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Editorial

Dear Reader,

May I commence by wishing you all a happy new year and a great 2025!

The *Language Issues* (LI) editorial committee continues to advocate for the imperative role of ESOL practitioners in contributing to the journal – bridging practice and research. Practitioners offer unique insights and innovative strategies and address real-world challenges. Their contributions ensure that research is grounded in practical realities, informs policies, and guides professional development. Sharing their expertise shapes ESOL discourse, strengthening the profession and maintaining the journal's relevance and inclusivity. The following articles reflect these sentiments.

Mary Milton's article highlights a workshop at the NATECLA National Conference in June 2024, which emphasised self-care and well-being, leading to the implementation of short well-being sessions in her ESOL Employability classes. Jyoti Sharma from Swinburne University of Technology describes introducing a dual qualification programme for migrant students in Australia, focusing on language proficiency, digital literacy, and healthcare services assistance. Tiantian Han's article suggests fluidity on a spectrum to recognise English usage, arguing that ESOL resources should present English usage more accurately, highlighting the need for further research and teacher professional development. Mathew Ashcroft's article explores the autonomy of one group of students who completed study diaries to track their English out-of-class interactions. Gordon Well's article (reprint) describes the *Island voices/Guthan nan Eilean language capture and curation project*, focusing on speech and bilingualism and its Hebridean community context. Paula Barrowcliffe's article focuses on enhancing diversity in the global ELT profession even though Scotland's ESOL lecturers are predominantly white, heterosexual, and speak English. Josianne Block's article highlights the importance of incorporating students' first languages into English language learning, emphasising the need for ESOL teachers to promote ELF for communication and social inclusion. Finally, Linda Ulrich reviews *The Teacher Gap* by Allen and Sims.

Language Issues welcomes contributions as articles, resource reviews and responses to what you read here. Please send your contributions to info@natecla.org.uk and copy in flanagandecan6@gmail.com. You can also contribute to the *Language Issues* blog: <https://nateclalanguageissues.wordpress.com>. Contributions to the blog can go to info@natecla.org.uk

Declan Flanagan, Editor

“Yes, what about me?”

A workshop that changed me as an ESOL tutor

May Milton

This article is about the workshop I attended during the NATECLA National Conference in June 2024 on ‘Emotion Labour in the Classroom: ‘Yes, what about me?’ given by Orsolya Dunn, which changed my own perspective and teaching practice as an ESOL tutor. It made me resolve to care for myself and ensure my well-being, and it opened ways of embedding short well-being sessions in my ESOL for employability classes this term. My practice in teaching a course to help ESOL students develop employability skills, improve their English, and place them for employment was changed for the better. In addition, I will be sharing my journey as an ESOL tutor after I experienced a major health issue. Likewise, I will write about how this workshop helped me understand what I went through and how it gave me the words to set boundaries for myself. It allowed me to be more self-caring and mindful of my well-being, which led to embedding well-being activities to help my twelve Bangladeshi ESOL students in East London be work-ready.

My journey as an ESOL tutor

I have been teaching ESOL for more than ten years, and for the past three years, I accepted more tasks that will enhance our college’s ESOL delivery and community projects. I worked as an ESOL tutor and agreed to add community organising and career advice tasks to my weekly tasks. I was happy to be at the forefront of combining lesson delivery with gathering my ESOL students to participate in co-curricular activities at the community level to help them develop self-confidence, access community resources, develop their employability skills and give them a competitive edge in getting employment. I did not say no or set boundaries to keep my need for rest and recovery from teaching ESOL and doing extra tasks outside the classroom. In retrospect, I realised I agreed to be overloaded with these tasks because I wanted so much to help my ESOL students be competent in the English language. I wanted to help them join the UK workforce and start a good life in the UK. To recall, I often worked late to prepare lesson plans and learning resources and gave extra time to my students beyond my contracted work hours to catch up with lessons. I rendered extra time beyond what was needed to complete all my administrative tasks and attend community activities to represent our college, even on Saturdays and evenings. I worked during my lunchtime, and sometimes, I took short break times of 15 minutes to catch up with work. I started to use my weekends to mark homework; I even offered to meet with students on Zoom to give them feedback about their homework and practice exam results. It is known that ESOL students are vulnerable, and they need support to deal with war trauma. Often, there are events that threaten them, like being harassed by unwelcoming elements in the community, delayed or loss of benefits, or not having enough food to eat. As an ESOL tutor in London, I experienced supporting a student with young children who was evicted from his home with a short notice period. The family was moved around London from one hostel to another in different boroughs. To help ESOL students, I keep a list of the addresses of helpful agencies where I can signpost them so that they will not become homeless and will have a weekly supply of food. These extra support tasks are important to ensure they are safeguarded. With my past training in career advice, I agreed to meet job-ready students to help them search for jobs and apply for employment. I took

one ESOL class to observe my advocacy work at the community level to help migrants get employment by asking for the support of local businesses and politicians. Without regard to my capacity and time limits, I led the implementation of the first job fair in my college to ensure that our ESOL student-job applicants would gain confidence in speaking and applying to employers. Watching ESOL students carry their written CVs, ask employers questions, and apply for jobs was rewarding.

Unfortunately, last year, before our first college job fair, I was diagnosed with a medical condition that required me to go through major surgery. Two weeks after our college job fair, I was in hospital and lived one day at a time. Then, I realised I have a body that needs to be listened to and cared for. It took time to get a good grasp of what happened to me. For the first time, I slept for long hours to heal well from my surgery. I realised how precious and short life can be and learnt to value the importance of teaching ESOL excellently and caring for myself and my well-being. I was honest with management about what I could and could not do. It is good to point out that my college is a community learning charity and an investor to people, so I felt I could negotiate a slow re-entry to work with adapted tasks and work hours. I was slowly returning to a normal life routine, and attending the NATECLA national conference from 28 to 29 June 2024 was timely. The workshop on *'Emotion Labour in the Classroom: What about me?'* gave me the words to describe what happened to me, and it changed my work life and teaching practice.

What I learned from this important workshop

ESOL tutors experience all sorts of emotionality and stress inside their classroom that could make them experience vicarious traumatising. My own experience of teaching ESOL and delivering co-curricular activities to enrich the ESOL classroom experience stretched me beyond my limits. While attending this workshop, I recognised that the “emotional labour” and pressures I experienced as an ESOL tutor went beyond my ESOL classroom. I learnt the right words to describe what happened to me. I should have set boundaries to help myself cope well and ensure my well-being and good health. Teaching ESOL allows us to meet some of our students’ needs and college requirements beyond what we can do in a day. It is inherent in teaching ESOL that there is diversity of demands both at the curriculum and personal levels. The needs of ESOL students can be beyond our capacity to support and address.

In this workshop, Orsolya Dunn made me recognise that it is all right to say, ‘What about me? What about my need for rest and my well-being?’ The workshop compelled me to watch out for moments in my job as an ESOL tutor and an Employability Adviser when I am overloaded beyond my capacity and time. It affirmed the fact that I can say “NO” and give priority to my self-care and my own need for rest and recovery. Moreover, this workshop reminded me to investigate sources of guilt feelings when I say no, which is part of my own training or family background. I learned to remove ‘self-laceration tendencies when I have the ‘myth that everything that happens in class depends on the teacher’ (Britzman, 1991). I realised I do not have to be guilty when I cannot do all my tasks. By recognising my limitations, I will survive well in my job as an ESOL tutor and be more effective.

If we stop caring for ourselves, we will be vulnerable to major health issues. In this workshop, a list of activities was presented that one can do to ensure self-care (Davidson, 2017; Phoenix, 2013):

1. Take time for lunch.
2. Set boundaries.
3. Leave work at work.
4. Ask for help.
5. Say no more often.

6. Learn something new.
7. Do not carry things on your own.
8. Find time for reflection.
9. Find something to laugh about.
10. Seek professional help if you need it.
11. Plan your professional development.

This list is now part of my weekly well-being activities. It is also good to share these activities with a friend and colleague to remind each other of our need to follow this list. To add, in this workshop, I learnt to express no to management in a positive way:

"I wish I could, but I can't take on any more responsibilities this week."

I will still be an effective and efficient ESOL tutor when I say this phrase. Then, I started to investigate the source of my negative thoughts about saying no and work to release my mind from it.

Embedding well-being activities in my ESOL classroom

This workshop made me observe my ESOL students and ask, 'What about my 'ESOL for Employability' students?' As a result of what I learned from this workshop, I asked my ESOL students if they felt fit to get a job given their present health and health issues. I was able to collect this data from direct group interviews with them. They are young mothers who came to live in the UK as spouses to their British husbands. Life for them is their husbands and children; some are from arranged marriages by their families, which adjusted in marriage and in the UK. They need work and a place to volunteer to improve their English and gain confidence. During the induction, we talked about the British values and dignity of work, and they expressed how different their life is in the UK. They talked excitedly about the meaning of democracy and liberty and said they appreciated their freer life in the UK. Their husbands understand and support them in their plan to study ESOL and find jobs. On the other hand, some of them struggled to adjust to the freedom their British husbands gave them; it is the opposite of how some of their fathers in Bangladesh taught them the importance of family life and staying home. Their concept of work is doing things in the kitchen, *"I want to be a dinner lady," "I want to be a carer for children,"* and *"I can care for the elderly."* I helped them identify their transferable skills in managing their homes so that they realise they can apply for other jobs in the labour market far beyond those related to doing things at home. I found out that these young Bangladeshi mums have major health issues, given the challenge of caring for a big family. Some see their GPs for weekly injections to address arthritic shoulders and back; two had major surgeries, another fell while cleaning her window and had to go through physiotherapy, two suffer from depression due to a divorce and another due to the death of her mother. These are apparent reasons to embed well-being sessions in my weekly lesson plans. To achieve this, we did the following activities during the first of my three-hour class period:

- identify how to live a healthier lifestyle and learn new vocabulary, assess if they are living healthily
- practice grounding techniques in dealing with anxious thoughts by using the six senses
- breathing exercises
- talk about the Healthy Eating Plate and share healthy recipes
- have simple chair-based exercises to stretch arms and strengthen backs
- our college wellbeing services (WBS) introduced art therapy in my class
- other well-being activities will be introduced that relate to any need that will surface.

Embedding well-being activities in my ESOL classroom at the beginning of my classes made the students feel my concern for being healthy, having good well-being, and being fit to learn and work. Students come to class happier and excited to write their CVs and learn about job interviews and other employability skills. I heard one of them say, *“I want to improve my well-being, then manage my home well and work well.”* I was pleased to see that they started looking after each other during break time; they took turns making teas and coffees for each other and brought two sets of Bengali traditional food to share with everyone when we did art therapy in class with the college well-being services led by another ESOL tutor. It was uplifting to see the community centre coordinator, who I teach in East London, join the art therapy session. She said my ESOL for employability class is the most attended class for the past two terms. She was happy to know that one of the ESOL students had already found a job as a Meal Supervisor Cover in a primary school. The coordinator said that starting next year, the next round of this course will focus on employability and well-being. Consequently, I am so grateful for what I learned from the NATECLA National Conference 2024, especially the opportunity to attend Orsolya Dunn’s workshop on *“Emotion Labour in Classroom: What About Me?”* It made me practice self-compassion and self-care, which made me embed well-being activities in my ESOL classroom. I hope we will all continue to be excellent and hardworking ESOL tutors and also excellent in our practice of self-care and self-compassion.

The author

May Milton, ESOL Tutor and Inclusion Officer, Career Adviser.

East London Advanced Technology Training (ELATT). May studied for a PGCE at the Institute of Education, University of London and an additional Diploma to teach ESOL and Literacy at Westminster University.

Innovative programme: dual qualification in English as an additional language (EAL) and health services vocational qualification in Australia

Jyoti Sharma

Background

English as an Additional Language (EAL) is the term used in Australia for English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL). EAL training for adults in Australia typically emphasises basic skills and knowledge essential for settlement purposes. However, one of the main aims of the migrant students in EAL classes is to find employment. In response to this need, Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne, started a dual qualification programme in 2019/2020. Seven students were enrolled in Certificate III in Aged Care (nursing home care) and Certificate III in EAL, with four finishing their qualifications and three finding employment in the aged care sector.

This dual qualification program required migrant students to be better prepared regarding their language proficiency skills to understand the specialised language required in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses. The findings showed they needed better digital literacy skills to manage online study material and use online learning management systems to successfully participate in and complete assessments. Mainstream VET course materials and assessments needed to be reviewed and adapted to meet the language needs of the migrant cohort.

Based on these findings, Swinburne University initiated another innovative programme in 2022/23, Dual Qualification in Certificate III in Health Services Assistance (HSA)/ Certificate III in EAL. The Certificate III in HSA is a qualification that leads to entry-level employment in health care facilities, such as hospitals, aged care, personal care, etc. The type of work a health services assistant might do includes clinical cleaning, hospital laundry, patient food service, bed making, patient transport, assisting with patient movement and maintaining supply rooms.

Programme purpose and outcomes

Two programme outcomes were identified: firstly, to provide specialised English language, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy support and tuition to students from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background to enable them to successfully complete a VET certificate/ qualification. Secondly, to develop course materials and contextual assessment tasks for the learner cohort that will support the successful completion of a VET qualification. In terms of student outcomes, the aim was to improve the student's English language and digital literacy and study skills and assist them in achieving new skills, knowledge, and qualifications. Another aim was to develop confidence and a higher chance of employment or further study options. The measurement of outcomes was regular attendance and engagement, completion of Certificate III in HSA and success in finding employment.

Methodology

It was proposed that the programme be delivered in two phases over a period of one and a half years. The first six months were the preparatory intensive phase, and the second phase, in which the students were enrolled and completed Certificate III in EAL/ HAS in a year.

Preparing for dual qualification

The *English for Health Services Assistance* course started in January 2022. The duration of the programme was six months, from January to June 2022, during which the students were to be prepared for the dual qualification in HSA/EAL. Before the commencement of the course, all students were interviewed and completed a language proficiency test to determine if they had sufficient language and numeracy skills to complete the course successfully. Two EAL teachers were organised to teach the class for the whole semester to provide stability and support. The classes were delivered face-to-face, four days a week, and the students were enrolled in Certificate II in EAL.

Student cohort

The students were mainly from two Swinburne University campuses who had already been participating in EAL courses before they commenced the HSA/ EAL dual qualification. The employment service provider referred one student, and a few heard about the programme through word of mouth.

