exams	1	1
There are sometimes online physically present in the classroom	2	2
varying level of learners in the same class and varying needs - literacy background - nationalities	1	4
Useful Resources	0	0
ABCEnglish Books	2	2
Conversation clubs in colleges	1	1
ESOL Support Project	1	2
FAN Groups	2	3
Graded readers	1	1
Learning and Skills Coaches	5	12
LESLLA Organisation	1	1
NATECLA	1	1
Some YouTube channels	1	2
Space4U	1	4
STAR - Student Action for Refugees	1	3
Welfare team in college	1	2

After refining my themes and sub-themes that can answer my research questions, I reached four main themes. An example of how I was able to re-organise and re-group sub-themes was for instance, in the theme “challenges refugees face from the perspective of the teachers”, I initially had the following twelve sub-themes:

<input type="radio"/> The challenges refugees face from the perspectives of the teachers	0	0
<input type="radio"/> Absence of fast track policies	2	2
<input type="radio"/> accommodation	3	7
<input type="radio"/> ESOL buildings do not have social areas	1	2
<input type="radio"/> ESOL is considered as an academic subject	1	1
<input type="radio"/> expectation for students to know how our systems work	1	1
<input type="radio"/> Lack of creche in ESOL settings for women and timetabling	2	5
<input type="radio"/> Lack of good digital skills	1	1
<input type="radio"/> Spiky profiles	1	1
<input type="radio"/> the asylum process - does not apply to all refugees	3	9
<input type="radio"/> Their educational background - different across nationalities	5	12
<input type="radio"/> Their teachers	1	1
<input type="radio"/> trauma, well-being and mental health issues - Social and psychological problems	4	6

However, upon review, I consolidated sub-themes as follows: ‘accommodation’ and ‘the asylum process’ were combined into ‘challenges related to the asylum process,’ as accommodation is part of this issue. ‘ESOL buildings lacking social areas’ and ‘absence of crèche facilities for women and timetabling issues’ were grouped under ‘challenges related to ESOL buildings.’ ‘Lack of good digital skills,’ ‘spiky profiles,’ ‘educational background’ and ‘trauma issues’ were merged into ‘challenges related to learners’ profiles.’ Additionally, ‘absence of fast-track policies,’ ‘expectations for students to understand the system,’ ‘ESOL as an academic subject’ and ‘teacher issues’ were combined into ‘challenges related to the ESOL system’.

This process reduced the 12 initial sub-themes to four broader sub-themes as demonstrated below, maintaining relevance to my research questions..

<input type="radio"/> The challenges refugees face from the perspectives of the teachers	0	0
<input type="radio"/> Challenges related to facilities (creche - timetabling - social areas)	2	8
<input type="radio"/> Challenges related to ESOL provision and policies in colleges (considered a subject - lack of fast track - the teachers - expectations from learners)	3	4
<input type="radio"/> Challenges related to the asylum process (system & accommodation)	5	14
<input type="radio"/> Challenges related to the learners’ profiles (spiky profiles - educational background - digital literacy skills - trauma experiences)	5	20

However, with this organisation, the sub-theme "challenges related to the asylum process" includes examples for both accommodation and the system, but when I click to view them, they appear mixed together. This required me to sift through the examples to determine which relate to accommodation and which pertain to the system. The same issue affected the other

sub-themes. To improve clarity, I re-organised the examples by placing them under each sub-theme in separate entries that can be accessed by clicking the ‘plus’ icon to expand the section. Please see the picture below for the implemented changes.

These are the sub-themes in a collapsed view.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/> The challenges refugees face from the perspectives of the teachers	0	0
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/> Challenges related to facilities in ESOL settings	0	0
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/> Challenges related to ESOL provision and policies in colleges	0	0
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/> Challenges related to the asylum process	0	0
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/> Challenges related to the learners' profiles	0	0

By clicking the plus icon to expand the sections, you can see the expanded view below.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/> The challenges refugees face from the perspectives of the teachers	0	0
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/> Challenges related to ESOL provision and policies in colleges	0	0
	<input type="radio"/> English is considered a subject	1	1
	<input type="radio"/> the absence of fast track options	2	2
	<input type="radio"/> the expectation for the learners to know how the system works	1	1
	<input type="radio"/> the teachers	1	1
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/> Challenges related to facilities in ESOL settings	0	0
	<input type="radio"/> creche	2	4
	<input type="radio"/> lack of social areas	1	2
	<input type="radio"/> timetabling for women	1	1
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/> Challenges related to the asylum process	0	0
	<input type="radio"/> accommodation	3	5
	<input type="radio"/> letters to support not being moved to a different place	2	5
	<input type="radio"/> The asylum system itself	3	4
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/> Challenges related to the learners' profiles	0	0
	<input type="radio"/> digital literacy skills	2	2
	<input type="radio"/> educational backgrounds	5	11
	<input type="radio"/> past traumas, health and well-being issues	4	6

This allowed a more organised and thorough details for the themes, sub-themes and the examples.

Another example is “the challenges teachers face when working with ESOL refugee learners”. These are the initial sub-themes I had:

<input type="checkbox"/> The challenges teachers face when teaching ESOL to refugees	0	0
<input type="radio"/> approaching learners with low digital literacy	3	3
<input type="radio"/> Big challenges intertwined with part-time courses	4	6
<input type="radio"/> Emotional involvement when students are moved to a different place	1	3
<input type="checkbox"/> exam focussed approach in colleges	5	7
<input type="radio"/> not all exam-related content is divorced from learners' everyday needs	2	2
<input type="radio"/> Some exam content is not really useful	2	3
<input type="radio"/> Yet not the same approach for all levels	1	1
<input type="radio"/> Getting the learners to practise the language outside the classroom	2	3
<input type="radio"/> Getting the learners to use the services available	2	2
<input type="radio"/> Lack of certain services such as creche can sometimes cause teachers to feel bad	1	2
<input type="radio"/> Learners' attendance	1	1
<input type="radio"/> The disadvantage of exams	1	1
<input type="radio"/> There are sometimes online physically present in the classroom	2	2
<input type="radio"/> varying level of learners in the same class and varying needs - literacy background - nationalities	1	4

Then I merged 'the disadvantage of exams' with 'exam-focused approach in colleges'. I created a sub-theme that I named 'challenges related to dealing with learners' under which I put 'approaching learners with low digital literacy', 'getting the learners to practise the language outside the classroom', 'getting the learners to use the services available', 'learners' attendance', 'Teachers cannot devote direct time to LESLLA learners' and 'Learners are sometimes only physically present in the classroom' and 'varying level of learners in the same class and varying needs.'

