

Effects of esol teaching on social integration



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The effects of ESOL teaching on learners in relation to social integration, identity and social cohesion

Introduction

This paper will investigate the affect that current ESOL teaching practice can have in terms of impacting on a variety of diverse groups of learners. It is important to consider that ESOL provision is taught across a number of disciplines and exists in various capacities within colleges, community settings, in the workplace and even prison and detention centres. The types of learners undertaking ESL courses represent a rich mix of backgrounds and come with a number of incentives to learn English. For the benefit of focusing on an area that is potentially vast in its research, this dissertation will concentrate predominantly on the UK systems and the teaching of diverse communities that represent different ethnicity, cultural background and citizenship.

Breaking the Language Barriers published by the DfES in 2000 documents the findings of a report into ESOL provision in the UK and identifies a number of issues that needed addressing. The report categorizes ESOL students into four types of learner:

- Settled communities
- Refugees and asylum seekers
- Migrant workers
- Partners and spouses of students.

(DfES, 2000)

From these categories they determined that a great many ESOL students particularly refugees and asylum seekers experienced a range of problems including; financial, legal, social, physical and mental issues and clarified that they were marginalized, often excluded and living in poverty, subject to frequent discrimination and racism.

(Sourced from: <http://www.niace.org>.

[uk/Projects/esol-enquiry/documents/ESOL-Committee-Issues.doc](http://www.niace.org.uk/Projects/esol-enquiry/documents/ESOL-Committee-Issues.doc), Date accessed, 21/11/08

What the report also highlighted was the variable levels of teaching ability, which has been attributed to the shortage of adequately trained teachers, the lack of use of the learners' first language as a learning resource and the lack of support for students with special learning needs. (Sourced from: <http://www.niace.org.uk/Projects/esol-enquiry/documents/ESOL-Committee-Issues.doc>, Date accessed, 21/11/08

The way in which the link between social cohesion and teaching can be made is perhaps best summarised by the work of Dagenais et al in *Intersections of Social Cohesion, Education, and Identity in Teachers, Discourses, and Practices*. Their paper examines the debate surrounding government policy on promoting social cohesion. It exemplifies programmes in Canada where local and national schools and teachers work with professional agencies to develop policy directives that are geared around building social cohesion practices within a bilingual and multicultural framework. Dagenais et al took this developmental work a stage further by undertaking teacher-researcher collaboration to determine how teachers

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utilize both their own cultural backgrounds as well as their student's backgrounds in order to achieve an inclusive classroom setting. Teachers were seen to adopt learning techniques which were innovative in their ability to incite inclusion. Consequently the research project concluded that teachers have the ability to help inform policymakers, researchers and other learning practitioners about the link between 'identity, language and education implicated in social cohesion projects'

(Dagenais et al, 2008)

The link between social cohesion and teaching is not a modern concept. Historically it has played a significant role from the mid nineteenth century to the present day. Jewish settlers arrived in Victorian London and were assisted by voluntary organisations and a small series of published self-help texts. The next wave of refugees came about from those fleeing persecution in the Spanish Civil War and to escape Nazi Europe. It was during this time between the 1930's and the 1950's that the Berlitz guide and the linguaphone emerged. Over the next couple of decades following the post-war immigration to the UK the government began to respond as to local education authorities and the birth of the official ESOL teacher came about during the 1960's. (Sourced from: <http://www.niace.org.uk/publications/C/CriticalHistory.asp>, Date accessed, 22/11/08) Ten years later and the Russell Report was published. The Russell Report of 1973 was to 'prove a milestone in adult learning in the UK'. With Russell emphasising the special needs of adults and the necessity to provide for them by developing a variety of courses at different levels.

(Sourced from: <http://www.niace.org.uk/Publications/R/Russell.asp>, Date accessed, 22/11/08). This was an important decade again in terms of refugees entering the UK from Latin America, Uganda, Cambodia and Vietnam. The 1980's witnessed the abolition of the Industrial Language Training and adult and community education was experiencing one of its most vulnerable periods. But at the same time other community languages were being recognized.

During the 1990's there was a significant move towards recognizing ESOL which was positioned within the newly established Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit within the central government education department. (Sourced from: <http://www.niace.org.uk/publications/C/CriticalHistory.asp>, Date accessed, 22/11/08) Today this exists as The Skills for Life Strategy Unit which is based in the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills and has been operational under its new identity since November 2000.