Twenty students started the course; seven were men, thirteen were women (Image 1), and the age group ranged from 21 to mid-50s.

The students were from eight different nationalities: Burmese, Chinese, Vietnamese, Russian, Iranian, Lebanese, Tibetan and Korean.

Educational background of the student also varied across the level. There was a paramedic, IT professional and other professional backgrounds, including engineers and accountants. Three students had not finished middle or high school in their country.



Image 1:
Students who started the dual qualification program

Semester one: English to prepare for HSA

Contextualised Learning Material and Assessments: The units to be delivered were selected and could be contextualised to cover health and work-related topics, exposing students to the vocabulary needed for their dual qualification in the future.

Units selected for the course focused on developing learning goals and strategies, communication skills required in casual and transactional conversations, reading and writing simple personal and transactional texts, and participating in and responding to spoken information and directions. They also included reading and writing simple instructional and information texts, working with numbers and money in familiar situations and producing simple word-processed documents, which was a computing unit.

The units in the preparatory course were chosen to help students expand their health and work-related vocabulary, strengthen their numeracy skills for everyday work environments, and enhance their digital literacy. This included navigating Swinburne University's learning management system (LMS), accessing study materials and assessments online, and completing and submitting assignments electronically.

Along with developing learning skills in terms of goal setting and using strategies to develop learning skills, various health-related topics were covered in each lesson to expand the student's vocabulary. The topics and vocabulary were developed from simple concepts to understanding more complex aspects of health.

Some topics covered during the preparatory phase were: What is health? What are the various aspects of health? Different types of health care workers, the human body – parts and organs, types of disabilities, allergies and allergens, First Aid, healthy eating, hygiene and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), food safety and behaviours of concern, etc.

Communication skills were developed using role plays to learn casual conversation skills, keeping in mind cultural differences and sensitivities, how to give opinions, negotiate at work, follow instructions and give simple instructions.

Digital literacy topics that were covered included the basics of using computers, health and safety, different types of documents, creating Word documents, logging on to Swinburne Learning management system (LMS), navigating websites to find information, filling in online forms, attempting assessment tasks online, and attaching and uploading files and documents.

Along with the teaching material, assessment tasks for all units were also contextualised to meet the demands of the English for health preparatory course. The assessment tasks were written to meet the performance features of EAL units in the context of health topics.

Orientation and regular incursions to the nursing lab: In collaboration with nursing staff, EAL students in the English preparatory course were introduced to nursing labs to familiarise them with the equipment and terminology. This experience helped students build confidence in communicating with teachers in the health mainstream course, engage with the equipment in the labs, ask questions to instructors and other nursing students, and practice their English skills outside the familiar setting of the EAL classroom.

The first orientation visit to the Nursing lab (Image 2) was done at the start of term 1. Students visited the nursing department at Swinburne University and met the staff.

This helped break the ice, and students saw the hospital beds and their mechanisms and discussed their future plans with the nursing staff.

After completing a health care course in Australia, they asked questions about the pathways, course material, course duration, and pathways.

During the second visit in term 1, the students visited another lab and saw the use of various hoists used in the hospitals to move patients.

Students participated in the demonstration of using bed hoists, standing hoists and wheelchairs by the nursing teachers during this visit. (Images 3, 4, 5)

Incursions by Water Well Project Team: The Water Well Project is a free and interactive health education programme run by professional healthcare volunteers to educate community groups from migrant and refugee backgrounds. They offer tailored health education sessions to educational institutes and community groups. Nurses and doctors run these information sessions in a friendly and interactive way. During the preparatory phase, the Water Well project was contacted, and they offered a few sessions to the students. The first session was about the 'Australian Health System' and was organised at the start of the course to help students understand the basics of the health care system in Australia (Images 6, 7).



Image 2: Students visited the nursing lab and met teachers.



Image 6: Interactive talk by doctors and nurses



Image 3: students observing use of standing hoists



Image 7: Australian Health system information session



Image 4: students participating in using a wheelchair



Image 8: Interactive talk about bone and joint health



Image 5: students observing and participating in use of bed hoists



Image 9: Students participating in exercise activity for better bone and joints

The Water Well Project team also presented another session about 'Bone and Joint Health' in term 2 of the preparatory phase. A group of nurses and doctors also ran the session. This further enhanced students' exposure to healthcare staff in real life to make them comfortable with the vocabulary, listening to instructions, asking questions and gaining confidence (Image. 8, 9).

Findings at the end of English for Health preparatory phase

Firstly, students with a clear sense of purpose and specific goals, such as further training or employment, are more likely to engage in a programme with strong focus and commitment, evident as students attend regularly throughout the semester. Secondly, the continuity of having the same two teachers throughout the programme and a core group of full-time students provided stability and fostered a cohesive and supportive learning environment. Regular visits to the nursing lab and talks by professionals assisted students in developing confidence and working together. Thirdly, post-beginner and intermediate-level students can be taught to use online learning management systems to access resources, complete activities and assessments, upload homework, and more. Having completed the English proficiency test before commencing the programme, students had enough language to comprehend the Swinburne LMS instructions. Fourthly, students' digital literacy skills improved through targeted training on LMS, preparing them to begin their VET qualification. All lessons were delivered through PowerPoints; assessments were attempted and uploaded online throughout the preparatory phase. Finally, contextualised materials that support VET content learning can enhance language, literacy, numeracy, and digital (LLND) skills. These can make it relevant to students and help them achieve their learning goals, as mentioned above in the health topics and digital literacy-focused content delivered and covered during the delivery of EAL units.

Dual qualification certificate III in EAL/HSA

Once the students completed the preparation course, they were transitioned into the dual qualification programme. Before commencing the course, the students attempted and cleared BKSBS (Basic Key Skills Builder) test, a computer-based assessment to assess the learners' current English and numeracy skills. It is a prerequisite that students have a score of level 2 at both levels, English and numeracy, to commence the health care assistance course. The course commenced in July 2022 with 19 students, and 17 completed it in June 2023. The students were enrolled in Cert III in EAL and Cert III Health Services Assistance. Two students withdrew from the course due to illness and inability to manage the HSA coursework and assessments.

The students attended two days of English classes and two days of health assistance courses. The focus in EAL classes was mainly to support the vocabulary and language skills required to successfully complete the health qualification. To meet this requirement, the EAL teacher was given access to the teaching modules in the HSA course, which assisted them in preparing for the EAL class delivery. There was a focus on developing research-based study skills to prepare students for further education, like a Diploma in Nursing or Certificate IV in Allied Health.

Moreover, a constant collaboration between the nursing and the EAL staff was needed to teach this programme. They met regularly and discussed strategies to assist each other in better delivering the course. The EAL teacher aimed to prepare students' vocabulary, terminology, and participation in role plays to support scenario-based assessments in health course units and develop better communication skills, which they would require

in the workplace. The EAL teacher also supported the health services teachers in understanding and adjusting their teaching style to meet the demands of EAL students. Strategies used in EAL classrooms, such as repetition and drawing on students' past experiences, group work and pair work, helping with pronunciation and grammar, etc., were discussed and shared with the health services teachers. This helped them to deliver the health unit more effectively to this cohort of CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) students.

During the delivery of the dual qualification, guest speakers were invited to the classroom. A further presentation from the Waterwell Project (health education initiative) was presented. The Royal Children's Hospital recruitment delivered an insightful presentation on the job requirements, dos and don'ts of working as a health services assistant, and how to apply and prepare for an interview for the HSA job. A past student working at a hospital with Certificate III in HSA qualification was also invited to talk to the students about the job, what is expected and how to network. An education coordinator from residential aged care was invited to discuss careers in aged care and advised students on preparing a good resume. In response to these presentations and to prepare students for job search after completing the dual qualification, job skills training was incorporated into the delivery in EAL classes in the final term of the course. Topics related to job search, for example, reading job advertisements, writing a cover letter and resume, and preparing and participating in an interview, were taught concurrently with other topics. As part of the HSA course, students could do a work placement for two weeks. Seventeen students opted to do the work placement offered at three different hospitals, and all of them successfully completed it.

Challenges

During the delivery of the programme, the students and teachers faced certain challenges. The programme's first phase was the hardest for the students as they came to terms with the programme's language demands and attendance expectations. The assessment load was very high during the second phase as the students were enrolled in two certificate courses. Students struggled with time management as they had family responsibilities or part-time work commitments. Digital literacy skills were challenging for a few students as they struggled with uploading and submitting assessments online. Some students had to use public transport, which was challenging regarding time management. Students also had to get accustomed to different teaching styles of nursing staff, scenario-based assessments, and role plays, which required an understanding of the scenarios with a degree of complexity. They also had to learn to adhere to the submission date/time of HSA assessments.

The teachers in both departments faced challenges, such as dealing with mixed-level abilities in class; some students had lower LLND skills than others. HSA teachers had to adjust from a lecture style to a more communicative teaching style to meet the demands of migrant students and learn how to support students in dealing with the assessment load. Teachers from both departments had to be flexible and adjust their teaching based on the needs of the students.

Solutions

'English for HSA' helped students to gradually adjust to computer-based delivery and assessment. To assist students in meeting the demands of the HSA qualification, more focus was placed on completing the HSA units rather than focusing on EAL assessments. Teacher support was also available in HSA classes to complete coursework and assessments

in-class time to reduce time management pressure at home. Students with higher language and digital skills supported students with lower skills. Swinburne University's support services, like Student Success Coaches and Learning Academic Support (LAS), assisted students with time management and study strategies. Communication between teachers from both departments to support each other and the students in the best way possible proved an effective strategy.

Programme findings and evaluation

To evaluate the programme, a student survey was done using Ziplet, an online survey tool, at the completion of the programme. Ranking, multiple choice and short-response questions were used to collect data. Some of the questions included were: How satisfied are you with the course? What was most difficult? What did you enjoy the most? Would you recommend it to others? Moreover, what are your suggestions for improvement of the course?

Based on the student's responses and teachers' verbal feedback, the following conclusions were made: the Dual Qualification EAL/Cert III in Health Services Assistance (including preparation to study programme) Innovative Programme was a very successful project. It was a well-designed and collaborative approach between two teaching departments, Migrant English (ME) and nursing. Having a dedicated EAL teacher to coordinate and teach the class for the duration of the programme provided great stability to the students and enabled their learning journey to be well managed. VET qualification health services were chosen for prospective students, who could see good employment outcomes and pathway opportunities to further training, like nursing and allied health services. The LLND (Language, Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy) support provided to the students during the preparatory phase enabled them to transition to a VET qualification effectively. The programme showed excellent attendance, good retention and high student cohort motivation, resulting in a 100% completion rate.

Despite facing personal challenges like family responsibilities, health issues, work commitment and travelling by public transport, students made the personal commitment to attend the programme four days per week for a year and a half. The group of students formed a strong bond over the period of the programme and was a very close-knit group which offered support and encouragement to each other inside and outside the classroom. During the course delivery, the focus of the EAL classes shifted to supporting the students' language needs to successfully complete the HSA qualification rather than completing EAL units. Flexibility and meeting the students' needs was considered the main priority. Furthermore, two weeks of work placement gave most students their first opportunity to work in Australia, to have some "local" work experience to include on their resume and some secured employment at the hospital where they completed their work placement. The student satisfaction survey showed 100% satisfaction with the programme's delivery. Twelve students out of 17 found jobs within six months of completing the qualification.

In conclusion, the two objectives identified at the start of the programme were achieved successfully. The first objective was to provide specialised English language, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy support and tuition to students from a CALD background. This was done to enable them to successfully complete a VET certificate, as all 17 students passed all HSA units with an average attendance of 94% for the course duration. The second objective was to develop course materials, learning resources, and contextual assessment tasks for the learner cohort. The resources developed during the delivery of the programme included Cert and Cert III in EAL unit work, teaching materials and learning resources contextualised and developed to support the learning in the Certificate III in HSA course and assessment tasks contextualised to HSA or employment. Modification of one

Certificate III in the HSA assessment tool was modified to better suit the learner cohort by simplifying the language in the questions and reducing the complexity of the scenarios.

Implementing the findings

Swinburne University implemented the findings of the innovative programme by starting the programme for the second time, with minimal modifications, in July 2023. In the preparatory phase, this time, EAL classes were run for three days to develop English language skills focusing on health topics; however, the fourth day was a digital literacy class run by a designated digital literacy teacher to better prepare the students in dealing with Certificate III in HSA. Due to the innovative programme's high employability rate and success, there was high interest in the course, and 17 students are currently participating in the dual qualification programme. This programme would end in December 2024. A third round of 'English for HSA' commenced in September 2024, with 20 students currently participating in the programme.

A 2023 dual qualification student's perspective on the innovative program

Mandy was interviewed by the EAL teacher at the end of the course as an exemplary student. Her enthusiasm and commitment to her studies were evident, and she attended the course 100% of the time. She was able to secure a job before the course completion through her initiative of contacting the guest speaker (a former Swinburne student working at a hospital facility) and applying at the hospital.

(As appeared in a good news story about the programme)

Mandy came to Australia from China in 2020. She worked in a bank in China for more than 18 years. Mandy worked hard and persisted in overcoming her low confidence when she arrived in Australia by attending English classes and then starting the dual qualification in HSA/EAL, to getting a job through her initiative by cold calling a health care workplace before she completed the course.

According to Mandy, she joined English classes in 2021 to improve her English. "First (goal) was to improve English, so started English classes in 2021." Then I joined the Innovative program Dual qualification, thinking, "New course good for me to learn new skills, join Australian life, join work workplace and do social work."

Mandy believed that "Yes, achieved goals. My short-term goal was improving my English; my long-term term was get a good job in Australia to help others, use learnt English."

Mandy's biggest challenge, according to her, "was and is still English. At work, I need communication with my supervisor and colleagues."

According to Mandy, participating in the innovative program helped her in many aspects. "Before I just came to Australia, I can't speak sentences. I too scared to go to supermarket, ask questions. Now, I can speak sentences, have more confidence to make phone call, ask questions. I feel my vocabulary also improve; grammar improve than before."

"I learn more new skills, like hand hygiene, how to wear PPE, how to control infection, also including the first aid, use the equipment, like the hoist, wheelchair."

Mandy used networking skills to contact a presenter, who talked to the class about her HSA job in term 1 2023 and took the initiative to approach the

workplace with her resume. She applied for the job online and did an interview. She was offered a job and started work after completing the course in June.