<input type="checkbox"/> The challenges teachers face when teaching ESOL to refugees	0	0
<input type="radio"/> Big challenges intertwined with part-time courses	4	6
<input type="checkbox"/> Challenges related to dealing with learners	0	0
<input type="radio"/> approaching learners with low digital literacy	2	2
<input type="radio"/> getting the learners to practise the language outside the classroom	2	3
<input type="radio"/> getting the learners to use the services available	2	2
<input type="radio"/> learners' attendance	1	1
<input type="radio"/> Learners are sometimes only physically present in the classroom	2	2
<input type="radio"/> Teachers cannot devote direct time to LESLLA learners	3	3
<input type="radio"/> varying level of learners in the same class and varying needs - literacy background	2	5
<input type="checkbox"/> Emotional involvement	0	0
<input type="radio"/> when certain facilities are unavailable such as creche	1	2
<input type="radio"/> when students are moved to a different place	1	3
<input type="checkbox"/> exam focussed approach in colleges	0	0
<input type="radio"/> a different approach for different levels	1	2
<input type="radio"/> a very exam-oriented approach in colleges	4	6
<input type="radio"/> not all exam-related content is divorced from learners' everyday needs	3	3
<input type="radio"/> Some exam content is not really useful	2	3

In this appendix, I did not detail this approach for all themes and sub-themes but only for a sample. After all these amendments, here are two screenshots of the final themes and sub-themes I reduced my initial data to.

NVIVO Themes and sub-themes – Collapsed View

Name	Files
Challenges related specifically to LESLLA learners	0
Opportunities the Welsh context presents	0
The challenges refugees face from the perspectives of the teachers	0
The challenges teachers face when teaching ESOL to refugees	0

NVIVO Themes and sub-themes – Expanded View (1/2)

Name	Files	References
Challenges related specifically to LESLLA learners	0	0
Difficulties with understanding general knowledge	2	3
Lack of learning skills	5	9
Not differentiated-separated	2	3
The logistics of understanding the written language	2	2
Opportunities the Welsh context presents	0	0
A refugee-welcoming nation	1	2
An opportunity to learn Welsh which helps in having a feeling	3	8
Bilingual country that encourages bilingualism and multilingua	5	6
Differences to non-Welsh context	4	6
Generous ESOL provision and availability in formal and inform	1	3
Positive experiences	2	3
The Welsh government supports ESOL provision	2	3
The challenges refugees face from the perspectives of the teachers	0	0
Challenges related to ESOL provision and policies in colleges	0	0
English is considered a subject	1	1
the absence of fast track options	2	3
the expectation for the learners to know how the system	1	1
the teachers	1	1
Challenges related to facilities in ESOL settings	0	0
creche	2	4
lack of social areas	1	2
timetabling for women	1	1
Challenges related to the asylum process	0	0
accommodation	3	5
letters to support not being moved to a different place	2	5
The asylum system itself	3	4
Challenges related to the learners' profiles	0	0
digital literacy skills	2	2
educational backgrounds	5	11
past traumas, health and well-being issues	4	6

NVIVO Themes and sub-themes – Expanded View (2/2)

The challenges teachers face when teaching ESOL to refugees	0	0
Big challenges intertwined with part-time courses	4	6
Challenges related to dealing with learners	0	0
approaching learners with low digital literacy	2	2
getting the learners to practise the language outside the	2	3
getting the learners to use the services available	2	2
learners' attendance	1	1
Learners are sometimes only physically present in the clas	2	2
Teachers cannot devote direct time to LESLLA learners	3	3
varying level of learners in the same class and varying ne	2	4
Emotional involvement	0	0
when certain facilities are unavailable such as creche	1	2
when students are moved to a different place	1	3
exam focussed approach in colleges	0	0
a different approach for different levels	1	2
a very exam-oriented approach in colleges	4	6
not all exam-related content is divorced from learners' ev	2	2
Some exam content is not really useful	2	3

After weeks of organising themes and writing my findings, I noticed significant overlap between the challenges faced by learners and teachers, as teachers' challenges largely stem from addressing learners' issues. Therefore, I decided to merge the third theme, "challenges teachers face," with the first theme on learner challenges and the second on LESLLA learners. This way, teachers' challenges are still addressed within both themes without needing a separate category. In [Appendix 6](#), you can find three tables that reflect the changes made, including all three themes, sub-themes and a selection of representative quotations.

Appendix 6 (Themes, Sub-themes and Quotations: A Comprehensive Overview)

Below are three tables that present all three themes, sub-themes and a selection of representative quotations.