The Unit works in tangent with other partner organisations including the Prison Service, Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and the Learning and Skills Development Agency in addition to voluntary and civil service. Its main objective is to take forward the Government's Skills for Life agenda. In short it encourages continual improvement with literacy, language and numeracy skills both at a national and local level. The Skills for Life Strategy Unit is categorized thus:

- Access and Inclusion
- ESOL Policy
- Learner Achievement

- Learner Engagement and Communications
- Level 2 and Level 2 PSAs
- Migration Strategy
- Quality and Teacher Education
- Workplace Engagement and Public Sector

(Sourced from: http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/readwriteplus/who_we_are, Date accessed, 22/11/08)

It is from the perspective of the twentieth century that this paper will scrutinize the historical relationship between ESOL provision and the wider community including its modern day responsibility to contribute to the framework of social cohesion and inclusivity.

Chapter one will concentrate on the existing evidence to suggest that there is a definite need to enhance current learning experiences for those people in society who may be at risk of exclusion or requiring greater understanding of their social, political and cultural background where the teaching of the English language is concerned. Recent research and investigative projects working with minority groups and diverse learners will be explored for consideration in the broader argument to suggest legitimizing these theories.

Chapter two will then examine what is currently being achieved in relation to forward thinking and strategic change taking into consideration the moves by government and learning bodies to begin the process of applying new curriculum and teaching developments that respond to the needs of a wider community of learners.

Chapter One: Identifying problems and issues amongst learners and tutors

The purpose of this chapter will be to outline an indication of the types of problems that exist for a variety of people in terms of how they are taught ESOL, to identify the characteristics and needs of the learners by way of case studies and examples. Consequently the teaching methods, ESOL curriculum and identified issues in these areas will be analysed.

The perceptions of English Language teaching vary greatly between different societies in accordance with their demographic, political situation and the sanctioned education systems of the country. For example in the United States second language tuition is considered the medium through which non-English speaking children are fast-tracked into English in the shortest amount of time, with little scope for quality of provision. (Julios, 2008)

To give another example, Pacific communities born into New Zealand life are currently facing a crisis with ESL provision in that while English is important to them economically and socially they are being denied their ancestral culture by losing their language and until further research has been carried out in this field it is feared the long-term issues of the teaching of English to Pacific ESL learners will remain problematic.

(Sourced from: <http://www.clesol.org.nz/2008/CLESOL08SaturdayAbstracts.pdf>, Date accessed, 21/11/08)

It is not just basic fundamental issues relating to culture or quality of teaching practice, other complications arise when learners have other specific learning needs which can further limit their academic success on an

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ESL course. For example individuals may experience low levels of literacy, no formal educational background or unfamiliarity with the standardized Roman-script. Recent studies in the UK reveal that within a cross-section of ESOL classes. ' 59 per cent of learners have had 11 or more years of Education, with 23 per cent having more than 15 years in education. Males were more likely than females to have no qualifications 37 per cent compared with 32 per cent of females'. (DfES, 2005) Some of these individuals may be survivors of torture and trauma as well as being older in years and require more time and attention in the classroom. The educational researcher McPherson determined that ' classes formed on the basis of a range of characteristics which indicate a slow pace of learning, will often result in such a disparate group that their different language and literacy needs will not be effectively met.' (Hinkel, 2005)

Refugees, asylum seekers and migrant workers as well as established settled communities want to learn English. Amongst these individuals there exists a huge diversity as well as some obvious common themes like those already touched upon. All of which bring with them a set of needs and different expectations as to what students require from a course of ESL teaching. Their backgrounds and life histories are often complicated. A number of ESOL Pathfinder projects were commissioned in 2002 across ten locations in England with the intention of contributing to the Government's Public Services Agreement Target to ' improve the literacy, language and numeracy levels of 2. 25 million adults between the launch of Skills for Life in 2001 and 2010' (DfES, 2005)

The ESOL initiatives were evaluated later that same year and stressed the diversity of learning characteristics within this sector, with interesting figures emerging about the slightly increased numbers of women than men undertaking the courses. This suggests that there may be a number of challenges for women trying to support their children at home. Gender in itself is another significant point of interest in this study as many women can be believed to have lived in England for a number of years and have never learnt the language or only speak elements of it, these women are often most recognized in Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities where they have very different cultural responsibilities and therefore less opportunities to attend beneficial ESL courses. (Heath and Cheung 2006) In particular women who are asylum seekers or refugees can experience tremendous isolation and feel restricted with access to health services, not being able to speak the language as well as being potentially more vulnerable to abuse or violence from a cultural perspective. The ESOL evaluation revealed that almost half of all learners were less than thirty years of age emanating from a broad sphere of ethnic origin. This ethnic breakdown included White and other students totaling 16 per cent, African, 15 per cent, Pakistani, 13 per cent and Other Asian 13 per cent.