"I can enjoy new life, new role."

Mandy believes that "If you want, you can do anything."

"I just try. I never thought I'll get a job, but I try, and I'm surprised" because doing the course was a very positive experience "for me 100% because I can get a job."

Conclusion

The dual qualification programme offered by Swinburne University has shown exceptional student motivation, attendance, and participation, driven by the goal of rapid workforce integration, as is evident by the continuation of the programme for the third time due to interest shown by the students. It is a great way to retrain migrants who are moving to Australia to find employment. It serves the dual purpose of integrating migrants into the Australian workforce by teaching them new skills, and it also helps to overcome the skills shortage currently faced by the health industry.

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English as a dynamic language and speaker depiction in ESOL resources

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Although much of the TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) world has acknowledged the value of English language variations, ESOL teachers are often labelled and valued binarily as NS (Native Speaker) or NNS (Non-Native Speaker), sometimes on the grounds of apparent ethnicity. What English an individual uses evolves with the development of the language itself. This article suggests fluidity on a spectrum as a mechanism to recognise how a user uses English. The article then reviews a course on BBC Learning English and argues that the way it depicts English speakers – white NS and non-white NNS – appears to be problematic. It is suggested that ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) resources for worldwide learners need to present how English is really used. The article concludes that more research on ESOL resources needs to be conducted. It also highlights the role of teacher professional development in the issue discussed.

Division between research and practice

The concept of World English (WE), which recognises diversity in the English language and prepares speakers to communicate with the population of the globe, is not novel to the field of ESOL. In practice, many ESOL teachers, especially learners, have not yet accepted this ideology (Triyoko and Kidwell, 2023; Seidlhofer, 2013). In the community-based college where I teach, though the principle of WE is reflected by a teaching team of teachers of different ethnic backgrounds, it is not uncommon to encounter an adult student who is not willing to sit in a class whose teacher is ethnically non-white. Some students have rejected teachers of colour and sought a class change. The perception of ‘native-speakerism’ (Holliday, 2005) has been rejected by the college, and no student is allowed to choose a teacher based on their ethnicity. The contrast between the college policy and learner attitude may well reflect the gap between research and practice in the issue. Learner attitudes appear unchanged towards the ‘non-native’ teachers, whereas the review of Calafato (2019) has particularly emphasised the advantages of the same group. The bilingual or multilingual nature of the ‘non-native’ speaker teachers is advocated as a compelling asset to second language education.

English as a dynamic language

Spiro (2013) suggests ESOL teachers who use English as L1 should adjust their relationship with the language and learn how English is used locally in the community. In fact, *every* teacher should progress constantly with language development, whether they possess English as L1 or not. There might not be such a thing as ‘native and non-native speakers’ in the Lingua Franca age of English. In the approach ‘Teaching English as a Dynamic Language’ (TEDL) put forward by Mahboob (2018), it is described that the word English ‘*language*’ has evolved into a verb. English is being reestablished by its users. It is fluid and thus indefinite at any given point.

English spectrum

I propose that all English users sit on a spectrum. Across this spectrum, there are different accents, dialects, expressions, etc., even among the so-called 'native speakers'. A Londoner may not fully understand Liverpoolian accents, and a user with an Irish accent may not be understood by an English-born user of South Asian origin who speaks English as their first language. A friend of mine was born and brought up in South England but now works and lives in Leeds (North England). On first moving to Leeds, she was confused by the Yorkshire dialect and accents of people on the street. My parents-in-law, both L1 English users who graduated from the University of Cambridge and the University of Sheffield, had difficulty making themselves understood by convenience store staff in the United States who were also L1 English users. Other than accents and dialects, the differences within the spectrum also relate to the language register and genre a person is used to. A university student with a working-class background may find it difficult to parse university rules written in dense bureaucratic English despite using English as their first language. However, it is worth noting that over time, any person's position on the spectrum can evolve with their lived experience. Having lived in the north of England for a few years, I am now used to using the word 'tea' as 'dinner'. I use English as my second language, and my position on the spectrum may have changed with my everyday experiences, the same as every other user of English. To some degree, every user of English equally possesses the language. We contribute to its development but also accommodate ourselves. Every user of English should be treated as an independent entity *without* being labelled in any fixed way. All users of the language contribute collaboratively to produce its shape.

Evaluation of *Learning Circles in English My Way* on BBC Learning English

One unit of BBC Learning English, *Learning Circles* (unit 1 of the online program *English My Way*) (*BBC Learning English – Course: English My Way/Unit 1, n.d.*), has drawn my attention because its content appears to divide English speakers into 'white native speakers' and 'non-white non-native speakers'.

Programme introduction

Learning Circles incorporates 14 sessions. In each session, a video, normally made up of three parts, is used to demonstrate how to communicate with people in everyday life in the UK. Everyday topics are covered in the sessions, including seeing a doctor, looking for a job, asking for directions on the road, buying medicine in a pharmacy, shopping, taking a bus, following recipes, and workplace conversation. In the introduction (*BBC Learning English – Course: English My Way/Unit 1/Session 1/Activity 1, n.d.*), it is stated that *Learning Circles* is for ESOL learner groups and '[it] will take [the] group through the everyday English they need to survive in the UK.'

In the introduction video, one learner from a group adopts the role of a session facilitator while the whole group learns collaboratively as a small community. This approach seems to parallel the Community Language Learning (CLL) approach, where the group leader, who normally shares the group L1, functions as a facilitator to support learning instead of a teacher teaching the target language (Spiro 2013). This learning mode sometimes relies on translations between group members. The other three units of the programme, *English My Way*, presented in the languages of English and Bangla, Urdu and Somali, respectively, seem to justify its employment of CLL (*BBC Learning English Course: English My Way/Unit 2, 3, and 4 n.d.*).

Portrait of characters

Almost every episode of *Learning Circles* depicts the non-white presenters as newly arrived non-native speakers with less power. In contrast, the white counterparts are presented as local native speakers with more power in the given scenario. Some examples are listed below.

- In episode 2, a brown woman with low English proficiency rings a dental surgery for an appointment; the member of staff she encounters is a white woman with fluent English and a British accent.
- In session 5, another brown woman loses her way and asks a passerby for help. The passerby is white with a British accent and possesses sufficient knowledge of the local roads to advise her confidently. In contrast, the brown woman is portrayed from the start as vulnerable and with low English communication skills.
- A workplace conversation between a manager and a cleaner is shown in episode 14. The boss is played by a white man who speaks fluent British English; the cleaner is played by a brown woman, depicted as an ESOL learner, who seems to have little agency in the workplace.
- In the prior episode (session 13), interestingly played by the group lead from the introduction video, another brown woman seeks career advice in a job centre. She has lost all the conversational skills she manifested in earlier episodes and has to be led through the conversation by the job advisor: a white woman presented as a knowledgeable native speaker. The brown woman must be given suggestions for possible career paths - cleaner, shop assistant, chef, or porter. Towards the end, she happily accepts the vision of becoming a chef.

Impact on learners

Through 13 episodes out of 14, the *Learning Circles* have largely presented a false world of English dominated by 'white native speakers', where people of colour are placed at the bottom of the English language hierarchy. It is worth mentioning that the third part of each session, 'listen and repeat', might be an attempt to balance the plot. In 'listen and repeat', each presenter in the series, regardless of ethnicity, takes turns to drill pronunciation of the keywords in the session for learners to practise. Nonetheless, my adult students in the college find it hard to accept the pronunciation delivered by the actors of colour because, in other parts of the series, these characters have been established as poor English users. Though I clarify that they are using a different accent and it is very good English, many students seem to perceive it as more or less deficient English.

The demographics of English speakers presented in *Learning Circles* do not reflect the real world. In West Yorkshire in the UK, where I am based, many people of colour (especially brown people) are actually L1 English users, and some white people (for example, people with European origins) use English as a foreign language. Nevertheless, my argument is not about the demographics of English users nor the hierarchy. It is about English as a dynamic language, where every language user is essentially on a spectrum and should be treated equally no matter what English they speak. When a fraction of ESOL learning resources puts forward a very limited vision of English, it can promote 'native-speakerism' and undermine learners' confidence in teachers with certain ethnic backgrounds. It might be very difficult for them to recognise the fluidity in English and the value teachers from a wide range of ethnicities can bring to them.

Implications

What English to use might be up to individual users and is negotiable between the teacher and learner group. The world of TESOL needs to raise awareness of the diversity and fluidity of English and let users choose freely regarding their position on the English spectrum. ESOL learning resources, an important part of the world, contribute to the awareness and the shape of English the learners would establish. It would also equip practitioners, like teachers, with powerful tools to demonstrate the diversity within the English language. Concerning BBC Learning English *Learning Circles*, a programme intended for ESOL learners worldwide, it might be reasonable to diversify the presenter identities and their characteristics, such as class and ethnicity, and avoid associating any specific characteristic or proficiency level with any particular identity. More studies on ESOL learning resources, such as coursebooks and assessments, should be conducted to evaluate the materials and examine their impact on learners and teachers.

Equally, teacher training should create space to discuss English as a dynamic language and beyond. As Mahboob (2018) and Calafato (2019) suggest, teacher continuous professional development (CPD) should serve as a bridge between research and practice. I hope teacher CPD could nurture a safe culture where teachers feel comfortable raising their perspectives. With an open mind, research findings would inform the practical dimension, and teachers could discuss the challenges of applying research theory to teaching practice. More practice-based issues may be identified for exploration and research.

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Using study diaries with lower proficiency ESOL learners

Mathew Ashcroft

When I became Curriculum Manager at a small, south London ESOL charity, my first task was to improve the slow progress made by the organisation's large number of Entry 1-2 learners. Class time was limited to two hours per week, with some optional conversation classes, so exploring additional opportunities outside class seemed most worthwhile. I consulted the teachers to gather thoughts on student progress, and the replies were typical: *"They're not exposed to English outside of class"* and *"Their class time is limited to two hours per week, and they don't practise outside of class"* as well as attendance issues.

Most striking was the perceived lack of exposure and out-of-class practice. Surely ESOL learners, compared to other ESL learners, would find themselves with opportunities to practise outside of class? With my previous experience in academic English, I decided to explore the autonomy of one of the Entry 2 groups. The group's makeup consisted of women of different nationalities and educational backgrounds, most of whom had settled in the UK for 5+ years. The teacher was interested in learning more about the group and agreed to participate in the study. A short, simple explainer video about the process was made for the learners, and their permission was sought – all 13 students agreed to participate. They would complete a study diary across a 10-week term to track their weekly interactions with English out-of-class and provide a structured guide for study and reflection. Eight of the thirteen students would regularly participate. This article will first outline some principles of autonomy and study diaries before discussing the process followed and some findings. I will finish with some reflections on what I have learned. I was fortunate to present this study at the summer (2024) NATECLA conference and a recent online webinar, so I will include some teacher feedback and discussion from these sessions.

Autonomy, ESOL, and learner diaries

The concept of autonomy in education has been around since the 1970s. However, in recent years, autonomy has become central to ESL teaching. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (2020: 28) discusses the 'paradigm shift' towards integrating autonomy into curriculum design. The British Council (n.d.) lists helping learners *'become successful and autonomous language learners'* as one of their key teaching principles. However, the Skills for Life (SfL) and Ofqual ESOL curriculum pages (n.d.) reveal no mention of *'autonomy'*. The recent Bell Foundation report (Schellekens et al., 2023) recommends reassessing the national ESOL curriculum, and I believe a new ESOL curriculum should more closely align with broader ESL practices of promoting autonomy.

Autonomy itself is not a skill but a capacity. Benson (2011: 14) defines it as *'the capacity to take control of one's own learning'*. Several skills can be developed to improve student autonomy. These can be practical, such as improving time management, recognising available learning resources, and goal setting to become more effective self-directed learners. There are also cognitive skills, such as developing reflection abilities to improve students' ability to evaluate their learning effectiveness (i.e. self-efficacy). Student motivation is another important factor. For ESOL learners, this can change quite quickly. While extrinsic motivations such as employment and citizenship can be strong, they are ephemeral; we must promote more intrinsic motivation by developing interest in the language for socialising and community integration.

Learner diaries have been used to explore and promote autonomy and as useful action research tools. Little (2022) made their use integral to his *Integrate Ireland* ESOL project to a positive effect. Norton (2013) used diaries to explore identity issues faced by female migrant communities in New York and found they could be used to promote empowerment and community integration. However, their use is not without challenges, such as limited exposure to pedagogies promoting autonomy and potential literacy issues. These factors will be considered in the design and implementation of this research.

Diary design and process

After researching various diary formats, I combined the Council of Europe's European Language Portfolio (n.d.) features, Wing's (2020) simplified diary template for lower proficiency learners, and a simplified structured reflection element. The diary booklet contained:

- a resource list of ideas of things to do each week, including links to useful websites
- a simplified version of the learning outcomes for SfL Entry Level 2 using can-do statements
- a weekly diary to complete (see Figure 1 below), including a simplified reflection model, a structure to set SMART goals, and further reflection on these goals to promote self-efficacy.

What did you learn in this week's class?					
This week we studied about places in the community. We did vocabulary and listened to some people talking about places in their towns.					
How do you feel about this lesson?					
  					
Why?					
I studied about this before, so I know the vocabulary. But the listening in the class was difficult and I didn't answer the questions well.					
Outside of class this week I want to... do more listening practice.					
Goal (What to do?)	How much/many? (A number)	Resources (What I need and where I'll find it)	Complete?	My thoughts Easy/difficult? Useful/not useful? Fun/not fun?	Do it again? <u>Do it different?</u> How?
Watch TV in English	30 minutes every day	TV in my house	Yes	Difficult Sometimes useful Fun	Yes, sometimes bored. I should choose better programmes. I should use subtitles – it will help.
Use English listening practice website	One time – 1 hour	Computer, internet, website	Yes – only 30 minutes	Not easy, not difficult Useful A bit fun	Yes, it was useful. I gave good answers. The website gave me the answers I didn't know.

Figure 1: Example of weekly diary template

At the start of the term, the 13 students completed a Google Forms questionnaire (easily auto-translated) to understand their language learning, education history, and attitudes towards the teacher-student relationship. It also included motivations for learning English, how much they studied out of class, their interactions with English and other languages, and their perceived confidence in different language skills. These data were used to create a profile for each learner. Students were given the diary and had the process of how to complete it each week explained to them.