Theme 1: Teachers' perspectives on refugee learner challenges and teacher challenges

Sub-themes (codes)	Title of the code	Supporting quotations
1.1 Challenges related to ESOL provision and policies in colleges	1.1.1 English is considered a subject	“I think the organisation of ESOL understands or perceives English language education like an academic subject where you put bits of knowledge and bits more knowledge and after one year you are Entry level 1, after two years Entry level 2, and after three years Entry Level 3. Language is not really a straight line like that.” (Samuel)
	1.1.2 The absence of fast track options	“Another issue is the absence of fast track policies, fast track options. So for example, again, it's not the same for everybody, and it's a really complicated field, but for a certain proportion of learners, perhaps younger learners were highly motivated to keep them like four or five years until they are deemed level 2, now you can do another qualification. Why don't we fast track these over 2 years, for example, or three years or two and a half years? But there aren't any fast or there are very few fast track options available, and I think it's important to try this approach.” (Samuel)

		<p>“We've tried to build in a bit of flexibility from next year, so we've got some kind of pathways for our learners, so if they want to focus on reading and writing, they can do like a half year reading and writing course. And if they want to do speaking and listening, they can do a half year course in that. So they could be at two different levels. For example, if they've failed their level one writing but pass their speaking and listening, they could go up to Level 2 speaking and listening, but then they wouldn't have the full level 1 qualification. So we've tried to build in some flexibility there. It's a new thing that we're starting next year.” (John)</p> <p>“So I think we've tried to build in something there that allows people to progress faster if they really want to just focus on getting their speaking up to a higher level.” (John)</p>
	<p>1.1.3 The expectation for the learners to know how the system works</p>	<p>“A challenge that I can think of is an expectation for students to know how our systems work and how our education system works which is not universally understood. So some students might know what we expect of them, or what process involves, and others don't know that information. That information is not easily accessible or easily available for them.” (Rhian)</p>
	<p>1.1.4 The teachers</p>	<p>“Other major challenges include the teacher. Who their teachers are can impact their second language learning. Every teacher has a different approach and where we are, the</p>

		<p>teachers are all on different types of contracts, so they have different amounts of hours available to help with any pastoral needs to meet the student and talk to them outside of lesson time. That's a lot.” (Rhian)</p>
	<p>1.1.5 A very exam-oriented approach in colleges</p>	<p>“It is very difficult, and I do feel that over the years the college has become a lot more exam focussed and meeting criteria, you know, which is not altogether a bad thing... The funding is linked to exams and passing exams, so that has an impact on what we do because we have to very much try and get students through exams because that's where the funding goes.” (Rebecca)</p> <p>“I don't know that we're going to move away from the model of exams anytime soon. It's here. It's not going anywhere. If that's the way the college makes its money for ESOL students, they're not going to stop assessments. And as teachers, we are under pressure to prepare students and prepare them to pass those exams.” (Rhian)</p> <p>“So first of all, it's a bad thing that we are so exam focussed, but we don't really have a choice about it... But at the same time, I feel bad saying it because I kind of feel well yeah you should know how to spell “going to”. Yes of course you should. And you should understand we're “gonna” comes from. But this is where I think because of our obsession with passing exams, this is one of the</p>

		<p>disadvantages because they're learning real English. You know how it's really spoken. And yet we're sort of holding them back from that.” (Daniel)</p> <p>“Again, increasingly in the years that I've been at the college, the focus seems to be moving more and more and more onto exams... The exam programme that we use requires a lot of teacher input and a lot of exam practice.” (John)</p> <p>“For example, you know it will ask them to these questions where you have to sort of say, well, what the purpose of this text is, right and, the options might be to advertise, advertise to instruct, to inform or to warn for example, but I know people who are first language English speakers that would look at that and probably get it wrong, you know? And I just don't think it's an important question.” (Daniel)</p> <p>“Is it a letter or an e-mail or you know? And I think pretty much all my all my students would be able to know exactly what was in front of them if it was real.” (Daniel)</p> <p>“Well, you know a party invitation. I wonder if they ever get a party invitation in English, so yeah, some of it you think, is this really relevant?” (Sarah)</p>
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		<p>“I think there is a distinction between the Pre-entry classes, and the Entry 1 above levels. And I think Entry 1 and above, there is a constraint or a pressure on teachers to teach, not teach to the test, but ensure you're equipping them to pass the assessments.” (Sarah)</p> <p>“So for Pre-entry, we do what's called a Agored steps. And they're much more practical. They tend to link much better with the things that students want to learn anyway.” (Sarah)</p> <p>“The topics that we cover in the curriculum and the scheme of work are not, you know, completely divorced from everyday life. We're talking about transport. We're talking about your house, your family, whatever problems in the home. So they are everyday things, and I suppose you would try and skew the examples a little bit more to how you think people are living, not talking about booking into hotels and so on.” (Rebecca)</p>
	<p>1.1.6 Big challenges intertwined with part-time courses</p>	<p>“So the actual input for a part-time learner is not huge especially for people who are working, and I'm sure you find in that evening class, you get a cohort of men, very often, who are working and that is their number one thing, is to earn the money because either their family are here or they have to send money, so that's the priority in</p>

		<p>life. Yeah, yeah. So yeah, I mean some are motivated and will do homework, but on the whole, they don't." (Rebecca)</p> <p>"In part-time classes especially I think the time is very limited to cover the actual basics of the curriculum. So dealing with anything other than what's in the scheme of work for today is very difficult. I think if you were on a full-time course there would be more latitude there and flexibility. You could build that in a bit more." (Rebecca)</p> <p>"But students who do not pass a level in a year, have to come back and repeat that level, but they're not coming back and doing the second-half of a full-time course for that level. They're just doing the same course again, so they don't have as much material. Often, they are going to cover a lot less than a full-time course would do. Let's say if they're using a course book, if you're on a 33 week course, a full-time course, you might get all the way to the end of the course book in a year. If you're on a part-time course, teachers are going to have to cut out over two thirds of that book to be able to get through the year in their small amount of hours. And then if you do a third of a book, can you really say you've got all the skills that that book expects you to have by the end? I don't think so, but our students who are part-time are expected to do that twice." (Rhian)</p>
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		<p>“They only learnt for two classes a week, for a total of 6 hours a week. That's all I was seeing them for, and so there's a real limit to what you can achieve in that time.” (Daniel)</p> <p>“Usually Entry 1, they go full time. If they fail, they do another year part time.” (Sarah)</p>
	<p>1.1.7 funding cuts affecting the Learning and Skills Centre at the college</p>	<p>“I've had support in the classroom, and I know that has made a difference. I mean it can't not have an impact. It will have an impact, yeah, it will.” (Rebecca)</p> <p>“Yes. Absolutely, absolutely there if we have a fully funded learning Coach Department, I think Learning and Skills is the name. I can't remember the name of the department, but if it's fully funded and we have a lot of learning coach hours available to us, we can really benefit the students who need the most support because we can almost give that learning coach a plan for what that student needs to do. They can attend their normal ESO classes, but they can also have this extra tuition essentially outside of their class and the and the learning coach and the teacher can talk to each other about what they're doing. If they are good communicators, then that can feed into the ESOL classes as well, so that then the student is getting wrap around support.” (Rhian)</p>