The Learner Survey revealed over fifty-four different first languages spoken by learners. Half were married or living with a partner and one in six were living away from their partner who resided outside of the UK. (DfES, 2005)

The 2008 NIACE report - ESOL: the context and issues also corroborates this evidence and adds that students of English are learning for a variety of purposes which include securing or progressing into long-term employment, <https://assignbuster.com/effects-of-esol-teaching-on-social-integration/>

supporting their children, being able to access services, being able to integrate more into their surrounding community and aspiring to embrace the British culture and British political systems. (Sourced from: <http://www.niace.org.uk/lifelonglearninginquiry/docs/Jane-Ward-migration-evidence.pdf>, date accessed, 21/11/08)

Most recent studies reflect the need to improve on the way in which ESOL is delivered and encouraged for the benefit of the inclusion of a variety of needs and abilities. It is clear however that this issue has been apparent for a number of years which makes the prospect of re-developing curriculum provision and teaching methods in this complex area of teaching particularly difficult. ESOL has inherently adopted a style which serves a purpose, designed for the masses often to be delivered and completed within a limited timeframe. In 1989 a study of 13 Adult Education ESOL centres across the UK were investigated focusing on bilingual migrant learners. This early analysis captured the attitudes and motivations of these learners and emphasized their desire to maintain their mother tongue and heritage whilst being taught the language and customs of their new host country. (Lal Khanna, et al, 1998)

One of the most interesting and informative research projects to date in this area is reflected in the Adult Learners' Lives (ALL) working with people who are learning within adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL groups to understand and appreciate their concept of the learning experience in relation to their wider lives; covering the regions of Blackburn, Lancaster and Liverpool. As part of this initiative a recent commissioned piece of research was carried out amongst ESOL students who were enrolled on an evening class at <https://assignbuster.com/effects-of-esol-teaching-on-social-integration/>

Blackburn College. The findings of this report share some of the most important data in existence relating to primary first hand interviews with students.

The outcomes reveal both positive and negative opinions relating to ESOL provision, which essentially can be interpreted in both a positive and negative light.

The participants believed that more than anything their work experience had provided them with the best opportunity to encourage their learning of the English language and was much less restricted than the classroom. For many this was their only chance to utilize the language outside of the classroom. The learners were critical about the amount of provision available and found it affected their learning capabilities. One participant in particular, Mahmood found that working all day and then studying English in the evening prevented him from finding a vocational course in a different practical subject that could increase his chances of gaining better employment.

In terms of issues relating to their background and culture, many familiar examples of diversity were apparent across the group as were their complex needs and considerations. Frederick carried the scars of war in his country and suffered considerably both physically and psychologically. Despite this his motivation levels were extremely high.

Iqbal came to England in order to be with his new wife. The transition from his old life and professional career had left him very dissatisfied. Proving earlier references to gender and cultural relationship issues Ammara was studying at degree level and had been instructed by her husband to

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discontinue with it. This had repercussions on her work life which she had to compromise with and learn English accordingly.

Below are some of the edited extracts detailing the participant's interviews taken from this report.

Frederick's story:

' Frederick came to England for the reasons above and more. He arrived in England with nothing. He didn't have permission to work, couldn't speak the language and had no friends or networks. His first step of integration in to the country was his attendance on an ESOL course at Blackburn College. Despite his desperate situation he was anxious to start again and enrolled almost immediately upon his arrival in Blackburn. Although he was aware of the importance of learning English he found the classes very difficult at first: *" It was my first time, the first time it was so difficult."* In spite of his worries he continued the classes and vastly improved his English during his first year here. Also significant was the beneficial effect ESOL classes had on his social life. He made many new friends, who helped ease the loneliness of living in a new country, and gave him an extra chance to practice his English.'

Ammara's story:

' Ammara sees a close relationship between education and work. She clearly perceives education and training as a stepping-stone into work. She has shown that she is quite adept at completing courses and using the obtained qualifications to find work. Her biggest problem is language related. She had quite a good decent overall level of English when she arrived in England particularly with regards to reading and writing. Due to the high level of education she obtained in Pakistan she was able to complete the courses she

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took here easily because she had a good level of literacy skills in English.

The language issues she is facing these days arise from her limited oral grasp of English and this appears to be most noticeable to her in her working life.