As the curriculum manager of the organisation, I was not responsible for teaching the class, and I did not wish to impede the students' and teachers' class time. I would collect the diaries from those who had completed them each week and then write feedback for each student's weekly entry. The feedback was positive encouragement and questions

to promote reflection; it rarely involved language correction. Of the thirteen students in the class, seven students submitted regularly. At the end of the term, students completed another questionnaire to chart changes in behaviours, attitudes, or confidence levels. Eight of the students completed this. Some students were interviewed to understand their feelings and thoughts about the process.

Learnings and recommendations

The quantitative data from the questionnaires revealed interesting findings about the students' autonomous behaviours and attitudes. While this article will focus more on the practical application of diaries, a summary of these findings provides context. Data reveal that the diary had a positive impact, with students reporting increased self-study time and improved proficiency and confidence. Students reported doing a variety of autonomous behaviours and showed a willingness to be more autonomous, regardless of previous educational background. This contrasts with an overwhelmingly traditional view of the teacher as the primary source of information, both before and after the diary. The students held two contrasting views: *"I want to learn things that are important to me"* and *"The teacher is my main source of language."* Therefore, the teacher's role is to start unpacking these beliefs.

Student's diary entries alongside the interviews were a rich source of information and formed the following recommendations.

1. Diaries are a useful way to engage in dialogue with students.

A few students wrote direct responses to my feedback and questions. Post-study student interviews and data revealed that this dialogue was engaging and helped them better inform their weekly goals. Students appreciated this personalised feedback.

2. Diaries can inform both in-class practice and broader curriculum decisions.

Students' reflections on the content and method of classes informed the teaching in the organisation. They also helped inform the teacher's in-class activities, such as promoting self-recording for speaking practice. This was in response to one student's reflection on desiring more speaking practice. Another student wrote about the importance of health, which was used as evidence for a funding application for additional health-focused conversation classes. Finally, more accurate IAG for students, especially regarding citizenship and employment, is possible.

3. Students struggled to reflect, particularly those with less education experience.

Some learners had tertiary education and were possibly more exposed to reflection, so their class reflections were more developed. However, most students struggled. Embedding reflection into classroom practice would be beneficial. For example, checking students' feelings using scales and pictures after specific tasks and consistent reflective questioning to review lessons.

4. Entries revealed ESOL learners' challenges in society and identity.

The women in this group found scant opportunities to use English at home and socially. One student felt learning English would require infinite time as she was *"scared to mess up."* Most interactions in English are related to their children and their children's education. One student reported people being unwilling to engage in conversation with her in a café. However, after guidance to seek safer spaces for speaking opportunities, the same woman started volunteering at her children's school to go on school trips and speak with other parents.

5. Consider multiple diary formats.

One student admitted to losing her paper diary, so she did not submit anything. Another student said she preferred a spoken diary version because she felt confident writing in English as part of her job. However, the submitted students emphasised the importance

of handwriting their diaries. It allowed them to focus on form and accuracy (often using digital tools), enhanced their memory, and kept them focused on the task. It could be helpful to have a digital version of the diary to allow students to voice record or video their diaries.

Other reflections

After delivering these findings at two separate NATECLA events, I would like to share some comments and suggestions from teachers from our discussions.

The most common question was how to use diaries with learners with even lower proficiency. While there are obvious difficulties, teachers share innovative solutions. AI tools such as voice-to-text could be leveraged, or audio or videos could be recorded for those with more spoken than written language. Greater use of pictures, both in the diary and from students taking photos on their phones instead of using language, was also suggested. The consensus was that if the diary was embedded into classwork, it could be beneficial as a continuous learning tool.

Another question was about teachers' time resources. As mentioned above, if the diary became part of classroom learning, this could save planning time for some lesson materials—it may even be more beneficial for students with minimal classroom time to have more personalised language guidance. While I gave weekly feedback, a less frequent feedback pattern could be agreed upon, perhaps aligning with existing tutorials. While feedback is essential for engaging students in dialogue, the process need not be onerous.

Finally, there were concerns that documents like this may duplicate existing ILP documents and may not be RARPA compliant. Again, this need not be the case. An ILP is a summative document undertaken at the start and end of the term; a diary could complement this as formative evidence of a learner's journey. The purpose of the diary is to be a supplementary learning tool. They are a way for teachers to understand their learners' needs more while allowing students to develop autonomy. If the national ESOL curriculum does change, then perhaps more holistic learning tools such as diaries can be a welcome adjunct to any organisation's curriculum without worrying that it meets a perfunctory criterion. After all, the purpose of language education should be to best provide learners with the tools they need to achieve their aims, and developing autonomy is a vital step in doing so.

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Island voices – Guthan nan Eilean – Hebridean language capture and curation, 2005 – 2023: an overview

Gordon Wells

This is an abridged version of an article providing a comprehensive description of the Island Voices/Guthan nan Eilean language capture and curation project as it stood in Spring 2023, available in full on the project's own website. The introduction presents information on its main features and aims, the linguistic rationale focussing on the primacy of speech and the salience of bilingualism, and the Hebridean community context in which the project operates. A shortened account of the project contents and chronology follows, divided into four separate sections or phases: Staff-led Production; Participatory Production; Multilingual Diversification; and Research Alignment. In conclusion, connections to further research and development projects and opportunities are sketched out, and some final reflections question a polarising juxtaposition of local versus global interests, while pointing towards responsibilities alongside the opportunities this kind of work entails.

Describing a primarily oral project through written text presents a challenge. Copious footnotes point to online samples of the materials discussed, and readers are encouraged to engage through screen as well as page in order to extract full benefit. The original article is bookended by a preamble and postscript which offer written exemplification from short, transcribed extracts. It can be accessed through the following link: <https://guthan.wordpress.com/2023/06/01/eighteen-years-of-island-voices/>

1. Introduction

In this section I provide a general introduction to the Hebrides-based language capture and curation project titled “Island Voices” in English, and “Guthan nan Eilean” in Gaelic. I give a short description of its features and aims first. I then discuss the academic discipline and influences that have principally shaped its development, and summarise the community context of the island locations which provide the focus for its activities.

1.1 Features and aims

Two key features of this project are signalled in its “Island Voices” title – its Hebridean geographical focus, and the emphasis placed on recorded speech. A third defining feature – the engagement with user-friendly electronic media – enables the signature “capture and curation” of local language production on widely popular online platforms, principally dedicated corners of YouTube.com and WordPress.com. These are harnessed together to host well over 300 videos, and present them for free public viewing in a coherent manner. As the project has developed, a substantial majority has emerged of videos in Gaelic, while English videos – on a numerical par with Gaelic in the early stages – remain a significant bloc within the overall total. Over twenty other languages are also represented, with Irish the most prominent among them. At the time of writing in Spring 2023 the project has over 6,000 online followers across its WordPress and YouTube platforms and associated social media. YouTube video hits exceed 400,000.

Figures 1 and 2 below, as consecutive screenshots from the project's "About" page¹ on the central WordPress site, give an impression of the project's online appearance.

Figure 1. "About" Screenshot 1



The strapline – "Slices of Life and Work in the 21st Century Hebrides – for language learners, and anyone else!" – identifies the project's main content and intended audience. It reflects the birth of the project in European Union Leonardo project funding (from 2005 to 2007 in the first instance), while pointing to growth and diversification as the project has developed. This has meant an evolution from an early focus on small clusters of short documentaries and interviews, to also include much longer one-to-one conversations, with room for poetry, songs, and stories, plus wider debate formats with multiple participants across international boundaries.

Support for language teaching and learning (particularly independent adult learning) remains an important part of the project, even as it has developed to welcome participation and contributions from across the islands and further afield, and particularly from those people to whom Gaelic proficiency has come as a natural function of having been raised in a Hebridean home. The latter might need no extra help in speaking the language, yet may still take pleasure in seeing their own community and speech represented, and perhaps even like to add submissions of their own. The approach

1 <https://guthan.wordpress.com/about/>

puts a high premium on presenting and representing language in an appropriate and realistic social and functional context, firmly rooted in vernacular community use.

Figure 2. "About" Screenshot 2

This project remains work in progress, as the [homepage blog](#) continues to record ongoing activity in the community that relates to the language work presented in the core videos, and adds to it. Users are invited to browse through past posts to learn about the history of the project, and see examples of more work by learners and other community members. Alternatively, you can view selections of this work gathered together thematically in the pages titled "Bonnie Prince Charlie", "The Great War", "Gaelic Journeys", "Storytellers", "Norman Maclean", "Magaidh Smith", and "Stòras Beò". And comments and suggestions are always welcome!

Grogarry Lodge

Watch later Share

Watch on YouTube

Learners of English and Gaelic gathered for a cèilidh at community-owned Grogarry Lodge in South Uist, organised by Cothrom's Language and Culture group. An early example (2011) of the project's engagement with multilingualism!

And if you want to dig deeper into some of the community and linguistic issues that surround the project, take a look at the [Research/Reports](#) page, which gathers together a range of associated research projects, reports, and articles, or [Talking Points](#) or [Aire air Sunnd](#), where you can listen to related discussions between linguists and community language speakers.

The project is fundamentally bi- or multi-lingual and aims to collect slices of life and work in the Hebrides, primarily for language learners. The work is islands-based, and has included provision for training for tutors and others, with a view to encouraging further community-based recording. The "[Other Tongues](#)" page now affords the opportunity to add other languages to the original mix. If you would like to try your hand at this kind of work and want some help getting started you can phone or text Gordon Wells on 07879 644984

Over the years since its inception, the project has worked in partnership with a range of institutions and community groups, including *Sabhal Mòr Ostaig*, *Cothrom*, *Am Pàipear*, *Soillse*, and others.

Tha a' phròiseict seo airson an dà chuid luchd-ionnsachaidh na Gàidhlig agus luchd-ionnsachaidh na Beurla. Ann a bhith ag obair le dà chànan còmhla chaidh againn air stòras nas motha a thogail airson gach fear dhiubh na bhiodh againn ann am Beurla no Gàidhlig nam biomaid ag obair ann an aon chànan a-mhàin.

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[View more on Twitter](#)

In sum, the primacy of speech is not merely recognised, but actively asserted through this project. Potentially contentious issues around language contact and bilingualism are not simply ignored, but openly acknowledged through both exemplification and discussion.

1.2 Linguistic rationale

The European genesis of the project in an exercise in the development of language teaching and learning methods and techniques naturally drew upon the disciplines of Linguistics and Applied Linguistics from the outset, and these have remained important influences in framing a coherent rationale and narrative for the project as it has developed. Two key project themes in particular, already mentioned above, directly reflect core linguistic concerns.

Firstly, the primacy of speech over writing has long been recognised as a fundamental insight, offered and developed by early Twentieth Century pioneers in Linguistics. Chafe & Tannen's (1987) discussion of this topic cites Bloomfield (1933), Sapir (1921), and Saussure (1966) as influential thinkers in the elaboration of the still cogent proposition that human

language, excepting sign language, is primarily realised and conducted through the spoken word. In societies that have achieved close to 100% literacy rates through programmes of universal education, this basic and simple fact may easily cease to register in the wider population, and literacy may come to be judged as the mark of minimum linguistic educational achievement, while fundamental oral proficiency (upon which literacy is based) is overlooked and undervalued. In a situation (such as in the Western Isles) where the education system has historically been heavily weighted towards just one of the languages present in the community, close to 100% literacy rates may well be achieved, but only comfortably in the institutionally favoured language – in this case English, rather than Gaelic.

In a context where non-literacy is widely stigmatised, it has been my contention (Wells 2011, 2013, 2020) that educational work which encourages a positive re-evaluation of existing oral skills, irrespective of whether or not they are complemented by literacy, may well pay language awareness and confidence-building dividends. This is a challenge which Island Voices seeks to address, assisted by the relatively cheap and easy affordances of new technology in concretely recording language as it is spoken, in preference to filtering human sounds through a complex system of codified visual representations on a page or screen (writing, in other words).

Secondly, a focus on language in community use quickly and inevitably demands a sociolinguistic treatment of languages in contact, variously subsumed under the titles of “bilingualism”, “diglossia”, or variations on these terms reflecting differences in analysis. Jaspers (2016) gives a historical overview of how thinking has developed in the field, citing Ferguson (1959), Gumperz (1964, 1982), and Fishman (1967, 1991) among others, while offering a contemporary critique reflecting increasingly overt 21st Century concerns around social justice issues.

This critical turn in sociolinguistics has certainly underlined the need for close interrogation of key terms such as “bilingualism”, particularly in the Gaelic context when it is frequently invoked by promotional bodies as a key benefit, for example, of Gaelic-medium schooling. However, the fact that bilingualism and related issues remain contested in academic debate does not relieve practitioners, such as teachers, of the immediate need to engage directly with linguistic realities “on the ground”. In attempting to reflect real community life, Island Voices has embraced the recording of both Gaelic and English from the start, (and gone on to include other languages as well, albeit with more attenuated Hebridean connections, and in pursuit of a separate, though complementary, agenda).

This open acknowledgement of bilingual reality may give rise to an appearance of conflict when viewed from a teaching perspective in which “immersion” in the target language has attained a particularly high profile in the formally organised learning of Gaelic at whatever age it may be even minimally encountered. Deliberative language learning can no doubt benefit from a performative and pretended monolingualism, through the temporary exclusion of the learner’s first language for particular and defined practices and purposes. However, a permanent suspension of disbelief with respect to the full range of actual linguistic choices personally at hand and in the local environment will not deliver a complete or realistic picture of the real-life speech community in which the Gaelic learner wishes to actively participate. Insofar as Island Voices has a continuing role in assisting Gaelic acquisition by non-speakers, the open presentation of bilingualism in the community, with all the attendant issues around code-mixing and switching (Wells 2011) and other associated features, serves to alert previously monolingual learners to realities of bilingual life which may otherwise take them by surprise.