		<p>“You know, because there are a lot of people who do make use of it and if there is a reduction in that resource then yeah, it's going to affect them, no doubt.” (Daniel)</p>
<p>1.2 Challenges related to facilities in ESOL settings</p>	<p>1.2.1 Crèche</p>	<p>“And this college has no creche, no childcare facility at all..., so that is also a barrier for female students that whole childcare thing.” (Rebecca)</p> <p>“There's the creche facilities for women with not just women, but majority, you know, parents with babies. But all of these things, we just get the big hand from the government. No, no, no, no money, no money, no money. So I don't know if some of them like the creche.” (Samuel)</p>
	<p>1.2.2 Timetabling for women</p>	<p>“Timetabling for women... It is women who tend to take the children to school and are expected to be in class at 9:00. Well, if you have to take two buses from X (Rebecca mentioned a name of an area that I did not include for anonymity purposes), then you're not going to be in class at 9:00. The problem is then an afternoon class has got the same sort of problems because you've got the pickup.” (Rebecca)</p>
	<p>1.2.3 Lack of social areas</p>	<p>“One of the things that this lovely building doesn't lend itself to is any social contact between students... I think what it does lack is a sort of a circulation place, a coffee place to build up more informal networks and friendships and support for each other. That's not easily rectified, but I think that's it's a big</p>

		<p>reason why some people come to college actually is not only for the English, but it is for the social contact and to make friends because people are very isolated.” (Rebecca)</p>
<p>1.3 Challenges related to the asylum process</p>	<p>1.3.1 Accommodation</p>	<p>“Other main challenges outside of class, students will be faced with difficulties in wider society in terms of accessing adequate housing.” (Rhian)</p> <p>“At one point, I think 4 out of the 17 I had in my class were all living in the X Centre (X refers to the name of the centre where some asylum seekers stay in the city targeted in this research), which is full of people with, you know, very, very complex needs, you know, drug addiction and alcoholism and long term kind of chronic homelessness, which obviously is a very difficult, almost impossible environment for somebody to A: be a student and succeed as a student, B: to practise their faith.” (John)</p> <p>“Accommodation is a huge issue. People are moved from one place to another... The cohort of people of British homeless people have a very particular needs which are NOT the same as some accountant who has left Iran and come to this country seeking safety and finds himself homeless.” (Rebecca)</p>
	<p>1.3.2 The stressful asylum system process (including relocation)</p>	<p>“I sent him a message later saying what's the problem you know. And he said, oh, I've been told I have to pack everything and I've been</p>

		<p>told I'm moving to Swansea tomorrow at 8:00 o'clock in the morning.” (Daniel)</p> <p>“Ukrainian refugees, you can have Arab refugees, their situations are different. The for Arab refugees, they have to go through the asylum seeking process, but Ukrainians they don't. They come and they immediately have refugee status. And also the Ukrainians are here. Many will plan to go back. Often, the background of Ukrainians is very different to some of the other backgrounds that we get in terms of education, experience.” (Sarah)</p> <p>“And then there's the whole system is very stressful for them. So wherever they are in that system, asylum seeker, or they've got their refugee status, until they're really settled, have got Universal Credit sorted out housing, they're not really in a really good place to focus on learning.” (Sarah)</p> <p>“Traditionally, they were given 28 days to vacate their accommodation, but I think they changed the guidance so that it was only 14 days for a time last year, and they didn't find out about that until the letter arrived, and the letter might take three or four days. So you know, they were often given just a little over a week to be told that they had to be out of their accommodation and the streets that the college is on.” (John)</p>
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	<p>1.3.3 Emotional involvement for teachers (writing letters/managing without crèche)</p>	<p>“And then I wrote a letter myself saying about how he built up a network of friends and all the things I just mentioned. And, you know, I was on hold for hours and hours and hours trying to get through to... And finally in the end they backed down, and he didn't move, but it took hours of my time, you know. Well, I did mind it because it was infuriating, but I was glad that I did it, you know.” (Daniel)</p> <p>“I thought about that afterwards. I thought, well, I can't. I can't keep doing this, you know, because it would just take over your life. And, you know, unfortunately, I need to earn a living.” (Daniel)</p> <p>“No, I mean, I taught a class yesterday and there were two toddlers running around it was just about to tolerable, but you know, I was at the point of saying you're going to have to leave... But.. but I feel bad about doing that because I, you know they're there, and they want to learn. They've made the effort to come and I don't want to be throwing them out.” (Rebecca)</p>
<p>1.4 Challenges</p>	<p>1.4.1 Educational backgrounds</p>	<p>“On an educational front, people, of course, come from a great variety of educational backgrounds and there will be doctors, engineers, oil engineers, accountants, but also people who have not had more than the very</p>

