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Interaction, educational background and identity: Arab women learning English in the UK

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Abstract

In the UK, being unable to communicate in English is a significant barrier to social inclusion. Each ESOL student brings a wealth of cultural experience and diversity to the country, but without sufficient proficiency in English to interact outside the home, migrants, refugees and settled communities struggle to integrate, can feel socially isolated and struggle to find employment. This is even more so for women, many of whom have childcare responsibilities. Arab women form a large proportion of the ESOL population, and often come from diverse backgrounds; some with high-level academic qualifications from their home countries and others who never attended a school. Despite these stark differences, what commonly brings the ESOL class together is a genuine motivation to learn a language that is vital to living a more inclusive life in the UK.

Over the past few decades, numerous studies have investigated contrastive linguistics and the transfer errors of Arab students learning English (Scott and Tucker, 1974; Hanania and Gradman, 1977; Altakhaineh, 2010). Recent research, however, has hardly addressed the complex social, cultural and interactional influences on their learning processes. With a focus on ESOL students in South Yorkshire, the present study employs ethnographic methods, including questionnaires, lesson observations and focus groups, with ten female Arab learners of English, to shed light on the role of educational background and identity on perceived language development. The findings reveal an interesting intersection of educational background and self-efficacy beliefs, and highlight the significance of environmental factors on language learning and the potential progress that can arise as a result of well-designed classrooms and interaction patterns. The study concludes with a list of recommendations that can be applied immediately to the language classroom, and draws particular attention to the need for more one-to-one time between student and teacher at the start of courses and regular opportunities to work on practical individual learning plans. This is to facilitate the opportunity for teachers to get to know their learners and ask the necessary questions that will enable them to prepare effective lessons, conduct useful formative assessments and support their students to become more productive learners of English, in turn enabling them to converse more confidently and apply their skills in wider society.

Dedication:

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, who provided unconditional love and encouragement throughout. I would not be who I am today without their belief in me, and their contributions to my life will be forever appreciated.

Contents

1. List of figures and tables

2. Introduction

The field of second language acquisition has yielded numerous important theories and pieces of research. This study highlights and examines specific aspects of the experience of learning English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and reveals a number of obstacles for women who have Arabic as a first language to learning English in adult community learning institutions in South Yorkshire. By conducting the study through both qualitative and quantitative methods, two key research questions were investigated:

1. What are the most effective ways of examining the factors influencing the ESL development of Arab women?

2. How can ESL practitioners utilise information on learners' first language, educational background and identity to effectively engage students and improve learner progression?

In this investigation, a wealth of rich data was uncovered, including feelings, perspectives and responses to both open and closed questions, which should aid other practitioners in understanding the challenges faced by Arab women learning English. Social and cultural implications also became evident in the study as barriers to progress that even the learners had not fully noticed.

The development of a positive identity is regarded a prerequisite for successful learning (Lin, 2007). The link between language and identity is acknowledged by anthropologists and social science researchers, with Holloway (1999) defining identity as the reference point from which an individual views him or herself and the world. Since individuals can be defined by the way they speak, language plays a central role in identity formation, and can subsequently have a significant effect on the promotion or inhibition of motivation for learning a second language. The theory of *psychology of place* (Fullilove, 1996) argues that it is through cultural association, or *familiarity*, that individuals develop knowledge and an identity connected to the sense of self, which ultimately emerges from one's intimate and immediate environment. Thus, since identity is the

primary reference point for individuals, it is reasonable that the first language tied to a student's identity should be valued.

According to Firth and Wagner (1997), research on Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has typically been preoccupied with language learning as an individual cognitive process. Much recent research on language learners and multilinguals, however, has undergone a shift in emphasis from "the interface between language use and linguistic development to the interface between language use and identity" (Block, 2007: 867). This study adopts a constructivist view of learner identity, one that resists static categorisations, but rather views it as "fragmented and contested in nature" (Block, 2007: 864). In the same way that individuals can recognise themselves as professionals or, for example, members of a specific gender or ethnic group, they should also be able to identify themselves as learners (Falsafi, 2010). Thus, while the construction of social, gender and ethnic identities has been addressed at large (Frable, 1997), research on the concept of learner identity and its influence on second language learning is less available, despite its potential for facilitating the accomplishment of wider societal goals and challenges.

For most immigrants, attending ESOL lessons at community centres, further education colleges and higher education institutions is the first step to learning English. With more than 180,000 students taking ESOL classes in England alone (a substantial reduction from 219,000 six years ago, due to funding cuts in the sector (NIACE, 2011)) — and a significant proportion of these being female Arabs — the need for research that examines the experiences of these learners and the strengths and challenges associated with their English language development has never been more pressing. The critical analysis of factors relating to educational background, interaction and identity in this study aims to fill the evident gap in research and support teachers of ESOL, ESL and EFL to identify and address associated issues more effectively. This study is necessary for achieving the integration of this large group of learners, and simultaneously for the reduction in the number of hurdles that children of mothers with otherwise poor English must overcome in order to achieve at school.