1.3 Community context

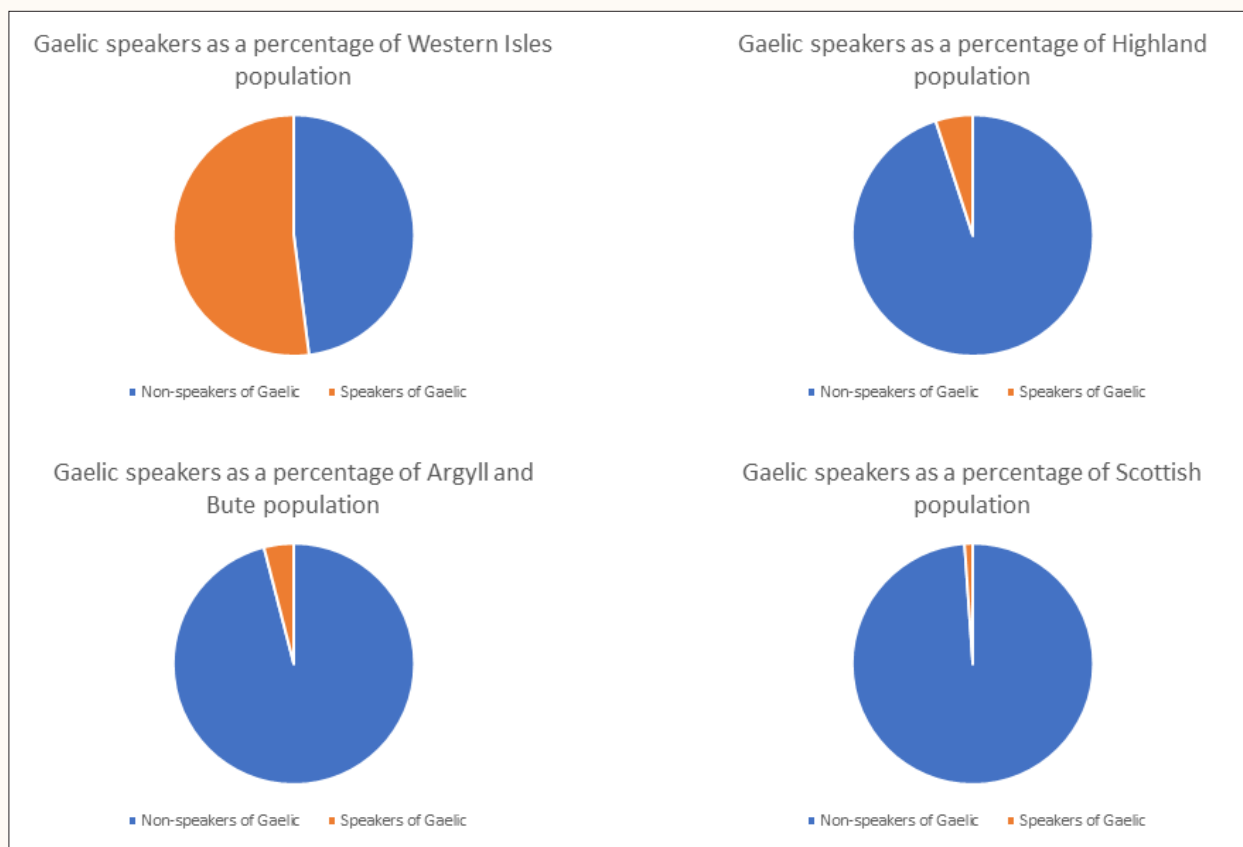
Over the period of time since the 2005–2007 inception of Island Voices, a number of studies and reports have been published on language use in the Outer Hebrides. I have made contributions myself, in Wells 2011 and 2012, centred on North and South Uist and the associated islands from Eriskay to Berneray. The first is a small-scale study with a Gaelic focus, while the second takes an Applied Linguistic interest in the overall language picture, within the context of looking at English language provision and resources for migrants and refugees, and how Island Voices can contribute on that front. In the latter I offer the following thumbnail summary, which may also hold broadly true for other communities in the Western Isles:

“To summarise the community language environment, we have a largely bilingual host society in the Uists that is in a state of linguistic flux. There is an uneven balance between the two major languages, with high prestige English firmly established, while the traditionally stigmatised Gaelic struggles to maintain its position. A number of Eastern European languages are a recent addition to this mix, whose speakers are keen to upgrade their English language skills as a matter of priority. There is also an interest in developing Gaelic skills on the part of some English-speaking monolinguals (as well as some migrants from outside the UK), and Gaelic speakers themselves may also lack confidence in their skills in that language – particularly in relation to reading and writing, for example. English literacy is also an issue for a proportion of English speakers.”
(Wells 2012, 162–163)

2011 was also a census year, in which questions are routinely posed about Gaelic competence in Scotland. Figure 3 below clearly demonstrates the Western Isles’ exceptional position in terms of the density of Gaelic speakers within the local community, as determined by the census self-reporting mechanisms.

For Scotland as a whole, the proportion of the population aged three and over able to speak Gaelic was 1.1% (58,000 people). The council areas with the highest proportions able to speak Gaelic were the Outer Hebrides or Western Isles (52%), Highland (5%) and Argyll & Bute (4%). (Scotland’s Census, 2011).

The census does not pursue a similarly detailed line of questioning with regard to other named community languages, so fully comparable data is not available for, for example, Polish or Russian or other languages spoken by migrants from EU states while the UK was still a member. However, Jentsch et al (2007) report that, following 2004 accession, and unlike with previous peaks in migration into the UK which tended to be evidenced mainly in urban areas, Poles and other Eastern European nationals quickly established themselves across rural areas as well, including the Highlands and Islands. Following Brexit, their numbers may have dwindled, with the loss of even one or two families liable to be keenly felt in relatively small island communities.

Figure 3. Gaelic speakers in percentage terms in various populations

Returning to a specifically Gaelic focus, Munro et al (2011) looked in considerable detail at the Shawbost community in Lewis in a report to Bòrd na Gàidhlig that raised serious concern about ongoing intergenerational transmission in a Gaelic heartland area – an issue, it may be said, that came as small surprise to many island residents living through the experience of language shift to English before their very eyes. The degree of public concern was then intensified following publication of the “Gaelic Crisis in the Vernacular Community” report by Ó Giollagáin et al in 2020 of the Soillse research network’s comprehensive Islands Gaelic Research Project, covering all the Western Isles plus Tiree and the Staffin district in the Isle of Skye. This projected the end of Gaelic as a community language in the islands within a decade, under current circumstances.

This report and warning gained national and international attention, and generated doubt and new debate about the direction of travel of Gaelic language policy and planning in Scotland. It also provoked discussion and criticism in academic circles (Ó Giollagáin and Caimbeul 2021, McLeod et al 2022, Ó Giollagáin et al 2022), reflecting to some extent the active contestation of global issues around languages in contact in the wider sociolinguistic debate referred to above, as well as disputes perhaps more particular to Gaelic. The latter relate in part to construed competition between urban mainland and rural island interests, despite the authors – a number of whom would meet “new speaker” definitional requirements (O’Rourke et al 2015) – explicitly disclaiming an “anti-learner” agenda. Without engaging directly in that debate here, it may be noted that the “Guthan nan Eilean” title is deliberate and unequivocal in profiling the project’s geographical focus on Hebridean communities as prime societal carriers of still unbroken Gaelic tradition and transmission, in full and acute awareness of the existential communicative threat now confronting them. This islands focus is not experienced as a barrier to the project’s outward-looking offer of free and open access worldwide to its online output. Indeed, I perceive it as an integral part of its attraction to those with a respectful and supportive interest in the culture and the communities that continue to use this endangered language functionally and communicatively in the face of ever more daunting odds.

2. Contents and chronology

In this abbreviated section I describe the various types of content included in the project, in roughly chronological order of first appearance. The description is “page-led” according to how the contents are organised on the main WordPress website and blog. Tabs for the various pages can be found in rows across the top of the site, as illustrated in Figure 1 above. Moving from left to right and top to bottom, their ordering is largely but not strictly chronological.

I have divided the seventeen pages up into four different sections or phases:

1. Staff-led production.
2. Participatory production.
3. Multilingual diversification.
4. Research alignment.

While these headings give a reasonable indication of the distinct nature and orientation of each section, the progressive chronological ordering is more indicative than clear-cut, with abundant overlap between the various phases.

2.1 Section one: staff-led production

This section covers the beginning stages of the project, when the focus was primarily on language teaching and learning, and associated materials production and methodological concerns. The bulk of this activity relates to a five-year period between late 2005 and the end of 2010, during which the following pages were first created:

- Series One.²
- Series Two Outdoors.³
- Series Two Generations.⁴
- Series Two Enterprise.⁵
- Extras.⁶
- Playlists.⁷

What is now called “Series One” was created between 2005 and 2007, before “Series Two” was even conceived of, and so advertises itself simply as “Island Voices” on the online catalogue which lists its contents.

The remit at the time was to create exemplars of user-friendly language teaching support materials in both Gaelic and English across a range of post-beginner levels. Within that specification the approach was two-pronged, in order to meet an anticipated demand in an educational context for mixed level delivery. On the one hand, a string of scripted documentaries with a voice-over narration introduces local themes in relatively simple “teacher-talk” language, with due attention given to the “plain language” needs of post-beginner language learners. On the other hand, each of these short documentaries is complemented with a small number of “talking head” interviews. In these, community members with a close connection to the topic at hand, give unscripted accounts relating to their own personal involvement. As samples of “authentic speech” (Widdowson, 1998), these clips offer more advanced learners the opportunity to hear the language (whether Gaelic or English) in real-time real-life use, unfiltered by considerations of learner-friendliness. At a later stage, transcripts of all these videos were made available online on the Clilstore dictionary access platform (Ó Dónaill, 2022), enabling viewers to watch the

2 <https://guthan.wordpress.com/series-one/>

3 <https://guthan.wordpress.com/series-two-outdoors/>

4 <https://guthan.wordpress.com/series-two-generations/>

5 <https://guthan.wordpress.com/series-two-enterprise/>

6 <https://guthan.wordpress.com/extras/>

7 <https://guthan.wordpress.com/playlists/>

video and read the transcripts simultaneously, with the added enhancement of one-click linkage to an online translation dictionary for any unfamiliar words. More recently still, same language subtitles have been added to the Gaelic videos as another option, using the Closed Caption function available on YouTube.

Following the success of Series One, a more extensive Series Two was created between 2007 and 2010, following the same general format of mixing short documentary introductions with more natural, and (for learners) more challenging interviews with community members. The Extras page gives some examples of additional video work produced during this period which was not part of the Series One and Two collections, while drawing inspiration from them. Of particular note are the re-edited versions of the Craigard Day Centre documentary featuring client Donald Mackinnon's own recordings of the narration in both Gaelic and English. This foreshadows wider multilingual re-purposing of a range of Island Voices documentaries at a later stage of the project. This page also features, in the Kallin Shellfish video, an early example of the participatory ethos in video-making that came to be emphasised in subsequent Island Voices work, which also gives voice, albeit in English, to local speakers of other languages.

The Playlists page was also created in this early stage of the project as an alternative and direct means of access to the online videos on YouTube, unfiltered by the cataloguing system described above. Originally introduced as a means of providing dedicated YouTube playlists parallel to the Series One and Two WordPress pages, there have been regular subsequent additions to this page as the project has developed.

2.2 Section two: participatory production

The beginning of 2011 marks the start of a second distinctive phase in the Island Voices project history. Here titled "Participatory Production" it signals a move away from staff-led media production to focus on facilitating and hosting community participation in the making and sharing of recordings. In responding to community-led initiatives, it is also characterised by a marked diversification of themes and genres in comparison with the first phase. It continues to run in parallel with later developments and innovations.

Various collaborations are included in this section, with both community groups and individual community members. At the time of writing these have resulted in the creation of the following pages:

- Bonnie Prince Charlie.⁸
- Great War.⁹
- Storytellers.¹⁰
- Norman Maclean (Part 2).¹¹
- Maggie Smith.¹²

The Bonnie Prince Charlie page results from a collaboration with the local South Uist, Eriskay, and Benbecula community land-owner, Stòras Uibhist, as part of their drive to enhance the visitor experience for tourists, and simultaneously support and highlight local culture and oral tradition. In similar fashion the Great War page catalogues eleven audio and video recordings made by members of Comann Eachdraidh Uibhist a Tuath (North Uist Historical Society) as part of their project "An fheadhainn tha làighe sàmhach" (the ones who lie silent). The other pages in this section reflect the interests of individual community members, with the renowned Norman Maclean among them sitting alongside his neighbours.

8 <https://guthan.wordpress.com/bonnie-prince-charlie/>

9 <https://guthan.wordpress.com/the-great-war/>

10 <https://guthan.wordpress.com/storytellers/>

11 <https://guthan.wordpress.com/sgeulachdan-thormoid/>

12 <https://guthan.wordpress.com/magaidh-smith/>

2.3 Section three: multilingual diversification

Series One of Island Voices emerged from the 2005–2007 Leonardo-funded European project “POOLS” (Producing Open Online Learning Systems), in which Gaelic College Sabhal Mòr Ostaig partnered with a number of institutions in other countries on the European mainland. Given the deeply embedded bilingualism within the home Hebridean communities of the project this was a natural cultural fit, out of which various complementary initiatives emerged, two of which developed to the point at which dedicated page creation became appropriate:

- Gaelic Journeys.¹³
- Other Tongues.¹⁴

The Gaelic Journeys page catalogues the recording products resulting from reciprocal visits in 2013 and 2014 between Benbecula in the Western Isles and Ranafast in Donegal. These were a natural bilateral follow-up to the developing relationship between Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and Ulster University as partners in POOLS-related projects. Following the introduction of the Irish language, further linguistic diversification followed with the Other Tongues page, first created in 2016. I set out the rationale in print in some detail in Wells 2016. It is also referenced and exemplified in film in the 2020 “Two Lands Many Languages” recording from the University of the Highlands and Islands Mediating Multilingualism¹⁵ project with Indian partners. In summary, I suggest that Do-It-Yourself media projects of this nature in localised linguistic communities may benefit from sharing resources, by re-purposing their recordings in other languages on a mutual exchange basis.

2.4 Section four: research alignment

More recently, Island Voices has effectively acted as an agent of community dissemination for a new sociolinguistic research focus on Gaelic which has turned closer attention to the vernacular communities in the Hebrides. At the same time, a parallel interest in wider international comparators for the Gaelic context has also been broadcast and serviced through the same Island Voices online channels.