With regards to work and language, Ammara feels she can manage but feels she regularly encounters difficulties. She has numerous concerns about language. She feels very unconfident about her use of grammar and structure when she is speaking. She believes that despite having a good knowledge of English, her speaking ‘imperfections’ lead to a barrier to her professional development. She also thinks that what she describes as a limited vocabulary is a barrier to communication and explanation. This has various implications for Ammara in the workplace. Because she lacks confidence she believes that her language prevents her from using her initiative at work, and so she ‘keeps quiet’. *“sometimes I know somebody is wrong and even if the person is senior, I can explain but I just kept quiet because I feel like everyone is picking on me.”* She also thinks that people’s perceptions of her professionally will change just because of her language problems.’

Mahmood’s story:

‘While he was waiting for the Home Office to grant him permission to work, Mahmood was unemployed for six months. He used this time to start English classes and familiarise himself with his new country and surroundings. Upon receiving his ‘leave to remain’ and permission to work from the Home Office he got a job at a sewing factory in Blackburn, where he still works. His role is to sew medical paraphernalia such as bandages and neck braces. He says

that initially he found this job quite easy, as he was able to use the skills and experience gained from his sewing job in Afghanistan. He does however worry about his future. He says there is little chance of promotion in this job and therefore he is keen to look for different work. He has started to think about a change.

When asked about his future ambitions with regards to work, Mahmood says he would like to do a building job. He thinks that this will be difficult for him to achieve because he doesn't feel he has enough experience. He doesn't feel that the experience he gained from his sealing job in Afghanistan will be of use to him here, as he believes that methods of building vary from the two countries. Mahmood is aware that he will have to do a course to help him achieve his aims, but has little knowledge about the courses available to him and thinks that it will be difficult to do a part time course, work full time and continue with his English classes.

Mahmood believes that his job in England has had a positive impact on his language. He gets indirect language support from his work peers : *“ and if I've got any problem with any word, pronunciation they will help me.”* He is able to use informal English at work in a mostly friendly atmosphere. He is also positive about the support he has gained from his boss with regards to his language. He says that right from the start of his employment his boss encouraged him to attend English classes. If overtime clashes with his twice weekly evening English class then his boss is always flexible, he will say, *“ OK you don't have to work you go to college.”* Mahmood is extremely aware of his language needs and is very motivated to improve. He told me that he uses friends at work to practice language covered in class, and his level of <https://assignbuster.com/effects-of-esol-teaching-on-social-integration/>

motivation can be seen in his 100% attendance in English class and the huge improvements he has made over the last two years.

(Sirling, 2005) Accessed from: <http://www.literacy.lancs.ac.uk/workpapers/wp08-esol-blackburn.pdf>

What is visibly obvious here are the feelings, aspirations and characteristics of a group of learners who may well require much of the special attention to teaching that this paper is attempting to argue. Although an already fairly advanced English language speaker, Ammara could like so many others at that level benefit from tutoring in just a few specific areas of English acquisition and at a time of the day when she does not have to juggle her family and several other jobs.

And we see with Frederick that despite finding it hard to study and adjust to the cultural and social restraints of a new country he has actually achieved a sense of community and belonging by way of attending ESOL classes.

It is clear that it must not be assumed that all migrant peoples, asylum seekers and diverse ethnicities should be labeled marginalized and socially excluded as there are many who do not experience this type of isolation. Nonetheless it is dependant on the type of teacher, classroom environment and delivery techniques which need to be made consistent in their quality and accessibility.

Returning to Jane Ward's ESOL into Context paper, she is very specific about the issues relating to the shortage of specialist ESOL teachers which impacts on the overall quality of provision across the UK with long waiting lists and

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minimized teaching time occurring in a number of venues offering ESOL tuition in urban areas. Rurally too where many migrant workers are being placed on entry to the country there is an inadequacy where teaching experience and expertise to deal with these communities exists. Ward also stresses that in rural areas 'learners accessing vocational programmes too often encounter subject tutors who have little awareness or training in language learning.' (Sourced from: <http://www.niace.org.uk/lifelonglearninginquiry/docs/Jane-Ward-migration-evidence.pdf>, date accessed, 21/11/08

Chapter Two: Solutions and future provision

Just as the former chapter dealt with the identification of the problems and consequences of inadequacies with ESOL teaching in respect of achieving a holistic and inclusive approach, this chapter will seek to establish potential solutions and recommendations for taking forward initiatives for future change within the current ESOL sector. This will be achieved by way of exploring current government objectives and responses to recent research which has exposed the levels of insufficient delivery within the sector.