<p>related to the learners' profiles</p>		<p>basic primary education, if that. So, if you've been brought up in Darfur, your maybe your whole life has been on the move and very little primary education, so reading and writing in your own language is maybe non-existent.” (Rebecca)</p> <p>“and I've talked to maybe Syrian people, in particular, the education is a lot more... Is it didactic? Is that the word I would use? You know, so getting the right answer is very important.” (Rebecca)</p> <p>“Background education, I think, can impact a learner's learning experience. For example, if somebody has been through an education system in their own country, they may be able to apply their understanding of that when they start learning here. Whereas if they didn't go to school in their country, that may really impact their understanding of how our education system works and our expectations of students.” (Rhian)</p> <p>“classroom participation competence. And that's the idea that we people who have been to school know how to do school. They know how to act.” (Rhian)</p> <p>“Whereas you know, obviously we've had a lot of Ukrainians over here in the last couple of years. With everything that they're going through at the moment and you know that</p>
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		<p>their handwriting, it is always brilliant, and that's because they've got an education behind them.” (Daniel)</p> <p>“It goes back to how much of a formal education they had I think as a child.” (John)</p> <p>“Their background... So if they've had a strong education, so for example, Ukrainians, they don't have any problems with literacy, they already know English phonetic, English alphabet, slightly different, but you know they've got a good starting point whereas if you have illiterate learners who, or even unschooled learners, they don't even know how what to do with the worksheet.” (Sarah)</p> <p>“And, you know, really now for a learner she, she or he may be literate in their first language, but know nothing about, for example, the Latin alphabet system, or they may be, as you say, not literate in their first language nor in the new language. At present, these learners aren't differentiated at all. In fact, we even have learners who are not familiar with the English alphabet in the same class as people who are familiar with the alphabet but still don't know any English. You know, and this makes the job of the teacher almost impossible.” (Samuel)</p>
	<p>1.4.2 Spiky profiles in the same classroom</p>	<p>“A spiky profile.... If you know what we mean by a spiky profile, you know, his speaking and listening were much higher than</p>

		<p>Entry 3, which was the level he was at, but his reading and writing were really pulling him down. So that's often a big problem is having that spiky profiles, people who have a well-developed skills on one hand and very poorly developed often the more traditional literacy skills on the other hand, so that's one issue.” (John)</p>
	<p>1.4.3 Varying levels of digital literacy skills</p>	<p>“I was talking to somebody today about digital literacy skills, which are varied from total beginner all the way to expert in every class, in every level. But the learners who need digital literacy training are not getting that. They're getting ESOL classes with a digital literacy element, for example hybrid classes where 50% of their course will be face to face and 50% will be online, but they are not being trained in how to use the technology. Often they don't have laptops. They only have a mobile phone, so it's very difficult for them to access half of their course sometimes due to different levels of digital literacy skills within a classroom.” (Rhian)</p> <p>“Those who don't have that are really limited in their ability to engage in the lessons right from the beginning because so much of our system involves print literacy and digital literacy.” (Rhian)</p> <p>“Digital literacy skills... So depending on what kind of background they've come from,</p>

		<p>they may not have had much access to smartphones or, you know, modern touchscreen devices before especially actually, if they're older. So if they're an older refugee or an asylum seeker, it may be the first time that they've had to use a mobile phone for their online portions of their classes, which can be a real struggle. I'm doing in-class activities that require the use of their phones. You know, you can really struggle.” (John)</p>
	<p>1.4.4 Diverse students’ life experiences and future ambitions in the same classroom</p>	<p>“I was talking to an ESOL teacher last week and in their class, they had middle-aged professional Ukrainian women. At the same time. Teenage Sudanese boys with very little work experience or life experience. In the same class, some Hong Kong retired women. It's really tough for that teacher to juggle the needs of the professional Ukrainians, these sweet, young Sudanese teenagers who want to study and begin their lives, and this Hong Kong retired. These are very different needs. And so yes, it's a very real issue.” (Samuel)</p> <p>“And then the final point for now is when you talked about the different needs. Of some people are in more vulnerable situations than others, then I think that that’s it, which are not focused on passing exams, but are focused on welcoming and teaching about the culture and the country and the language.” (Samuel)</p>

	<p>1.4.5 Past traumas and well-being concerns</p>	<p>“People very, very often say that: <i>“I can't remember anything. I can't learn English because there's too much going on in my head. My head is like a fridge. I think too much. I can't remember anything.”</i> I think I mean that is a huge barrier for people's learning that there's just so much anxiety and so much going on in their head.” (Rebecca)</p> <p>“trauma in people's backgrounds which isn't only something that refugees face, but a lot of refugees are more likely to have faced trauma. I tend to approach my classes, imagining that everyone who walks through my door has been through some sort of trauma in their life, therefore trying to create a safe space for everybody.” (Rhian)</p> <p>“Sometimes, they can have anxiety and so on.” (Daniel)</p> <p>“for a lot of them there is just the trauma of coming here has put them in a place of not really being in a stable situation where they can learn. Some come with a lot of mental health issues, physical health issues, so there's those sort of physical challenges.” (Sarah)</p> <p>“A bit of vocabulary about I come to college <i>ON foot</i> or I walk to college. You know, there's a million other things happening in their heads that are preventing them from even hearing what you're saying.” (Rebecca)</p>
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		<p>“I have noticed that some students can get distracted, or they're not quite there.”</p> <p>(Daniel)</p>
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<p>1.5 Challenges ESOL teachers face related to learners' motivation</p>	<p>1.5.1 Motivating learners to practise the language outside the classroom</p>	<p>“And then encouraging them to do extra outside of class... It's a real struggle to get them to do extra things outside class, so part of the battle is just getting them to accept that what you're saying has value.” (John)</p> <p>“I'm always telling them this, that you can't just come to class and think you're going to learn English. You have to do things outside of class. You have to watch English TV, you know, with subtitles, or you have to go to a chat group or whatever it is. If you've got kids, then brilliant. You can talk English to them and some do, but some just don't, and they just they kind of turn up and you feel like they haven't moved on since the last lesson, you know. And that can be quite frustrating.” (Daniel)</p>
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	<p>1.5.2 Encouraging learners to use the services available</p>	<p>“And if for example, writing is their issue and they're not doing any practice outside class and they're not taken advantage of the Skills Centre, which is free to them as well, if they haven't done these things and they're just turning up to class for six hours a week, then probably it's not going to solve the problem.” (Daniel)</p> <p>“So yeah, it's using the tools at the college make available.” (John)</p>
	<p>1.5.3 Interplay between resource availability, learner motivation and language learning</p>	<p>“There were a group of ladies and you know who were friendly together and they went to the Skills Centre as well. So you know, they were motivated AS WELL.” (Rebecca)</p> <p>“It's difficult because people with low literacy skills and lacking in confidence often they lack the motivation as well because it's sort of chicken and egg, you know. They're failing because they haven't got the literacy because they haven't got the confidence, and because they're failing, then they become less confident. It just becomes on spiral whereas. If you can get a group of students or people who will be motivated and go and use what it is on offer or has been on offer, shall we say it may not be in the future, to go to the Skills</p>