These interests are currently reflected in these five pages:

- Research/Reports.¹⁶
- Norman Maclean (Part 1).¹⁷
- Stòras Beò.¹⁸
- Talking Points.¹⁹
- Aire air Sunnd.²⁰

I first created the Research/Reports page in order to provide a portal for various articles looking at the Island Voices project and context for a range of interests. The page contains a table of report titles together with live online links enabling free and open access to the articles in question, with a range of topics covering the bilingual community environment and other Linguistic and Applied Linguistic issues. The prime reason for gathering these links together on a single page is to enable ease of access, particularly for island community members who may often find themselves the objects of linguistic or other research without necessarily being able to easily read and check the published findings. The remaining pages in this section document research collaborations with various academic and community partners. Space does not allow elaboration here, but interested readers are encouraged to refer to the full version of this article on the Island Voices website.

.....
13 https://guthan.wordpress.com/gaelic_journeys/

14 <https://guthan.wordpress.com/other-tongues/>

15 <https://guthan.wordpress.com/2020/02/02/scotland-of-the-east/>

16 <https://guthan.wordpress.com/research/>

17 <https://guthan.wordpress.com/sgeulachdan-thormoid/>

18 <https://guthan.wordpress.com/storas-beo/>

19 <https://guthan.wordpress.com/talking-points/>

20 <https://guthan.wordpress.com/aire-air-sunnd/>

3. Conclusion

I begin this section by highlighting the synergies that have grown out of Island Voices with other research and development projects, both within a University of the Highlands and Islands framework, and with other universities. I close it with some final reflections that question a polarising juxtaposition of local versus global interests, while pointing towards academic responsibilities alongside the opportunities this kind of work presents.

3.1 Further research and development

I have already made reference to the Clilstore online multimedia platform, with which Island Voices has been in a close symbiotic relationship since very early days, often through collaborative European projects with other partners. Ó Dónaill (2013) and Ó Donnaíle (2014) offer user and developer perspectives respectively on its iterative progress at an earlier stage in its development, but further innovation is ongoing, with new features being added in late 2021, such as the “custom dictionary” function to facilitate use with languages like Okinawan²¹ or Jamaican²² which lack good online dictionary support.

Although designed as a language learning aid, Clilstore’s basic functionality in marrying online media with supporting transcripts has enabled flexible deployment in a number of other contexts as well. The completed Saoghal Thormoid collection piloted its use in support of video ethnography, and this approach has been further developed within the University of the Highlands and Islands framework in the ongoing Stòras Beò nan Gàidheal/ Taisce Bheo na nGael project in Irish as well as Scottish Gaelic. Both these projects also contribute to spoken Gaelic corpus development work led by the University of Glasgow in a collaborative partnership. This emanates from the pioneering Dlùth is Inneach project conducted for Bòrd na Gàidhlig (Ó Maolalaigh et al, 2014), which endorsed a “retro-vernacular” Gaelic model on which to base a broadly acceptable and authoritative grammatical description of the language.

In another more recent example, collaborative work led by the University of Edinburgh on Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) for Gaelic leant heavily on Island Voices uploads to Clilstore to supply initial training data for its prototype tool (Evans et al 2022). This is an eye-catching development, welcomed by Bòrd na Gàidhlig in its latest five-year plan (2022), for example, and by other stakeholders in broadcasting and other sectors. While it was not foreseen in the original thinking focussing on language learning, Island Voices’ contribution to ASR development has emerged as a natural outcome from the founding linguistic principles on which the project is based.

On that basis of known unpredictability, one may project forward the development of further initiatives with external partners in times to come, which may well result in new page tabs being added to those discussed above. Mention has already been made of Comann Eachdraidh Uibhist a Tuath. Closer collaboration with *comainn eachdraidh* (local history societies) across the islands would also be a positive way forward to develop the Stòras Beò nan Gàidheal collection²³. The fundamental point here is that the project has no defined point or date of content completion, though the day will surely come when no more recordings are uploaded to YouTube or posts added to WordPress. More important is that it embodies a dynamic process of boundary-crossing collaboration between multiple partners in community and academia, and in so doing perhaps provides a model for others to emulate in similar situations, including contexts of language endangerment and retrieval.

21 <https://guthan.wordpress.com/2021/11/01/scotlands-gaelic-college-okinawan-take/>

22 <https://guthan.wordpress.com/2021/11/15/hebridean-dijitaizieshan-senta/>

23 <https://guthan.wordpress.com/2022/08/01/storas-beo-coinneach-maighread/>

3.2 Final reflections

The roughly chronological description presented above of the project's content development path has traced a shifting emphasis over time to a predominance of Gaelic material, though not to the complete exclusion of either English or indeed a growing diversity of other languages. There have been good reasons for the change, as the project has responded positively to a range of locally expressed interests and priorities, and arguably in line with a social justice agenda that questions any perceived ideologically "neutral" stance in the analysis of language contact situations where power relations between different linguistic groupings are not equal. The ongoing nature of that debate prompts consideration of the prevailing sociolinguistic and geo-political context within which the Western Isles are placed. They are islands, but they are not isolated, and the sea is no longer the barrier it may once have been to linguistic developments and shifts. The dynamically multilingual nature of mainland Britain and the wider world has an inevitable local impact, while the Western Isles' own special linguistic make-up may also attract reciprocal interest from further afield.

It is notable, for instance, that Simpson (2021, p9) quotes an excoriating comment from Gaelic-speaking Angus Brendan MacNeil, Member of the British Parliament in Westminster for the Western Isles, on a 2019 Boris Johnson speech. Simpson analyses this speech in detail as part of his critique of a dominant monolingualist ideology in political discourse at UK level and in England, while tracing its seriously detrimental impact on the actual teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages.

That this ideology has a pervasive, though not uncontested, reach across both geographical and linguistic boundaries is equally demonstrated in Norman Maclean's dismissive reference to then topical debate around so-called "Muslim isolation" following the publication of the government-sponsored Casey (2016) review into opportunity and integration. This report placed a negative and deprecating emphasis on indications of low English language skills amongst women of Bangladeshi and Pakistani heritage. Simpson refers to the same report in his article. While he presents an applied linguistic discourse analysis, Norman's forceful contribution just 21 minutes into the first day of recording Saoghal Thormoid is based on lived family experience, pointing out that his own grandmother never learned English after migrating to Glasgow from Uist as a young woman, having no need for it, though she lived there happily for the rest of her life.

... Ach, 's e cailleach smart a bh' innte. But, thuirt mo mhàthair, an uair ud ann an Glaschu, cha ruigeadh i leas Beurla a bhith aice. Bha uiread de Ghàidheil timcheall oirre, agus bhiodh i – daoine a' bruidhinn mu dheidhinn Muslim isolation is gnothaichean – cha do rinn i oidhirp sam bith Beurla ionnsachadh. Bha nighean aice a sgrìobhadh litrichean dhi – seo mo mhàthair. Chan e gur e Nobel prize-winner a bha nam mhàthair, ach, you know, bha comas sgrìobhaidh aice. Bhiodh ise a' sgrìobhadh. Bha na gilleann, Tormod is Seumas is Cailean – rachadh iadsan dha na bùithtean dhi airson biadh, agus, recreation mar a chanas iad, well rachadh i a thaigh a' Bharraich air Paisley Road, chan eil fhios agam cò am Barrach a bh' ann, air neo rachadh i aig Ciorstaidh Eachainn – 's e cailleach às a' cheann a tuath, 's i seanmhair Alasdair Gillies am pìobaire, Ciorstaidh Eachainn – agus cho fad 's is aithne dhomhsa, och bha tòrr dhiubh ann an uair ud ann an Kinning Park agus Plantation...²⁴

(... But she was a smart old woman. But, my mother said, at that time she didn't need English. There were so many Gaels around her, and she would – people talking about Muslim isolation and things – she made no effort to learn English. She had a daughter who would write letters for her – this is my mother. Not that my mother was a Nobel prize-winner, you know, but she could write.

²⁴ <https://youtu.be/nCR2mVnDcX0>

She would write. The boys, Tormod and Seumas and Cailean – they would go to the shops for her for food, and, recreation as they say, well she would go to the Barrach’s house on Paisley Road, I don’t know who the Barrach [person from Barra] was, or she would go to Ciorstaidh Eachainn – an old woman from the north end [of Uist], Alasdair Gillies the piper’s granny, Ciorstaidh Eachainn – and as far as I know, och there were plenty of them at that time in Kinning Park and Plantation...)

So the sharpening Island Voices focus on Gaelic in its geographical setting as a Hebridean community language, far from being exclusionary, or unduly insular or introspective, offers the potential for fresh insights to be derived, and common interests developed, through grounded cross-linguistic comparison with other urban or mainland-based community languages within the overall polity. Such links and insights may be as apparent and important to the common man or woman as to the applied linguist, even if expressed in rather different terms.

I would hope that Island Voices recordings, in their mission to reflect real community life in real people’s voices, serve to provide a local resource that answers first and foremost to Hebridean wants and needs. That there is also openness to a wider national and international audience, whether lay or academic, is an attractive additional factor offering the potential for fruitful learning or research opportunities of many different kinds. The openness of the offer properly invites respectful reciprocation from those who wish to engage from a distance. This cannot be guaranteed, of course, though it may be hoped that increased social justice sensibilities, at least in academia, would prompt due reflection on responsibilities towards the source community.

Approaching from a linguistic viewpoint, this points to recognising value in the ordinary and mundanely quotidian, as much as in the exceptional or aesthetically pleasing. Whether we’re enjoying a domestic cèilidh with Norman Maclean, one-time star of stage and screen, or observing Donald MacKinnon’s daily routine in the Craigard Day Care Centre, each has something of true worth to say about themselves and their community. And while few would associate the word “ordinary” with Norman’s multiple talents, one ingredient in his widespread grassroots popularity was surely the “common touch” of a natural communicator at ease with his home audience. There may be a lesson here for applied and socio-linguistic professionals. In a meaningfully socially aware mission, the development and display of academic and linguistic prowess should surely show and serve a genuine community connection and purpose. Such, at least, are the principles which the Island Voices project aspires to uphold. The project trajectory, while linguistically guided, thus aims at inclusiveness in content organisation and presentation, remains open to new inputs, and has an undefined endpoint still over the horizon.

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For the full list of references please consult the original article here:

<https://guthan.files.wordpress.com/2023/05/island-voices-capture-and-curation.pdf>

Ways to enhance ESOL lecturer diversity in Scottish FE colleges: practical solutions from the lecturers' perspective

Paula Barrowcliffe

In recent years, there has been a clear focus on enhancing diversity in the global ELT profession (Pérez Berbain, Banegas and Beacon, 2021; Chen and Kong, 2022). This trend also permeates the context of ESOL education in Scotland, as clearly stated in the Adult ESOL strategy (The Scottish Government and APS Group Scotland, 2015) and, more recently, in the Adult Learning Strategy for Scotland (The Scottish Government, 2022). However, this focus on diversity does not seem to be reflected in the identity characteristics of lecturers working in ESOL departments in Scottish colleges. Most ESOL lecturers working in Scottish colleges seem to be predominantly white, heterosexual and speak English as a first language (Barrowcliffe, 2022). This paper aims to suggest some ways in which ESOL departments could become more diverse in terms of staff diversity based on the participants' views and perceptions.

Background

Norton and De Costa (2018) point out that students tend to perceive language teachers in the second language classroom as figures of authority and, therefore, teachers can be seen as role models for students. In addition, scholars such as Varghese *et al.* (2005) and Winchester (2013) argue that to achieve effective communication in the second language classroom, it is important for teachers to understand their students' backgrounds.

In a context such as ESOL education in Scottish colleges, where classes are multilingual by nature and the student cohort is diverse (Stella and Kay, 2023), understanding the students' backgrounds and linguistic needs seems essential to foster an inclusive atmosphere and employ targeted approaches to learning. Yazan and Lindahl (2020) point out that teachers who are more sensitive to diversity seem to be better equipped to create environments that are welcoming to students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This can help enhance learners' sense of belonging and confidence in the classroom, thus boosting their language development. By modelling inclusivity, teachers can encourage students to embrace their own identities, resulting in better social and academic outcomes and improved participation in classroom activities. However, when teachers fail to acknowledge learners' diverse identities, it can lead to feelings of alienation or exclusion among students, potentially negatively impacting learning.

One way to model diversity in Scottish ESOL departments could be by having a truly diverse body of lecturers that represent, at least, the diversity that is present in Scotland in terms of ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender and other identity characteristics. However, as I discussed in an earlier work (Barrowcliffe, 2022), the reality seems to be that the majority of ESOL lecturers working in Scottish colleges seem to share similar identity characteristics, which suggests a barrier to diversity in this sense. Therefore, encouraging more diversity in the ESOL departments could not only have positive effects in terms of meeting students' needs, as suggested above, but it could help to promote the values of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion outlined in the Adult Learning Strategy for Scotland (2022, p.25) which includes ESOL and state the following:

'We will collaborate to improve diversity and remove barriers in the workforce.'

As I will discuss below, the participants of my study shared that they believe having diverse departments in terms of staff can positively impact the profession. The question is how to implement change to make departments more diverse and whose responsibility it is to diversify the departments.

Methodology

The study uses qualitative data from nine interviews with ESOL lecturers and curriculum managers across various Scottish further education colleges. Participants were at different career stages and worked in colleges of different sizes. Thus, despite the small sample, they represent diverse perspectives based on years and type of experience (lecturer, curriculum manager, or former senior lecturer) and institutional context (rural or urban institution). During the interviews, participants considered and reflected on the different ways in which their own ESOL departments and the sector, more generally, could be diversified to welcome staff from various backgrounds and with varying characteristics of identity. The interview data was analysed thematically, where I could identify recurring patterns and insights discussed below.

Findings: ways to increase staff diversity

Most participants seemed positive that *“everybody would like to see more diversity within the teaching staff”* (Participant 1). This was based on the belief that bringing more diversity into the ESOL departments in Scottish colleges can positively affect the profession and is important for ESOL learners from an academic and pastoral perspective. However, there were different reflections about who should be responsible for bringing diversity into the profession. In the following sections, I will present the participants’ views and reflections on how such change can be achieved.