The originality of this study lies in its theoretical framework, where an attempt has been made to devise a "toolkit" of suggestions for teachers with dimensions that directly or indirectly enhance student motivation, generate more effective learning environments and yield more significant advances in second language learning achievement.

2.1 Scope and pedagogical implications of the study

One discernible characteristic of this study is the prominent link between its plan and the type and quality of data obtained. Continuous reflection on the purpose of the research and the placement of this into the real world — such as the institution from which the data was collected — rendered the direct relevance of this research to adult community learning in the UK a key strength; however the study is not without limitations. Having employed a sample size of ten participants from two institutions, the study does not allow a generalization across the ESOL population in the UK. This is one study in one region in the UK, and time did not permit the study of more participants. Nonetheless, the findings will benefit teachers across the country and internationally who have direct teaching interaction with Arab women learners of English, and offer insight into how lessons can be strategically planned and delivered to create the most successful learning experiences.

Given the large proportion of Arab ESOL learners in the UK, it is hoped that the exploration of the language learning processes of Arabic L1 speakers will become part of the research agenda in the field of SLA and that the understanding of identity and the educational, motivational and language learning profile of these learners will help to eliminate barriers to learning.

3. Literature review

Key Words: *ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages), L1 (First Language), L2 (Second Language), QI (Qualified Immigrant), motivation, identity, SLA (Second Language Acquisition), classroom layout.*

Research on second language learning has attracted significant attention over the last few decades. In the following chapter, a large body of literature is reviewed to explore a range of dimensions of the concepts of motivation, learners' educational background, identity, first language and the classroom environment. This is with the aim of examining the available research that will pave the way for the findings in this study to uncover the core factors that influence the English language development of Arab women learners of English and explain how the first language, educational background and learner identity of these students affect their progress in new learning environments.

The literature review is divided into the following six chapters:

1- Current and recent ESOL policy context
2- Motivation in language learning
3- Learning environments and second language learning
4- Investment and learner identity in language learning
5- The Arabic language as a first, critical and heritage language
6- Educational background and second language learning

3.1 Current and recent ESOL policy context

3.1.1 Nature of ESOL provision

The term 'ESOL' refers to English language teaching for adults in the UK whose first language is not English. It is delivered though courses provided by public funding in England and Wales under the nationalised Skills for Life framework established in 2001 (DfES, 2001). In the early 2000s, UK ESOL researchers were granted sufficient funding to undertake their first large-scale classroom research and ethnographic study where

agency and contingency in the classroom was examined (Baynham, 2006). Learners' motivation, investment and agency were investigated (Cooke, 2006), and there was assessment of speaking skills (Simpson 2006), in addition to the *Effective Teaching and Learning: ESOL* report being produced (Baynham et al, 2007).

Since language learning is inevitably linked to the social and economic context in which the learning is placed, with policy areas such as race, immigration and integration all naturally affecting English language learners (Hamilton and Hillier, 2006). Rosenberg (2007), Blackledge (2006) and Simpson and Whiteside (2012) argue that English language learning is integrally bound up in, and frequently defined by, the discourses of employment skills, community cohesion and immigration controls. Since 2001, which saw the introduction of the Skills for Life policy to oversee the establishment of an integrated national infrastructure, the ESOL field attained a number of notable benefits. Primarily, a significantly greater number of learners were able to access provision, funding had increased to unprecedented levels and the ESOL profile had clearly improved (DfES 2003).

Whilst many teachers welcomed centralisation — believing that it brought about greater consistency, coherence and support for their development as practitioners — others took a more critical standpoint. These teachers argued that centralisation drew in financial benefits at the cost of producing an inflexible view of what was right; one which imposed limitations on the autonomy of both learner and teacher. Furthermore, Hamilton (2009) suggested that centralisation generated an 'inspection' culture of targets and quality improvement criteria that, ultimately, neither delivered the targets nor were wholly in line with learners' primary concerns.

The wide range of English language teaching services which thrived in the twentieth century as a direct response to the growing population of settlers has been described by Rosenberg, (2007) as underfunded or completely voluntary. Provision would be found in a variety of settings, from formal workplaces or institutions to community colleges and forums. The growing divide between ESOL and TEFL then began as a result of the difficulty in applying TEFL pedagogy to immigrant communities which were becoming

increasingly heterogeneous, with ESOL provision focusing more on the needs of settled learners in the UK.

However, planning and research into students' particular needs was especially challenging, since one of the core problems besetting research is that it can be almost impossible to acquire accurate and up-to-date demographic data on the language levels and needs of immigrants (BIS, 2011). The result of this is that local, regional and national bodies and providers are generally constrained in their ability to devise strategic responses to demands for ESOL. Recently, it was estimated that, in London alone, there were over half a million adults of working age who had varied English language needs (O'Leary, 2008).