		Centre and get that additional support.” (Rebecca)
1.6 Learning from experience: Teachers' growth through challenges	1.6.1 Cultural sensitivity and awareness	“And then the next line was, oh, you can't have a BBQ without booze and obviously “ booze ”, I wanted people to try and figure out what that word meant. But of course obviously it basically means an alcoholic drink, doesn't it? And I hadn't actually thought that through because you know most of the people that you would be teaching would probably not drink alcohol, so although it is the reality of living here, you know it just wasn't appropriate, shall we say. And if I could have had my time again, then I wouldn't have done that. And so those are the kind of mistakes I try and avoid.” (Daniel)
	1.6.2 An understanding of learners' backgrounds and experiences	“I suppose you get to know a bit more about countries, so it's interesting. Over the last 15 years, where people are coming from has changed a lot.” (Rebecca) “I mean, one of the biggest issues we have with the refugees is attendance. But their attendance is poor because they are so caught up in their asylum seeking process.” (Sarah)
	1.6.3 A broader socioeconomic awareness	“I think it's cultural awareness from my part, it's.... No, no, maybe not so much cultural. It's more socioeconomic awareness, I think so. We when I taught EFL and ESL, you could quite comfortably stick to the topics presented in a textbook, and it wouldn't raise any eyebrows.” (John)

	<p>1.6.4 Teachers now recognise their role extends beyond language instruction</p>	<p>“I remember a CALL teacher when I first started, asking me something about what she should do if... It was at the time when there was a lot of Syrian refugees because of the civil war. She said: “But Mike, what do I do if the students were asking me about things not connected to the class, like housing or jobs or and they have problems, how do I solve their problems?”. And I said to her at the time, look, our expertise is language teaching. They want our help with learning the language, not with everything else. There are other people expert in housing and employment and accommodation, etcetera, but I think now I I've come to rightly or wrongly, I've come to think that that these things are not dividable. I think that the language is inextricably linked to everything else, and by talking about accommodation or housing or employment or whatever it is, that both helps with language and helps with whatever the issue might be as well as signposting the learners to the relevant people. So, I think being more open to whatever the learner brings to the class has been has been a development.” (Samuel)</p>
	<p>1.6.5 Improved trauma-informed approaches</p>	<p>“I mentioned before, I would like ESOL classes to be a safe space for people when especially those who've been through trauma. I learned this phrase, which I find fascinating and wonderful, called Post-Traumatic Growth, which essentially is where people who have been through a lot of trauma and</p>

		<p>maybe experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder can feel supported and nurtured and empowered by good things happening in their life and experience post traumatic growth. In other words, healing their brain from their negative experiences. And I would love for ESOL classes to be part of that growth to be part of the process that enables people to, you know, leave negativity behind them, things that have, you know they've experienced behind them and move forward and start you know reaching their ambitions. I would love that.” (Rhian)</p> <p>“I attended some very good training around trauma-informed responses, and that helped me to understand neurologically what was going on for some of my students. And especially regarding refugee students, it has changed the way I approach difficult topics, but I every year, I still experience challenges with refugee students that make me reflect on ways I can do things differently.” (Rhian)</p>
	<p>1.6.6 Becoming better at asking the right questions about learners’ backgrounds (literacy)</p>	<p>“So yeah, I think just a greater understanding, but I think I'm also much better asking the right questions when they start off their literacy experience or their learning experience previously. I think, yeah, just having a much greater awareness of how background can affect their learning. And just looking for those signs when students are struggling and perhaps then digging in to find out why.” (Sarah)</p>

Theme 2: Teachers' perspectives on LESLLA learner challenges and teacher challenges

Sub-themes (codes)	Title of the code	Supporting quotations
2.1 Lack of learning skills	2.1.1 Difficulties with understanding general knowledge	<p>There's a whole sort of background of general education. In textbooks, they do assume that people have a knowledge of the world, and, you know, just various things like we're doing weather, so: "<i>Today it is very cold. It is freezing in the Antarctic.</i>" Nobody has heard of the Antarctic. Nobody has any idea on the whole of where that is." (Rebecca)</p> <p>"He said, you know, here's a sentence: "The earth moves around the sun, so it was it moves around the sun." So I said yeah, so IT and then it's got an s because he/she/it rule..., and he says no no what does that mean?" (Rebecca)</p> <p>"And yeah, I think it comes back to something I said earlier again about assumed knowledge. You know, just you've got to work on a much more diagnostic basis about what knowledge people have because it could be a lot less than you would imagine that they might have, and it could be a lot more, you know, because everyone's background coming into the classroom is very different." (John)</p> <p>"even showing them a map of the UK and you know, without the towns on saying, where are</p>

		<p>we, where are we? point out where Cardiff is on the map, point out where Swansea is? Not all of them can do it, but as looking through my lens as you know Western European you know middle class person, if I'm going to a new country, the first thing I'm going to do is look at the map. Where is it in the country we know? Where is it in relation to other places? Where is it in relation to other countries? But that's my background that's led me to that and it's not always going to be the same. And people live here for years without really knowing where in the country they are.” (John)</p>
	<p>2.1.2 Lack of learning/study skills - not knowing classroom norms</p>	<p>“people who haven't been to school are learning that for the first time as an adult, and it may take them a while to learn those expectations. It may be very confusing for them because there are lots of social norms or social cues that they may not have understood yet, or that they're picking as they go along. It's very cognitively demanding for those learners because they're not only learning a new language, but they're learning a new system to use that language with which is literacy.” (Rhian)</p> <p>“And just sort of the study skills that you assume that people know about a table that everything in this column is the same thing or those sorts of bits of information that you would nearly take for granted, but if you've never been to school, you don't necessarily know how to read that or the</p>