1. Whose responsibility is to bring ‘Diversity’ into the ESOL departments?

When considering ways to increase staff diversity, an important question to ask is whose responsibility it is to drive this process. During the interviews, there seemed to be a suggestion that such change must be driven by *“the younger ones”* (Participant 1) and *“the newcomers”* (Participant 5), who seem to be coming from more diverse backgrounds compared to ESOL lecturers who are *“well established”* (Participant 5). The indication seems to be that staff from diverse backgrounds (including those who are outside the middle age bracket) seem to be the ‘standard’ in the Scottish ESOL teaching force (Barrowcliffe, 2022) and are best positioned to introduce diverse perspectives and make relevant changes in the ESOL departments. This can be seen clearly in the excerpt below where Participant 8 refers to:

“teachers who are diverse putting the responsibility for change on those who want to share their diversity” “if you have teachers who are diverse and who want to share their diversity with their learners, then it becomes less forced, if you know what I mean, like, it’s not just something you’re saying, “Okay, this week, we’re going to do this”. And it’s, it’s more a natural process.”

Similarly, in discussing issues related to sexual orientation, Participant 1, who described himself as *“straight”*, shared that he does not feel comfortable discussing these issues with students but that one of his colleagues who is part of the LGBTQ+ community could address these issues with students:

“In terms of sexuality, we’ve got one member of staff that is gay, and you know, will address issues of equality in that respect with the students.”

From those participants who considered themselves part of that 'diverse' group, this responsibility for being the change makers seems to be internalised. This emerged from the interview with Participant 2, who described himself as a "gay man" and younger than the rest of his team. Participant 2 stated very openly that *"we should be embracing change"*. In his opinion, as a young, gay lecturer, he has been able to offer different perspectives, and other people in his department *"found it refreshing to have a new pair of eyes"*. Participant 2 argued that it's *"quite good for [more established members of staff] maybe to see what our younger audience has got to bring"*. These statements suggest that Participant 2 sees himself as somebody who can help staff embrace more diverse perspectives and seems willing to take an active role. For him, the change needs to come from *"inside"* the profession, from the bottom, moving upwards. In his view, *"unless we start making the change, then the change won't happen."*

Participant 5 perceived herself as the *"odd one out"* in her department because she is a refugee and speaks French as her first language. She also argued that people *"like her"*, who have been in similar situations to the ones the students might be facing, are able to introduce new perspectives into the ESOL field, as, in her opinion, she is able to understand the students' struggles better than other lecturers in the profession who might not have shared experiences with students:

"I can bring things like, for example, what I discussed with my colleagues when I arrived in [this city], I couldn't say the name of the streets, the name of the neighbourhoods, the name of the other cities in Scotland, the name of people. I couldn't pronounce first names or surnames, and it's something you need to teach. It's not something that you can learn fast. If you can't say the name of your doctor, and you've got an appointment, it's the first thing they ask you at reception. Well, if you haven't been in my situation, you will not think about that."

She seemed to be aware of the challenges they may face and, drawing on her experiences, is keen to support them in developing skills that can help them navigate these challenges. This is illustrated in the following excerpt, in which she restates her opinion about the reasons we need more diverse teams in Scottish ESOL departments.

"So that's why you need a diverse team. If you've never experienced racism, or other forms of discrimination, how can you relate to your students? Whereas I've got, I've got colleagues from Western East Africa, they've experienced discrimination, I've experienced discrimination. We know what it's like, we know how it feels. And we can relate to our students, and we can discuss the topics and ways to deal, you know, with some, some issues. So, I think that's why it's very important to have a diverse team because obviously, there are things that I don't know and that my other colleagues know."

These statements align with Freire's (2000) argument that change must come bottom up, initiated by those outside the dominant profile of being white, heterosexual and native speakers of English. However, when the onus to drive change is on those considered 'diverse', one could argue that this is a double-edged sword: on the one hand, diverse staff are allowed to make changes that can be beneficial for students and the wider teaching force. On the other hand, this places a disproportionate burden on them. In this situation, staff who fit the dominant ESOL lecturer profile could be seen to relinquish their responsibilities to improve a situation which they have acknowledged as requiring change.

2. The role of those in power

If increasing diversity should be a collective goal shared by everyone, then staff who fit the dominant profile should consider what actions they can take to contribute to achieving this collective objective. Freire (2000) describes this as having solidarity with the 'oppressed' and questioning the ways in which they can contribute to support the issues that affect the those whose identity does not align with the dominant profile. Participant 7, an ESOL

curriculum manager in a large college, seems to recognise this. As a curriculum manager who is responsible for hiring new members of staff in her department, she has actively worked on educating herself and has become aware of her ability to introduce change within the college

“having done bits and bobs of reading and things recently, I have become aware of how you might need to positively create a situation where people are being put into roles in order to then be able to perpetuate itself more moving forward. Because if you’re never giving people the chance to get into those roles, then it doesn’t have the chance to sort of filter down through this, through the system.”

Participant 7 suggests that college staff with the power to appoint teaching staff from diverse backgrounds should do so because this can help increase diversity moving forward. She seems to be hopeful that this can be done:

“Well, I guess it’s for, again, I can only talk from [...] myself, and the fact that I am trying to educate myself on being more diverse and more inclusive; I do see the value in having a diverse staff. So, I’d like to hope that we can find ways to make that happen.[...] [M]aybe moving forward, we can think, and I hadn’t actually considered until I’m talking to you right now, that perhaps using that particular criteria to narrow the list down has affected the pool of people that we have. And so maybe in the next round of interviews, we consider something different so that we can try to diversify a little bit more.”

This willingness to change responds to Richardson’s (2016) request to employers to analyse discriminatory practices in their own context to revise their hiring criteria and use their position of power to transform the profession. In the field of ELT, Richardson (2016) also asked those who are in positions of power to rethink and reevaluate hiring criteria to encourage inclusivity.

3. Funding for ESOL specialist qualifications

Currently, to apply for any ESOL lecturer position in a Scottish college, candidates are required to have specialist qualifications such as CELTA (*CELTA: Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages.*, 2022). These types of qualifications are only offered by private institutions. Participant 6 argued that in order to diversify the profession, funding should be available to people from diverse backgrounds who would like to study for these types of specialist qualifications that are required to work as an ESOL lecturer in Scottish colleges but do not have the financial resources to do so:

“I suppose access to the specialist qualifications I mentioned to you would have to be broadened perhaps through, you know, public funds or some sort of funds becoming available for people to access those courses.”

However, Participant 6 acknowledged that this may not be feasible as these specialist qualifications are offered by private institutions, which is a complicating factor.

“But you see those...those qualifications are provided by ... Well, Trinity College, London, Royal Society of Arts, I think. And as far as I know, these are private bodies, they’re not state bodies. And so, I think there would be a problem there in a in a, in a state institution, what is effectively a state institution like the college recognising.... I don’t know whether that’s the case or not. But I mean, you have to have some recognition of these other qualifications.”

At the moment, in Scotland, there is funding available for people who are willing to study undergraduate degrees and some postgraduate degrees (SAAS: *Student Award Agency Scotland*, 2024) as well as some support available for refugees and asylum seekers to progress to Higher Education (Universities Scotland Scottish Refugee Council, 2016). However, no funding is available for ‘specialist’ qualifications such as CELTA, which are

considered 'essential requirements' for ESOL positions. In the UK, only England offers financial help to people who would like to undertake this course (Cambridge: English Language Assessment, 2022).

4. Revise hiring criteria

According to Participant 1, another way to encourage diversity in the ESOL profession is by introducing flexibility in the hiring criteria. He was optimistic in believing that current ESOL learners will be willing to become ESOL lecturers in the future:

"I'm hoping that will change over the years as the students that we are teaching become better at English, become more integrated in Scottish society and maybe want to do the job themselves. Certainly, a lot of the students say to me "I would like to be an ESOL teacher like you. This looks like a good job" and quite often they'll find work once they've, you know, progressed through upper intermediate. They'll be able to find work as interpreters within the school or just for local, you know, for charities doing volunteer work and things like that, and... ultimately, I hope some of these people could be ESOL teachers."

However, in his view, this may only be possible if there is some level of flexibility about what is expected from an ESOL teacher and, as will be seen in the next section, he suggests that compromise may be necessary.

Participant 7 also considered positive discrimination during recruitment, explaining that, as a Curriculum Manager, she would support *"positive discrimination"* because *"the learners [in her college] are from such a wide variety of race backgrounds, that [she] think[s] it would be a really useful thing for [the department] to have that represented more on [their] staff"*. This comment highlights her positive view on increasing the diversity of staff in her department. However, she recognised that this type of positive discrimination may not be possible in the current system, as members of the panel selecting applicants for interview do not have access to information about applicants' personal characteristics:

"And I'm also kind of constricted with HR processes. That's dictated to me I cannot do that ... not follow what the rules of the college are, what their HR processes are."

While positive discrimination may increase diversity in the ESOL profession, this suggestion should be considered in the context of the following comments by Participant 5, who, as previously noted, comes from a diverse background. Participant 5 remarked that the challenge is not about welcoming diverse people into the profession but allowing the newcomers to be *"different"*, as, in her view, once they enter the profession, they are required *"to fit the mould" and adapt to a curriculum and teaching environment that "[is] bums on seats"* and there is no space for any other methods or adaptation. Participant 5 seemed to believe that, in the college environment, there is no *"flexibility to be diverse and even if there "[was] a diverse team, and we want to, we want to bring our diversity, we don't always have the opportunity, because that's not what we are... meant to do. That's not what we are paid for."* Consequently, in Participant 5's view, the change should start by allowing more flexibility in the curriculum and in the classroom in a way that embraces other ways of teaching that perhaps are not so *'standard'* in the college sector but that would suit better students and teachers who do not come from a traditional Western education system.

5. Compromise

As noted above, when discussing the ways in which the ESOL profession could be diversified, Participant 1 remarked that ESOL students who come from a variety of backgrounds could be good candidates to work as ESOL lecturers in the future. However,

he made clear that for this to happen, the curriculum managers might have *“to compromise a little on somebody having a very, very high level of grammar ability in order to get somebody who is more representative and that the students can identify with”*. These statements show Participant 1’s willingness to change and welcome people from different backgrounds into the profession. However, his idea of ‘compromising grammar’ implies the assumption that those who can bring diversity into the department may not have a good command of the language and may never be as good as those who speak English as their first language, which, in turn, suggests that they could never be at the same level as ‘native speakers’. Participant 1 described himself as a white, native English speaker, which on this occasion could be perceived as a position of power, as suggested by Courtney (2017), who points out that in the ESOL context, having a good command of English is perceived as power.

Furthermore, it highlights the discourse of whiteness and ‘nativespeakerism’ that is still so prevalent in the global TESOL profession (Floris and Renandya, 2020; Gerald, 2020). On a related note, Participant 1 suggested that maybe there should be a place for *“people with [...] not quite such a high level, to teach in community classes and to teach maybe lower-level learners with the college because maybe they don’t need that super high level [qualification] and maybe there’s a balance there”*. While this compromise could increase staff diversity by allowing ESOL practitioners who do not have specialist qualifications to teach some college classes, albeit lower-level ones, arguably, this arrangement could reinforce the divide between those who ‘belong’ to the profession and those who are only teaching at the periphery.

6. Organic change

Some participants seemed to believe that diversity in ESOL lecturing staff will occur organically, in tandem with changes in the wider community. As Participant 4 put it, the profession will *“get more and more diverse just the same way that Scotland’s getting more and more diverse. Well, more and more, a little bit more diverse”*. Three participants (P5, P8 and P1) remarked that this change towards a more diverse profession is already visible in Scottish ESOL departments in some ways. For example, Participant 8 highlighted that *“in comparison to 16 years ago, it’s certainly moving in a more diverse direction”*. Gradual diversification in relation to gender was highlighted as an aspect of identity that is making the departments more visibly diverse. For example, Participant 1 noted that *“there are more ESOL teachers writing ‘they’ as their gender pronoun”*. This would suggest a step towards the conception of gender as a spectrum rather than as a binary, which reflects wider societal moves in this direction. Participant 9 also suggested that change will come organically from ‘outside’ the profession. She commented that, although *“the percentage of non-white non... non-UK teachers [in ESOL departments] is ... is still very low”*, the change will come from bigger social movements such as ‘Black Lives Matter’, which will permeate the profession and will make it *“attractive enough to attract people from different, diverse backgrounds into it” in a similar way that has happened “down South [England]”* where, in her view, the teaching population is *“much more diverse”*. The data regarding the ethnic backgrounds of the staff working in Scottish colleges shows that only 2% belong to ethnic minorities (Colleges Scotland, 2021); in England, it is over 11% (Education and Training Foundation, 2020). Although this data reflects the whole college sector in these nations and is not specific to ESOL departments, it indicates the difference between England and Scotland in this particular aspect that Participant 9 reflects on. While most participants were optimistic about organic change in a positive direction, Participant 3 was rather pessimistic when reflecting on the bigger picture, which he linked to wider structural forces:

“I think it’s also related to the political situation. I think if Scotland continues to be run by Westminster’s government, then we will continue to become more of a closed nation. And that will affect ESOL and ESOL practices. If Scotland

goes a different path, then I would see the country opening up and everything changing. So how will it develop? ... If we do have a kind of far-right government the way that we have at the moment... If that continues, and there's nothing to say that it won't, then I think that the UK will become more closed in and diversity in many aspects will reduce".

Participant 3 also suggested that looking at the development of more populated areas in the UK, such as London, could be interesting to get a better idea of the direction of ESOL departments in terms of staff diversity. As noted above, at the moment, college staff in England seem to be slightly more diverse than in Scotland (Education and Training Foundation, 2020); therefore, Participant 3 seemed to imply that if Scotland follows the English model, the Scottish ESOL profession could also become more diverse.

Conclusion

The disparity between the diverse student body and the homogenous staff profile underscores the pressing need for more inclusive hiring practices and institutional reforms in ESOL departments in Scottish colleges. To address these challenges, the participants of the study suggested several strategies, including funding for qualifications, revising hiring criteria, or compromising the level of qualifications and experience required to work in ESOL college departments. Some of these suggestions may have some limitations in terms of implementation, while others might be easier to achieve in some contexts. In any case, I would like to invite ESOL practitioners working in different contexts to reflect on these suggestions and develop their own ways of contributing to making ESOL departments more diverse.

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Multilingualism in ESOL classrooms: an opportunity or a challenge?

Josianne Block

This article explores multilingualism in ESOL classrooms through the lens of a teacher-researcher. Drawing on personal teaching experiences and a classroom research study conducted with adolescent migrant learners in Malta, this article highlights the benefits and challenges of incorporating students' first languages (L1) into English language learning. While multilingualism may foster inclusivity and affirm linguistic identities, excessive reliance on L1 can slow down migrants' integration process and limit their development of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) proficiency. Finally, the article discusses the need for ESOL teachers to promote ELF as a communication and social inclusion tool. It emphasises that celebrating students' multilingual identities must not overshadow the practical necessity of a lingua franca.