3.1.2 Student heterogeneity

ESOL learners in the UK comprise asylum seekers, refugees, migrant workers and members of settled communities. Baynham et al (2007), Pitt (2005) and Ivanic et al (2006), amongst many others, are in agreement that these groups are not homogenous, and that these individuals bring with them a wealth of cultural, educational and employment diversity, and a spectrum of needs and expectations. Their unique experiences, in turn, influence what and how they wish to learn, and they rarely pursue the learning of English for a single purpose. The most common motivation for attending ESOL lessons is to enable learners to access services, support their children or secure sustainable employment.

In addressing the heterogeneity of the student population, Cooke and Simpson (2008) shed light on the issues that impact women learners in particular, such as caring responsibilities at home, the lack of available and good quality childcare, family changes during migration (such as women becoming single parents due to war), low literacy levels and poor access to education. They further found that ambivalence towards the need to support children was a key concern for parents, as it was stressed that "one of the main motivations for parents to attend ESOL lessons is cohesion in their own immediate families, especially when their children are growing up" (2008: 19). According to Cooke and Simpson (2008), such factors demonstrated a clear need for adequate funding as an investment in the next generation.

Roberts and Baynham's (2006) argument, also echoed throughout ESOL research, is that it is necessary to attend to both the heterogeneity of learners and to the particular structural constraints within which provision takes place, affecting the agency of tutors and learners. This, in itself, is regarded part of a wider critical agenda (Auerbach et al, 1996) where political contexts and policies are inspected for ways in which they support or restrict language learning. Roberts and Baynham (2006: 3) promote bringing the life experiences of ESOL learners into the curriculum whilst simultaneously "working to develop the interactional skills in classrooms characterised by student agency and teacher contingency", a concept they label "bringing the outside" which will "maximise their potential in an unequal world".

Gender, as a particular factor, has been highlighted as an issue in reaching vulnerable and isolated learners, yet is rarely debated from the starting point of meeting the needs of women as the mainstream learner population who experience issues emanating from unbalanced power relations (Tackey et al, 2006). Surveys that record ESOL enrolments indicate that female students outnumber males by approximately 2:1, and this contrast rises slightly in terms of achievement (BIS, 2011).

Gender is significant as women often experience additional discrimination and have difficulties that are frequently overlooked (Refugee Council, 2005). Gender oppression, family opposition and lack of independence, in particular, have been expounded by Heath and Cheung (2006) as factors which can restrict opportunities for learning. Many women have lived in the UK for several years but never learned English, and particularly low levels of English are prevalent amongst Pakistani and Bangladeshi women, whilst female refugees and lone parents can also be isolated, with little access to health and other key services (Refugee Council, 2005). Dumper (2002) and Kofman, Raghuram and Merefield (2005) further recognised that these individuals are also more vulnerable to violence and abuse.

3.1.3 Funding

In the UK, state funding for ESOL classes has dropped significantly over the last four years. The most recent cut, announced in September 2015, saw the withdrawal of £45

million worth of funding which had been put in place for individuals in receipt of Job Centre benefits and identified as having a language level that prevented them from obtaining employment. This, in addition to earlier cuts in funding, has had serious effects on the ability of further and adult education establishments to provide ESOL classes. Numerous organisations have ceased to run such courses altogether, several skilled and experienced teachers have lost their jobs and, where ESOL classes still currently exist, long waiting lists are common. Moreover, the number of free places previously available for the most vulnerable learners was also slashed.

It is estimated that 16,000 learners were affected by this cut alone, and one of its most obvious consequences has been that migrants must now wait at least one year before being eligible to commence their learning of English (Action for ESOL, 2015). The Association of Colleges (AoC) stressed that this will "prevent them from not only integrating with society, but from getting into employment and off benefits. Many high-level professionals who come to this country could now be held back from offering their vital skills to the economy" (AoC, 2015: 4). The timing of the announcement was further subject to criticism as it came on the same day the Prime Minister, Cameron, announced a review of how integration should be improved in deprived and isolated communities. Ultimately, thousands of Job Centre claimants have had to attempt to seek alternative access to classes, whilst many are likely to remain on benefits as a result.

There have been a variety of influences on ESOL provision relating to government initiatives and legislation. Key moments in this history included, in 1992, the classification of literacy, numeracy and ESOL as vocational courses which qualified for funding from the Further Education Funding Council. In 2000, *Breaking the Language Barriers*, a report of the working group on ESOL, was published to explain the range of learners, identify the scale of need and make recommendations. ESOL was then integrated into the Skills for Life (SfL) policy framework in 2001, when staff were required to work towards teaching qualifications and learners were encouraged to gain "marketable qualifications with national currency" (Rosenberg 2007: 228), resulting in a significant uptake of classes.

In 2001, the Adult ESOL Core Curriculum was also introduced, describing the content of what should be taught in ESOL programmes and setting out a clear set of skills required to meet national standards. In 2005, a new citizenship test, *Life in the United Kingdom*, was introduced. The test comprised 24 questions to be answered over 45 minutes, and applicants were required to correctly answer 18 or more questions to pass. Despite being known as the UK's 'citizenship test', the *Life in the UK* test is required for any individual applying for permanent residency prior to applying for citizenship. Thus, the test is perhaps more accurately a type of residency test, and one which affects the lives of hundreds of thousands of people.