		<p>fact that the line underneath the writing is where you should write your answer. So some of the very basic things maybe for Pre-entry and Entry 1 students, those sort of study skill things aren't there.” (Rebecca)</p> <p>“Then just general study skills. So, the kind of understanding that just being in the class and doing what we give them to do in the class alone probably isn't going to be enough for them to really succeed as a student that they need to be doing their own work, doing their own research, doing their own extra practice outside of the class. So that's often just not something that they're really aware of training those kind of self-study skills.” (John)</p> <p>“but there are times when obviously I'm standing up and speaking and presenting something, and they need to be writing it down. You know they need to be making notes, they need to be writing down examples. They need to be asking questions. They don't know this, you know. So a lot of them will sit there quietly with their hands folded on the desk without really making any notes, so it's just that lack of basic knowledge of what should a student be doing to succeed. It comes back again to, you know, gaps in their formal education.” (John)</p> <p>“There's the actual learning skills, so we know when we're learning, we write things down to help us remember, and we put it in some order in</p>
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		<p>a notebook and we perhaps will date it or give it a title to help us remember. All those kind of structuring of our learning, we know how to do, so if you've not had an educational background, you don't know what to do when someone says go and learn or practise that vocabulary. How do you practise that vocabulary? What does that look like? What does that mean? So there's that side.”</p> <p>(Sarah)</p> <p>“But then there's also the just not having any previous experience of text, of understanding how these marks make meaning, that there is a phonic pattern.” (Sarah)</p>
	<p>2.1.3 The logistics of written language</p>	<p>“And if they're not familiar with the alphabet either, you can see them very often. Just sort of say what they think the word the next word might be based on the words they've already read, rather than what's actually in front of them. Yeah. And of course they're reading very often back to front because if you're an Arabic speaker, then yes, you'll start from the right and work to the left. And I see people construct letters in the same way where they obviously the flow of English has to start from the left and go to the right. But I can see the way they form letters, quite often they'll get to the letter and they'll go to the end of the letter and work backwards a bit, and then they'll jump forward. This kind of thing. So the flow, basically it is a problem in writing because of that, and I think the phonetics create a huge problem when you're reading at or trying to spell.” (Daniel)</p>

		<p>“the logistics of understanding written language and knowing how that there's a directionality, that there's that these marks linked to a phonetic sound, all of those just basics of knowing how literacy works.” (Sarah)</p>
<p>2.2 Challenges teachers face in supporting LESLLA learners</p>	<p>2.2.1 Lack of differentiation for LESLLA learners</p>	<p>“Yeah, they are not separated at the moment in college... At present, these learners aren't differentiated at all.” (Samuel)</p> <p>“And we spoke to our manager, and we developed the idea of separating our learners who have literacy needs into a different class so that we could go at a slower pace. We could use tailored resources to help build the foundations of literacy for them, and we could give them a lot more individual attention. In a mixed pre entry class or beginner ESOL class.” (Rhian)</p>
	<p>2.2.2 Teachers' inability to devote time to LESLLA Learners in mixed abilities classes</p>	<p>“No, I really can't say that I do because in a class of maybe 15 people, it is very difficult to devote that amount of time and you know, X fell into that, but for different reasons in some ways that. It is very difficult to devote the time to one or two students who are really struggling.” (Rebecca)</p> <p>“There is a limit to how much I can actually devote, you know, direct time to them myself within that class time.” (Daniel)</p> <p>“In a class of 10 or 15 people, there's very, very little I can do. The teacher can do other than employ other people in the class to help, and then to identify those learners with these needs and to</p>

		direct them to a class specific for them.” (Samuel)
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Theme 3: Opportunities the Welsh context presents

Sub-themes (codes)	Title of the code	Supporting quotations
3.1 Wales is a refugee-welcoming nation	3.1.1. A Nation of Sanctuary vision	<p>“I think there has always been a more welcoming kind of approach from the top levels of governments of Wales, as you know, and the status of nation of sanctuary under the aspires to be a nation of sanctuary.” (John)</p> <p>“I think just being welcoming as a nation and as institutions and kind of celebrating, you know, refugees and asylum seekers. We have events, you know that celebrate refugee week.” (John)</p>
	3.1.2 A positive environment	<p>“I think most of the refugees that I've spoken to have had a positive experience of Wales and they say people are friendly and helpful and so I think there's lots of opportunities whereas you know if they're in a city, say in in London, they may not get that chance to practise English. People don't necessarily chat to them.” (Sarah)</p> <p>“Here I proudly say I teach asylum seekers and refugees.” (John)</p> <p>“So you know just that that kind of top down approach from government has been great knowing that you know we are not being fought against in what we're doing. We're being</p>

		supported and our funding has mostly been quite protected. So that that's been great.” (John)
3.2 Welsh Government support for ESOL in formal and informal settings	3.2.1 More options (formal/informal)	“You can study full time. You can study part time. There is voluntary classes. There is a lot of choice for ESL learners in Cardiff which I think, you won't get in in other places.” (Sarah)
	3.2.2 Generous funding compared to other places	<p>“I think having been to NATECLA and spoken to teachers in England, we seem to have a much better funding for refugees here in in Wales, so they were shocked that we were teaching full-time classes of 20 hours a week. A lot of classes in England are 2-3 hours a week. So to have 20 hours did not seem common in England. I need to look into that more. I'm not an expert on that, but certainly a lot of the issues that English teachers in England, said they just don't have enough time in a week to teach the curriculum that is given to them. So we don't have that. We have very generous funding. I mean 20 hours a week is a very generous amount to give students for learning.” (Sarah)</p> <p>“But from what I was picking up in NATECLA, there isn't that range of choice. Even (X – a friend we both know) was saying they've got a massive waiting list in Birmingham for classes. We have a waiting list, but...” (Sarah)”</p> <p>“I'm not entirely sure of what the English setup is. I get the impression that it is not as plentiful as it is in Wales, especially for asylum seekers and refugees.” (Rebecca)</p>