Introduction

Last summer, I travelled to a Slavic country to deliver a workshop on incorporating learners' own languages into the English classroom. The activities I presented were ones I had tried and tested with my students, but the session was not well-received. I got the impression that many teachers who attended the workshop still favoured an English-only approach, believing that exclusive use of English leads to higher proficiency. Later that day, I attended another session by a speaker who had come from the United States to give a talk on some literacy strategies that her school employs for multilingual learners. Despite her enthusiasm and the freebies she generously shared with the audience, the session only had four attendees; perhaps the late hour or the topic discouraged participation. When the session was over, I remained fixated on her opening words: *"There is no language that's more important than another in the language classroom, as long as students can successfully express themselves."* This prompted me to reflect on my beliefs and certain trending pedagogical approaches. If all languages are equally important in the classroom, and if any language can do so, as long as students communicate their needs and wants, then what is the purpose of teaching and learning English?

The role of English in multilingual classrooms

With 281 million migrants worldwide, we truly live in a multilingual world (IOM, 2024). In this article, I am going to adopt a broad definition of the term 'migrant', referring to individuals who are living in a country different from the one they were born in, either temporarily or permanently. 13% of the current global migrant population is under 18 years old (IOM, 2024). Malta, my home country and where I am currently teaching, has also seen an increase in migration, with over 20% of the total population composed of non-Maltese nationals (NSO, 2022). As a bilingual nation with English and Maltese as official languages, Malta's migrant community largely depends on English for communication. The English language is not merely a "legacy of colonialism" but a "practical requirement" that one cannot do without (Block & Xerri, 2024, p. 8). Hence, for someone who does not know English, day-to-day interactions in Malta can be tedious and challenging.

While multilingualism enriches classroom interactions, I believe it is essential for teachers to create a balance in their classroom and ensure that English, as the shared lingua franca, plays a critical role in integrating migrant learners. In multilingual classrooms, students come from several countries, each with their first language (L1). English should be the common thread that binds them. It should allow them to form friendships, communicate their needs to their teachers (even if we do not speak their native languages), and integrate within the classroom, school, and the wider community by being resilient (Puttick, 2024). This was something I believed in and what I thought happened in my classroom of adolescent ESOL students.

In a multilingual context such as Malta, suggesting that all languages are equally important in the classroom overlooks practical realities (Jaspers, 2017). The notion devalues the role of a lingua franca like English in helping migrant learners integrate into new environments. There is no debate as to whether or not multilingualism should be celebrated. However, as the Douglas Fir Group (2016) claims, power dynamics and societal inequalities due to language persist, and acknowledging the beauty of different languages in our classrooms is not enough. Cogo and Dewey (2012) describe English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) communication as interactions where English serves as the preferred language of exchange among language users who lack another shared language. Although this usage of English may not be exclusive, it remains central to facilitating communication. I thought that recognising English as a shared lingua franca would not marginalise students who were still not proficient in English. Instead, I thought that it was necessary for their inclusion in the broader community rather than having them isolate themselves in shared L1 communities. A part of me wanted to acknowledge and include students' L1 in my lessons, and another part of me wanted the students to acknowledge the importance of English in the local context.

Conducting classroom research

Migrant learners face several challenges, and school plays an important role in smoothing their transition into the new society. Once they arrive in the host country, migrants unconsciously place themselves into a 'spatio-temporal waiting zone' (Rydell et al., 2023, p. 98). They feel that they are physically in a place to which they do not belong; however, they do not belong to their native country anymore. This liminal experience may often lead to social isolation (Puttick, 2024). I felt it was my duty to explore how I could, as their language teacher, combat isolation by assisting them in their integration process, and in order to do so, I had to better understand the linguistic dynamics of my classroom. This was done by conducting a three-month teacher research study. My classroom comprised of ten teenage students from Albania, Italy, Ukraine, Russia, Colombia, Egypt, and Syria. Most of them had lived in Malta for less than a year and had limited proficiency in both English and Maltese. They were enrolled in an induction programme offered by the Migrant Learners' Unit, which provides language and social support to migrants for smoother transitions into mainstream education (MLU, 2024). In the case of newly arrived adolescents, they are expected to follow a year-long induction programme prior to starting mainstream education in a designated school where I was teaching. The research involved 14 audio-visually recorded interactive tasks that required communication among peers. During these tasks, students could use any language they wanted as long as they completed the activity and reached its conclusion in English. Different tasks were used, including board games such as 'Guess Who' and 'Taboo'. The goal was to investigate how they used their linguistic repertoires and whether this supported or hindered their English learning.

I reflected on each activity using Farrell's (2015) framework, which includes philosophy, principles, theory, practice, and broader context (beyond practice). This reflective cycle allowed me to adapt my teaching approach, gradually reducing scaffolding and increasing task complexity. Although students were still allowed to use their L1 whenever they wanted if they felt that it helped them, I aimed to prepare them for real-world ELF contexts.

Key findings on language use in the classroom

The recorded activities were transcribed and analysed as I coded the function of every L1 occurrence and then grouped similar occurrences together. What I observed was both fascinating and surprising.

Certain students used their L1s creatively to negotiate meaning and foster connections while acknowledging and supporting each other's identities. For example, in a collaborative food menu activity, students substituted words they did not know in English with their L1 equivalent, such as 'microndas', but the meaning was still successfully communicated to speakers of different L1s. On several other occasions, a Spanish-speaking student made use of basic Italian phrases to better communicate with her Italian friend, despite never having studied Italian, showing a will to learn more about her friend's linguistic identity. Similarly, an Arabic-speaking student occasionally used Russian phrases he had picked up from the classroom to engage with his two Russian-speaking classmates. I found these exchanges positive, and I was hopeful that this multilingual approach that I had adopted was helping students build classroom relationships while celebrating diversity.

However, a more in-depth analysis of the recordings made me realise several unintended consequences. Shared L1s often became a crutch, and the need for students to take risks in English was reduced as they heavily depended on their L1. Groups with a shared language would sometimes avoid English altogether, even if their knowledge of English were enough to accomplish the task. Hence, this over-dependence on L1 did not always happen due to a lack of proficiency in English. On other occasions, groups with different L1s ended up with certain students excluded from the conversation. Exclusion happened unintentionally and intentionally since specific students often abused their L1 to claim power within the group. This slowed down the integration process within the classroom and limited opportunities for them to develop confidence in using English, which they still viewed as another school subject rather than a linguistic tool for integration.

Furthermore, students sometimes segregated themselves into small groups of a shared L1, inadvertently reinforcing social barriers. It became easier for most of them to construct friendships by telling jokes and sharing personal experiences with peers who spoke the same language. This made me question whether explicitly permitting L1 use might unintentionally isolate some learners rather than unite everyone in one classroom community.

Balancing multilingualism and English proficiency

The findings underscored the need for a balanced approach towards language use in the classroom. They also led to several unanswered questions: Should L1 use in teenage classrooms be regulated to foster more equitable classroom interactions? Would such rules stifle natural communication? Moreover, how might the dynamics change with older learners or in less diverse classrooms?

Despite these uncertainties, one thing remained clear: becoming successful users of ELF was essential for teenage migrant learners to thrive. This is relevant not only to a context such as Malta, where English is spoken by 96% of the population (NSO, 2023), but also to other multilingual contexts where a lingua franca is used to connect speakers of different L1s. Conducting this classroom research, I made peace with the fact that it is all right to promote the importance of English among migrant students, and in doing so, I am not being disrespectful to their linguistic identities. However, I also felt I should be more attentive and reactive to instances in the classroom where languages are used unjustly or a dominant L1 is favoured (Sah & Guofang, 2022). Most importantly, I learned that although a multilingual classroom should celebrate and incorporate students' L1s, the value of ELF lies in facilitating integration within the classroom community and providing access to wider opportunities, both locally and internationally (Jaspers, 2017).

Concluding thoughts

Several pedagogical approaches, such as pedagogical translanguaging, aim to celebrate the richness of linguistic diversity. However, they must be applied judiciously because such approaches often ignore discourses of conflict and power (Jaspers, 2017). Overemphasising the inclusion of students' L1 in the classroom without addressing the challenges it poses can be counterproductive, particularly for migrant adolescent learners who are already passing through complex social and emotional phases. As teachers of ESOL, our ultimate goal is to empower students with the linguistic tools they need to communicate, integrate, and contribute meaningfully to their new environments. I believe that multilingualism and ELF can co-exist in the classroom. They should complement, rather than compete, each other because both are necessary. By maintaining this balance, we can help our learners succeed academically and in their everyday lives while acknowledging their sociolinguistic identities. In order to achieve this, we may wish to monitor classroom dynamics more carefully to address any linguistic inequities immediately. After all, as Tupas (2024) claims, multilingual pedagogical approaches can indeed be a disruptive tool to combat social injustice, but if misused, they will end up disrupting education instead.

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The teacher gap

Allen, R. and S. Sims (2018) Publisher: Taylor & Francis Ltd
Reviewed by Linda Ulrich

This is a book on the problems that teachers know about and the solutions that school leaders and managers need to address. The book's main message is that teachers need to thrive, and it therefore looks carefully, with recourse to many theories, at what a teacher needs in order to feel valued, autonomous, and successful in the classroom.

The authors ground their research in human psychology, explaining the need for teacher quality is a powerful determinant of learning and that *'no other attribute of schools comes close'*²⁵. While there will be much for teachers to acknowledge wryly in the book, *The teacher gap* is particularly recommended for school leaders and policymakers²⁶. However, there are chapters here, particularly 'Teacher Motivation' and 'Teacher Development', that, as well as including new (-ish: the book was issued eight years ago) insights, also provide teachers with the tools to make a case for CPD from peers, less uploading of data and (definitely!) no lesson plans.

The style of the book is occasionally less than rigorous – I am not sure that we need to know *'I blow on my coffee as they talk'*²⁷ or that the teacher being interviewed is *'short'*²⁸. Also, the many theories used are sometimes inconclusive: *'this research tells us that sometimes pupil attainment improves if PRP²⁹ is introduced, and sometimes it does not'*³⁰. There are, however, conclusions added at the end of each chapter entitled: Things that schools can do without waiting for policymakers'; there is also a great deal of information in the second half of the book which can help managers and school heads work towards, as Chapter 9 explains, making teaching *'a career worth having'*.³¹ The first half of the book sets the scene with the dramatic statement that over decades, *'standards have not risen, and teaching has not improved'*³². This is despite politicians introducing vote-catching ideas such as smaller classes, TAs, extra maths, and SEND support. Unfortunately, teaching skills and knowledge don't get a mention in political manifestos, even though teacher quality is especially important for those from disadvantaged groups, which surely includes most ESOL learners.

The teacher gap is a result of burn-out, increased workloads and a lack of mentoring, especially in the time after teachers' steep learning curves in the first five years. In a case study of teachers enrolled in year-long training courses, the authors noted that nine of the 18 trainees had left by the end of their first year. The authors stress (teachers, please smile resignedly) that when the classroom door closes, we are alone – from the first day on the job. Isolated teachers often lack the advice and support of colleagues. Consequently, after five years of teaching, 40% of qualified teachers have either moved to private schools or left the classroom completely. While practice may make perfect, teachers are practising (especially in ESOL) on learners who often desperately need our teaching to acquire jobs or immigration status.

As demand on teachers grows through the extra work that policies implement, some schools are running a recruit/burnout/replace mode. Sunday working is common and demands placed recently have meant that experienced teachers are also leaving the profession. The book reports that two-thirds of experienced teachers (those who have taught for over five years) say their morale has declined in the last five years.³³

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26 Back cover

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29 Performance Related Pay

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What, then, does the book recommend for teachers, line managers and policymakers to improve morale, make a teaching career more enjoyable, and retain both new and experienced professionals? Many of these ideas will be known to us, but the authors have set them out clearly and have underpinned them with research, case studies, and conversations with both teachers and school heads. The recommendations cover the themes of subject material and timetabling, training and CPD, exams, OFSTED and observations. These will be looked at below, and the main conclusion reached is that control is demoralising, while trust leads to continued development and inspiration. Rather than leading to boredom, giving teachers the same subject material to follow and a similar timetable adds greatly to progress, especially for new teachers. The more a teacher feels comfortable with a specialism, the more he or she will branch out, read around the subject, concentrate on those learners who have difficulties and try new approaches. Thus, with stable specialised teaching assignments, teachers move further up their learning curve.

Training is an area where teachers often talk of needing help. However, school department heads need to know what training is efficacious and also when: they should not wait for one brave teacher to say she wants to visit a course or study her peers. Further, what kind of training is useful? The authors advise teachers to build up a portfolio of evidence such as training, video-ed parent meetings or peer comments to exhibit self-determination and autonomy: a case study of teachers with and without training sessions on self-determination found that those with these sessions were more autonomous and increased motivation. An example of peer training is the NATECLA 'Teachmeet' – learning from other teachers in short sound bites, which is both helpful as well as motivating. Long training sessions from outside experts are tiring, and this material is frequently ignored. The idea of learning from colleagues shows the importance of mentoring. A new teacher rarely shadows an experienced colleague: he or she is usually in the classroom from day one. The authors do not mention the 'O' word (OFSTED) until Chapter seven on workload, a chapter they subtitle '*auditing the hamster wheel*.' Studies have shown that single, short observations '*might not be useful; they certainly do not show flexibility nor ability to work with colleagues*'³⁴ Thus, an outstanding school is one that is outstanding at ticking boxes. Exams should be externally marked, and teachers should be allowed to be motivated by mastery rather than looking for performance outcomes.

In conclusion, the authors stress three qualities that can help close the teacher gap: self-determination, assurance that teachers are being valued, and autonomy. These qualities make teachers want to read books on learning acquisition and visit conferences in their own time. Two experiments quoted in the book show the value of these qualities: the first was called a '*tuning cycle*' where peers tried and refined a teaching technique with weekly feedback from peers. This deliberate practice encourages improvement. The second experiment was a six-week cycle where teachers were told to work only between 08:00 and 16:30 and to take no work home. What do you think they left out? Yes, time-intensive uploading of data, specialised marking schemes and lesson plans!

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