2007 then saw the end of free ESOL classes for asylum seekers, as all ESOL learners now had to pay course fees unless they were in receipt of means-tested benefits (LSC, 2006). This announcement by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) was met with dismay and criticism, and triggered a 'Save ESOL' campaign led by the University and College Union (UCU).

The nature of ESOL — how it is talked about, how it is practised and how it is affected by other areas of social policy — has changed over time, and it continues to be a contested site of public policy. As a result of political rhetoric, laws and regulations, ESOL teaching and the lives of learners in general have been a focus of discussions of immigration, community safety, citizenship and economic changes. Simpson and Whiteside (2012) stress that the increasingly restricted agenda of individual teachers and institutions has resulted in excessive bureaucratisation, a rigid qualifications framework and a curriculum focused on preparing students for low-skill employment and the UK citizenship test.

ESOL was originally developed to address poverty and support the inclusion of recently arrived immigrants (Refugee Council, 2005). Rediscovering methods of linking language learning to the social contexts of isolation and disadvantage could therefore better direct ESOL resources in order that racism, poverty and exclusion are addressed, ultimately contributing to the establishment of a more equitable society in which migrants are valued and enabled to thrive.

3.2 Motivation in language learning

3.2.1 Self-learning

Self-learning, which is also referred to as learner autonomy, has its roots in humanistic and cognitive psychology, and has an identifiable position in modern learning theory. As with any other learner ability, learner autonomy is regarded an acquirable skill. Alongside the defining of learning goals and the preparation of a learning plan, this commonly necessitates appropriate methods of teaching and learning that enable the autonomous learner to inspect and evaluate the learning process (Johnson, 2002).

Despite learner autonomy often being considered a buzzword in second and foreign language acquisition (Little, 1991), and having several definitions (Benson, 2011; Holec, 1981; Little, 1991), a consensus does exist that autonomy involves learners taking greater control of their learning (Benson, 2011). In recent work, this definition has also been linked to personal autonomy, a concept relevant to individuals struggling for more control over the general course of their lives. Benson (2011: 16) recognises that autonomy is "multidimensional" and, depending on the individual, the setting and the context, "takes many different forms". More importantly, autonomy can be exhibited by learners in various different ways, consequently allowing for a variety of perspectives on the types of autonomy that should be aspired in specific contexts.

Benson (2011) argues that vital to the strength of the concept of autonomy are three major claims: firstly, that language learners naturally tend to take control of their learning; secondly, that learners who lack autonomy are able to acquire and enhance it; and thirdly, that language learning with autonomy is more productive than non-autonomous language learning. The reasoning behind these claims is explained by the reality of the idea of autonomy and the viability and value of interventions that endeavour to nurture it.

Naturally, the key psychological component required for self-learning is motivation, as this comprises the initial force to begin learning and the essential factor for maintaining the learning process. However, the actual driving force that keeps learners' motivation active over a period of learning has been debated, and a review of this is given below.

15

3.2.2 Integrative and instrumental motivation

Gardner and Lambert's (1959) identification of integrative and instrumental factors is one of the most widespread models of motivation in language learning. Respectively, where some learners exert effort to learn a language for either "social, cultural or ethnolinguistic" reasons, as in a desire for greater identification and involvement with speakers of a particular language, others may embark on this learning journey because they trust that it will aid in the accomplishment of set academic or professional goals (Dornyei, 2003: 279). Thus, an integratively motivated individual might believe that studying English will enable them to better understand English life and culture, whereas an instrumentally motivated individual may believe that learning English is necessary because it will allow them to gain a particular qualification or enhance their career prospects.

For several decades, ideas of motivation for second language acquisition had been centred on the influential concept of integrative motivation. Over the past twenty years, however, there has been increasing concern with the theoretical content of this concept, partly because the term 'integrative' was found to be limiting, and partly because it did not offer any obvious links with the cognitive motivational concepts that had emerged in motivational psychology, such as 'self-determination theory'.

3.2.3 Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation

Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory is a prevalent model of motivation in language learning. Branched into three types of motivation — amotivation, extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation — Ryan and Deci's (2000) theory identifies learners who see no particular reason to continue learning as motivated. Learners who persevere primarily as a result of finding learning interesting and rewarding are considered intrinsically motivated, while those who are driven by academic grades or professional opportunities are viewed as extrinsically motivated.

Although intrinsic motivation is commonly regarded as the most desired and influential, Ryan and Deci (2000) argue that a solid, sustained effort to learn can potentially be achieved if extrinsic motivation is internalised. According to this theory, motivation that

is initially extrinsic can be internalised as a direct result of three core factors: *relatedness*, in that the behaviours of the students are "prompted, modelled or valued by significant others to whom they feel (or want to feel) attached or related", such as teachers or parents; *perceived competence*, where the learner clearly expresses their capability of completing the task at hand; and *autonomy*, which "allows individuals to actively transform values into their own" (Ryan and Deci, 2000: 73).