	<p>3.2.3 Easier access to ESOL in Wales</p>	<p>“here are differences in things such as the access to ESOL classes is far easier in Wales with regard to asylum status, so asylum seekers can attend ESOL classes from day one in Wales, that's not the case in England.</p> <p>Refugees have to wait six months or three years. I'm not sure in England, but they can attend classes immediately in Wales.” (Samuel)</p>
<p>3.3 Promoting bilingualism and multilingualism: Opportunities to learn Welsh and foster belonging</p>	<p>3.3.1 An opportunity to learn Welsh which helps in having a feeling of belonging</p>	<p>“But then, invariably, having sort of taught them the alphabet in a few words, you find that everybody's really positive, and they love the fact that it's a phonetic language which is brilliant, and you know, of course they have seen words like ‘heddlu’ on the side of the police car and things like that... And they start to understand then what these weird words mean, and so I think it helps them feel more at home, really.” (Daniel)</p> <p>“But I think the introduction of basic Welsh classes for everybody I think is important for a sense of belonging in this part of the country in Wales, because you see Welsh everywhere. And if you don't have an idea about Welsh, the history about how to pronounce it, then it's going to be another thing which makes you feel excluded, I imagine.” (Samuel)</p> <p>“But I think that there's a growing appreciation that there's an opportunity to create a sense of belonging for this nation if the people, new people have some familiarity, some understanding, not fluency, maybe, but some connection to the language.” (Samuel)</p>

		<p>“There's nothing to be scared of throwing them to the deeper programme where they'd actually pick up another language, and that over their career would give them higher earnings.” (John)</p>
	<p>3.3.2 Integrating Welsh language and culture in ESOL</p>	<p>“In Wales, obviously there are two languages. It's a growing bilingual country because a law has been passed to try and encourage the use of Welsh, and that is happening from the ground up, but it is happening in even in this college, we are now being encouraged to introduce more Welsh language to our ESOL students as well as ourselves which is great.” (Rhian)</p> <p>“I'd also try to just build awareness amongst our student cohort that we're a bilingual country and that they're going to see Welsh everywhere they might hear Welsh here and there.” (John)</p> <p>“but I think it's just always having that awareness of the cultural differences in Wales as well as introducing a few Welsh phrases and words.” (Sarah)</p>
	<p>3.3.3 Positive experiences with Welsh taster courses</p>	<p>“and she did a series of four Welsh taster sessions for them, and then she did a piece of practice-based research based on how receptive they were to it and how much more they wanted at the end of it. And she found that I think she did a group of 30, and out of the 30, twenty nine either said they wanted a little more or a lot more Welsh in the future. And that wasn't just Welsh language. That was Welsh language, culture, history.” (John)</p>

3.4 Other unique opportunities in Wales	3.4.1 An opportunity for working collaboratively	“There is greater opportunity to work collaboratively. So for example, we have the REACH hub, you know it's Swansea, Cardiff, Newport.” (Samuel)
	3.4.2 Having an ESOL policy	“We have an ESOL policy. England doesn't.” (Samuel)

Figures

Figure 1 (2019 UNHCR Global Trends, p.2)

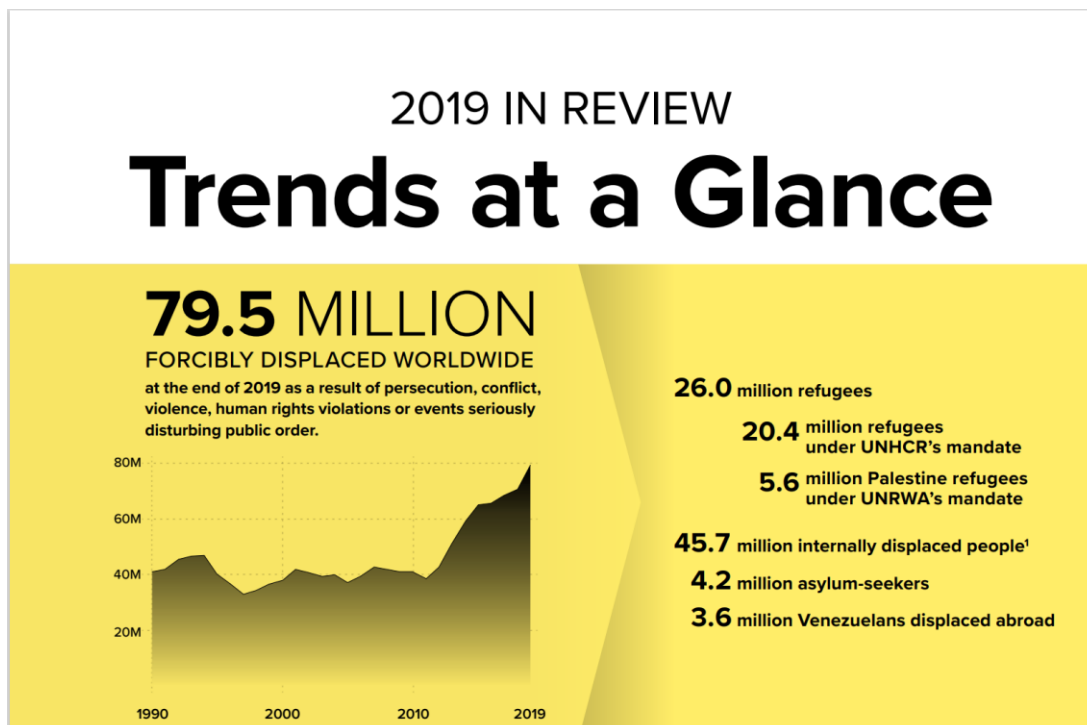


Figure 2 (2023 UNHCR Global Trends, p. 2)