In 2003 the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy published a comprehensive review of recent research projects carried out in the field of Adult ESOL. In particular that which 'focuses on learners who need English for the UK workplace, for study in further and higher education and for living in the community. The review mainly concentrates on research that has taken place in the last 15 years and it has attempted to include all of the research that has been carried out within the UK. As most of this has been fairly small scale or not directly concerned with pedagogy, research <https://assignbuster.com/effects-of-esol-teaching-on-social-integration/>

that has been carried out in the USA, Australia, Canada and Europe is also included and its relevance to the UK context is discussed.’ (Sourced from: <http://www.nrdc.org.uk/content.asp?CategoryID=424&ArticleID=353>, Date, accessed, 22/11/08)

The recommendations that emerged from this review have been summarised below:

- It is recommended that a large scale study of actual practice in different settings is carried out. Alongside this larger study there should be a number of smaller ethnographic studies of good practice in ESOL classes, covering: learners with little prior experience of the written language; bilingual literacy provision; workplace courses; and language support on mainstream courses. The aim of these studies is to provide accounts that can be disseminated to other practitioners.

There should be ongoing research into the relationships between teaching and learning in formal contexts. This could be based around a programme of practitioner research, with support from established researchers. This research should explore:

- specific classroom tasks to address issues of accuracy and fluency in the spoken language
- an investigation of different media of learning, including written materials and new technology
- learners’ discursive experiences and practices outside the classroom, and how classroom practices can take account of them
- learners’ expectations and learning strategies.

And that primarily there is a need to track learners in terms of their learning ability and experience (both in and out of the classroom) as well as gleaning specific information relating to them as individuals, the key aims being to determine:

- learners who arrive in the UK with professional qualifications and experience, but low levels of English
- learners whose first language is an English based Creole or dialect
- learners with trauma.

(Sourced from: <http://www.nrdc.org.uk/content.asp?CategoryID=424&ArticleID=353>, Date, accessed, 22/11/08)

This is a refreshing indication that learning practitioners are now heavily involved in a dialogue that recognises both the necessity to investigate further into the practices of ESOL and its students nationally. This also compliments the Government's new commitment within its '*Community Cohesion and Migration, 2007-08*' report which makes recommendations as well as recognising localised 'Further Education Colleges, as the centres of ESOL training in the front-line for new arrivals, in particular as they are often the first official agency encountered.'

The report goes on to clarify that teaching staff working within ESOL should be providing 'support and help to new arrivals and referral to other agencies'. The Government continues in its conviction for change by allocating funding to this area of support. (House of Commons Report, 2007)

This is however not sufficient action for many academics working in the field. As Linda Morrice demonstrates in her paper *Lifelong learning and the social* <https://assignbuster.com/effects-of-esol-teaching-on-social-integration/>

integration of refugees in the UK : the significance of social capital . Morrice challenges the UK Government on its recent measures to account for the inclusion and integration of refugees in the face of an increasing migrant population. She refers to the learning issues of refugees and argues that current education systems and opportunities do not adequately address the issues that they face and declares rather that ' for refugees to become integrated and useful members of society requires a shift away from the present focus on formal, individualised education provision to a greater recognition of informal and social learning opportunities'. (Morrice, 2007)

Alongside this " Discourses on social cohesion widely acknowledge that public education systems provide critical contexts for constructing social cohesion among their diverse communities" (Dagenais et al, 2008 p 85). What this seems to show is that ESOL provision to date may be serving the political ends of British society by covert mechanism of social control.

In her paper Action Research: Exploring Learner Diversity Pam McPherson carried out a class-room project in an Australian adult migrant English language class. It succeeded in profiling as well as discovering the learning needs of disparate learners. She trialed a number of teaching exercises and different learning techniques from course design, resources and even the room layout.

In terms of responding to students with limited formal education and low levels of literacy, she suggested the following actions should be taken and integrated into ESOL courses:

- Assessment and referral schemes that can identify special needs at entry into the programme
- Bilingual assistance for course information, goal clarification, language and learning.
- Low intensity courses
- A teaching methodology that has explicit goals, the development of language learning strategies and spoken and written language for community access
- Teachers trained to identify special needs and develop appropriate strategies to meet them.
- Recognition within the certificates in spoken and written English in order to achieve language goals related to settlement needs and the need for further education and training. (Hinkel, 2005)

McPherson also recognises a specific type of approach for asylum seekers and those who have experienced trauma and the tortures of War. That their physical, Social and psychological needs require specialist attention.

Assuming that many of these individuals are likely to feel overwhelmed, out of control as well as possessing memory loss and poor concentration it is likely that they will have difficulty with the amount of control and concentration that is associated with language learning. (Hinkle, 2005)

Perhaps a solution might be to make ESOL classes more flexible and the level of participation and communication compliant with the needs of the students. Many of McPherson's findings inspired the government in Australia to make significant changes to their systems of resettlement and language instruction.

What then have the g