3.2.4 Dornyei's model of motivation in second language learning

Dornyei (1994) devised a model of second language acquisition that encompassed some of the more expanding views on motivation. Comprising three distinct levels, Dornyei's (2004) theory addressed integrative and instrumental motivational elements at the first language level. These elements centre on attitudes towards the target language.

At the learner level, motivation is about the individual's reaction to the language and the learning situation. At this level, different cognitive theories of motivation are included, such as motivation as a function of an individual's views, not as an instinct, need, drive, or state. The source of action, then, is when information is encoded and transformed into a belief (Dornyei, 1994).

At the learning situation level, motivational aspects are related to that which the student interacts with, from the teacher and fellow students to the course and the classroom (Dornyei, 1994). Furthermore, the syllabus, lesson materials and activities are course-specific motivational components, whilst the teaching style, approach and attitude are teacher-specific components that can influence motivation. As for group-specific motivational components, Dornyei (1997: 487) defines these as "classroom structure, group cohesion, goal-orientedness and the norm and reward system".

Ushioda (1996) argues that such cooperative learning can create appropriate conditions for intrinsic motivation. Hence, group work is a beneficial mode of classroom interaction as it facilitates opportunities for students to collaborate and share ideas with one another, in turn raising the potential for enhanced learning.

Clement, Dornyei and Noels (1994) further highlight the value of collaborative learning by arguing that group cohesiveness is a fundamental factor in second language motivation. In reference to "goal-orientedness", Dornyei (1997) states that group members differ in the levels of responsibility they possess in order to fulfil the aims of the group. According to Nichols and Miller (1994), learners engaging in cooperative learning are more goal-oriented, highlighting how they differ in their commitment to the group's overall objectives based on their personal views. It could be argued that support and a positive attitude to learning are prerequisites to successful group learning, as Dornyei (1997) suggests that rewards are dependent on the performance of the whole group.

To summarise, the majority of the concepts of motivation describe the individual level of the process, though the performance of groups often illustrates particular motivational features that reflect the group rather than individuals (Dornyei, 1997).

3.2.5 The significance of the language learning environment

In the past, methods employed to identify and test the above models of motivation with different populations have commonly been quantitative and survey-based, with participants responding by expressing the extent to which they identify with a set of statements and self-reporting their progress and proficiency in language learning. This was the nature of the study conducted by Noels (2005), for example, on motivation among learners of German at a Canadian university, whereby motivation of Heritage Language Learners (HLL) and non-HLL of German, using both the integrative/ instrumental and intrinsic/extrinsic models, were compared. A Heritage Language Learner is defined as a language student who is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, who speaks or at least understands the language and who is to some degree bilingual in that language and in English (Valdés, 2000).

A more qualitative study may have offered a more in-depth account of the concept under investigation: motivation. In the present study, quantitative data gathered from questionnaires is accompanied by qualitative observations of learners in the classroom and a focus group yielding richer data that aims to explain why students respond,

18

interact and learn in the way they do. Researchers in motivation have increasingly come to realise the limitations of psychologically-based approaches, those which rely on the individual student and their self-reporting of agreement with broad statements about motivation.

Gardner (2006: 243) argues that motivation "definitely cannot be assessed by asking individuals to give reasons for why they think learning a language is important to them", as reasons need to be supplemented with and evidenced by observable behaviours. Since a motivated person "expends effort, persists in the activities, attends to the tasks, shows desire to achieve the goal, enjoys the activities, etc.", a purely survey-based study will simply not capture the data required to allow a reliable judgement on motivation to be made (ibid). Furthermore, aspects of the learning situation, such as the influence of the teacher, the group and the course, in addition to factors related to the learner, such as the desire for self-confidence and achievement, have been identified by Dörnyei (2003) as having a major impact on language learning motivation. The findings from such observations in the present study are analysed in the discussion of data.

3.3 Learning environments and second language learning

3.3.1 Classroom design and student engagement

A student's success is influenced by several variables, and academic research has explored many of them, from the effects of different teaching styles to socioeconomic background to internal motivation. However, still underemphasised and often overlooked is the role that classroom design plays in student progress. In recent years, many studies (Scott-Webber, Strickland and Kapitula, 2013; Durán-Narucki, 2008) have been conducted that found that factors in the built environment can affect motivation, attention, retention and academic achievement, but few studies have reliably evaluated how different *classroom* designs affect the success of students.

Engagement is widely recognised as a highly probable predictor of student success, and one key study that measured the impact of classroom design on student engagement was the Steelcase education study (2013: 3). Conducted across four American

universities, the research indicated that classrooms designed for active learning —
where "physical space promotes engaging experiences for both students and staff" —
have a significant impact on student engagement. According to the study, the learning
process is affected by seating arrangements and how furniture is arranged; i.e., where
students choose to sit could influence student performance. Attention span,
comprehension and the retaining of information can all be affected by where a student
is situated in the classroom.

Students who occupy the front rows of the classroom tend to be more attentive than
those in the back (Ceryan et al, 2014; Sanders, 2013; Turner and Patrick, 2004). In order
not to miss out essential information, they generally answer questions posed in class
and appear more diligent than the students who opt for the seats further back. Woolner
(2010: 36) argues that students who do choose to sit at the back of the classroom do
this to avoid being noticed by the teacher, or to be closer to windows or other
distractions that can "provide them with an escape from the monotony of lessons
taught".

Looking back at my own time at school, most, if not all, instances of passing notes,
whispering and pranks were undertaken by students who occupied the seats at the back
of the classroom. From a student's point of view, the choice of where to sit may well
reflect one's personality. This does not necessarily, however, signify that students who
choose to sit at the back are less hard-working overall or care less about learning and
progression.

Creating optimal seating arrangements can advance learning in class (Tessmer and
Richey, 1997; Turner and Patrick, 2004). Teachers often pay little attention to
classroom layout, tacitly accepting that the arrangement of the classroom furniture is as
it should be, with traditional rows the most common classroom layout in most state
schools that participants of this study have been accustomed to in the Middle East, and
where the situation is generally "the larger the class, the less interaction" (Wachob,
2009: 39). The positive effects of well-organised classroom layouts have been
documented (Tessmer and Richey, 1997; Turner and Patrick, 2004), yet such

improvements can only be seen if appropriate arrangements are implemented by the teachers.

3.3.2 Varied seating arrangements and their characteristics

American poet and etymologist John Ciardi (Tauber and Mester, 2000: 182) stated that, "the classroom should be an entrance to the world not an escape from it". This suggestion is especially fitting for the ESL classroom, where students naturally bring with them a wealth of cultural experience, diversity and traditions, and so, in effect, the teacher is already aided with a range of invaluable resources: the students and their unique individual backgrounds.

With the aforementioned considerations of classroom design and student engagement in mind, the institution delivering the ESL courses, or indeed the teachers themselves, could organise the classroom furniture in many ways, four of which are detailed below and evaluated with the benefits and limitations of, and suggested uses for, each.

- *Nested/clustered desks* (Evertson, Pool and Iris, 2002). This layout is formed by pushing two or four tables together to create a continuous square or rectangular surface, and the students position their chairs around the outer edges of the square or rectangle. The nested tables arrangement is especially suitable for group work as students all have space to write whilst visibly surrounded by the other members of the group for the sharing of ideas and gaining consensus on project work. However, it is usually more difficult for a teacher to easily regain these students' attention, as not all learners around the 'nests' will be facing the front of the classroom (Budden, 2007).
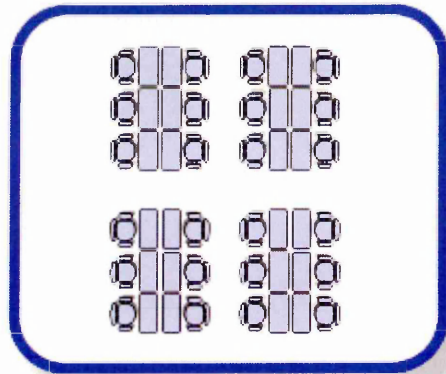
- ***The Circle.*** This layout can either include or exclude desks, but is more common as only a circular arrangement of chairs (Crossland, 2013). This design is particularly conducive for open discussions and debates, and generally encourages students to offer their full attention as all students can generally see each other at all times, and disruption is easily detected. The circular arrangement often receives criticism that it is not an effective classroom layout because the teacher is sitting in the middle of the circle, and therefore half of the class will be unable to see their face, instead facing the teacher's back (Evertson, Pool and Iris, 2002). A solution to this would simply be to have the teacher, along with the students, sitting in the circumference of the circle. That way, sight of all participants is possible and engagement in learning and discussion can effectively take place.
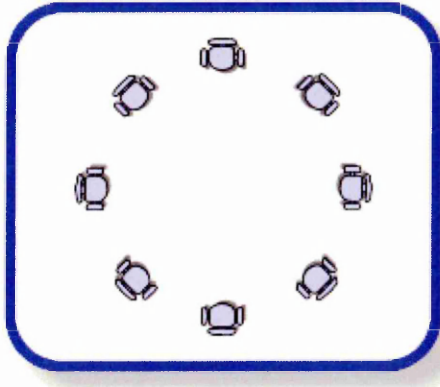
- ***The Horseshoe.*** This semi-circle layout of desks and chairs is a common preference for ESL teachers, and I have personally found that it offers good, friendly visibility, is conducive for individual and pair work activities and offers quick access to everybody in the classroom (Crossland, 2013). Nonetheless, in order to arrange a u-shape as such, a relatively large classroom is required, and this is not always available. Conversely, if the classroom is very large, the horseshoe arrangement can become ineffective in the distance it creates between the students, and thus, forming two semi-circles in larger classrooms allows the full benefits of such an arrangement to be gained for students' engagement.
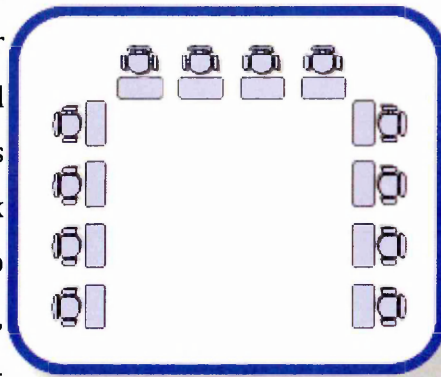
- **_Rows._** This is generally the most traditional of classroom layouts, and was favoured in the 1950s, but with the desks set apart individually as though an examination were taking place in every lesson (Evertson, Pool and Iris, 2002). The observable advantages of using rows in class are that many students can be accommodated in a relatively small room, and that examinations can be conducted with ease. However, very often there is little space to walk behind and between rows of desks, which makes checking progress, offering support, or even disciplining, more difficult.
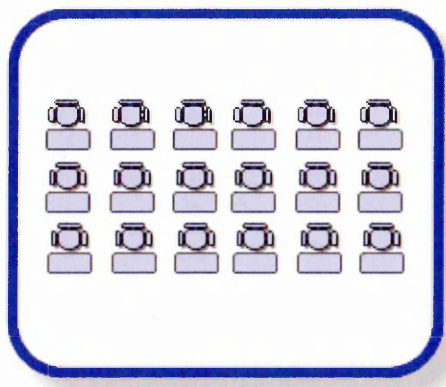
Ultimately, an ineffective classroom layout can frustrate, and even inhibit, successful learning, whilst modern classroom designs that promote student interaction and an active use of space evidently have the potential to lead to greater student engagement, more motivation, the anticipation of higher grades and more creativity (Cheryan et al, 2014; Silverthorn, 2006; Hanrahan, 1998). Such "creative spaces", as referred to by Jankowska (2007: 7), can also affect students' perceptions of respect and value, as many learners identify "new and important looking" learning spaces as an institution's valuing of their students' learning.

3.4 Investment and identity in language learning

3.4.1 Identity and the language learner

In this research, the concept of identity refers to the collection of a person's self-beliefs, public or private, and these may differ from one social context to another. Peer-group, teacher-pupil and family interactions are but a few contexts where social roles and expectations would usually be clearly defined (Taylor, 2013). The identity of the language learner can be viewed as multiple, a site of struggle and subject to change (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000). This is because the conditions under which language learners speak, read or write the second language are influenced by relations of power in different sites.

Given that language is the main vehicle of expressing the self (Ochs, 2008), and that learning a new language is often associated with learning a new identity (Lightbown and Spada, 2006; Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000), it is not surprising that language learners who struggle to speak from one particular identity position may be capable of adjusting their relationship with their interlocutors, thereby expressing alternative, or more powerful, identities from which to speak, and in turn enhancing language learning.

The relationship between identity and language learning remains of significant interest to scholars in the fields of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), sociolinguistics and applied linguistics, and has seen a shift from a principally psycholinguistic approach to SLA to a greater focus on the cultural and sociocultural dimensions of language learning (Firth and Wagner, 1997; Morgan, 2007; Norton and Toohey, 2001). Block (2003: 5) labelled this the "social turn" in SLA. Thus, while many studies on language learning in the 1970s and 1980s were concerned with the motivations, personalities and learning preferences of individual learners, contemporary researchers in the field of identity (Cummins, 2001; Day, 2002; Miller, 2003; Potowski, 2007) are primarily focused on the historical, cultural and social contexts in which language learning takes place.

Learners, however, often negotiate and sometimes resist the diverse positions those contexts offer them, and cannot always be defined in simple binary terms as motivated or unmotivated, or introverted or extroverted. Such labelling, as argued by identity

24

theorists (Lin, 2007; Kubota and Lin, 2009), is not effective without giving due consideration to the fact that such personal factors are often socially constructed in unbalanced relations of power, changing across time and space, and possibly coexisting in contradictory ways within a single individual. For example, Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) propose that identities may, in practice, be imposed, accepted or negotiated: imposed by interlocutors and the wider social context (in perhaps unintentional ways), accepted by students who do not feel that they can resist them, and negotiated by those who find the power and agency to maintain or develop acceptable positions for themselves. Every time language learners communicate in the second language, they are therefore naturally engaged in identity construction and negotiation.

3.4.2 Culture and identity

There is much interest in the individual's perspective of identity in foreign language learning, and this is evidenced by the popularity of Dörnyei's (2009b) L2 Motivational Self System. The model itself is an application of two earlier theories — possible selves (Markus and Nurius, 1986) and self-discrepancy (Higgins, 1987) — and encompasses three key components: the ideal L2 self, the ought-to L2 self and the L2 learning experience.

The most influential component of the model is the ideal L2 self, which is highlighted by Dörnyei (2009: 29) as "a powerful motivator to learn the L2 because of the desire to reduce the discrepancy between our actual and ideal selves". The model, however, does not include an actual self and, as such, it is unclear how the ideal self can be a powerful motivator to distance oneself from one's actual self, when no attention is given to the actual self. In practical terms, it is ambiguous, for instance, how an ESOL teacher can help a female Arab student reduce the discrepancy between her actual self and her ideal self if he does not know much about the starting point of this motivational process – the actual or current self.

When ESOL students do not use English beyond the classroom, as expressed by two of the participants in my study, two situations may generally arise. The first is that these students are attending the course because it is a requirement (such as mandated ESOL courses, where attendance on the ESOL course is a prerequisite for benefit entitlement),

and thus completing the worksheets and classroom activities suffices. The second is that the students are learning ESOL because they have future plans about what they will be doing with the language, such as furthering their studies in the UK, travelling the world or finding a good job. The learning outcome is ultimately, therefore, heavily influenced by the learner's sense of future selves.

The roles of identity and culture have gained increasing attention in the field of SLA as researchers have become increasingly aware that language occurs not only in the mind, but also in complex sociocultural contexts (Firth and Wagner, 1997; Atkinson, 2011). According to Hinkel (2005: 17), "Identity and culture are not static, but complex, perpetually evolving, and sensitive to such diverse social constructs as social status, education, language contact, current and shifting ideologies, and historical and political legacies". It is also acknowledged that a multitude of factors affect individuals' desire to learn, as well as their access to opportunities to learn a language. The growing body of research views identity and culture as something that learners can construct through their use of language and interactions with others.

The focus of ESL practitioners working with students from different backgrounds should not be on identity as a fixed trait, but on identity *construction* via the processes of language learning and use. Accordingly, the factors that impact the identity construction process are not peripheral to the language learning process, but rather integral to initiating and sustaining it. McKay and Wong (1996: 603) accept that learners' specific needs, desires and negotiations are "not simply distractions from the proper task of language learning or accidental deviations from a 'pure' or 'ideal' language learning situation", but argue that they must instead be viewed as constituting "the very fabric of students' lives" and as "determining their investment in learning the target language".

Identity perceptions have also been linked to declared learning achievement, and therefore environments that promote a holistic, person-centred approach to learning have the potential to enable students to do better academically and socially. Teachers designing personally relevant learning activities for their students, encouraging them to bring their interests to class and allowing them to contribute to the design of larger

projects, all whilst allowing students to "speak as themselves" (Ushioda, 2011: 221), are examples of how such environments can be generated.

3.4.3 Imagined communities, participation and membership

As one seeks to develop an understanding of the relationship between language and identity among Arab women learners of ESL, a more accurate identification of the construction of English in their lives and the implications of this process for language development can be achieved.

Originally coined by Anderson (1991), the *imagined* community was adapted for the language learning community by Norton (2001), who posited that in the language classroom, the targeted community may be not only a reconstruction of past communities and relationships, but additionally a community of the imagination. This community of the imagination, in essence, would be a desired community that offered potential for a greater range of identity options for the future.

An imagined community assumes an imagined identity, and a learner's investment in the second language can be understood within this context. In turn, it could be argued that language learners' actual and desired memberships in imagined communities influence their learning routes, affecting their motivation, agency, investment and resistance in the learning of ESOL. This concept is applicable in myriad senses, from one's personal, individual aspirations to become a member of a specific community of practice (Wenger, 2000: 231) to a broader understanding of nations as imagined communities (Anderson, 1991). Throughout life, individuals will inadvertently become members of several real and imagined communities, and while some are central to one's identity formation and life goals, others may be insignificant and fragmented. Some communities could be a matter of choice or interest, while others may be assigned to one irrespective of preference.

Imagination ventures beyond allowing an individual to construct an identity as a potential member of a community (which may or may not exist) and generates and binds communities that spread much further than the scope of our immediate involvement. For example, when we employ an identity category to define ourselves,

27

such as British, Arab, native speaker or scholar, we invoke an imagined community of people who we believe share particular perspectives. Hence, although individual cognitive processes are involved, learning a second language remains a largely social process demanding engagement with users of that language.

3.4.4 Cultural capital and investment

As described by Bourdieu (1977: 29), 'cultural capital' denotes immaterial, non-monetary assets such as knowledge, education, skills and relationships that may be exchanged for other types of capital, including social relationships and wealth. By learning a second language, students are participating in a community in which they hope to become fully legitimate members, and thus assign and employ resources as they attempt to consolidate cultural capital. In turn, language competence and effective communication serve as markers of social status and educational attainment, and a means of interacting with others in these desired communities, which can then confer value on participants' cultural capital and allow them to exchange it for other assets (Bourdieu, 1999).

Bourdieu (1999: 67) argues that "the value of the utterance depends on the relations of power that are concretely established between the speakers' linguistic competencies, understood both as their capacity for appropriation and appreciation". In essence, this is that effective communication will be established in a situation where "those who speak regard those who listen as worthy to listen, and [...] those who listen regard those who speak as worthy to speak" (Bourdieu, 1977: 649). As we will see in the analysis and discussion chapter, the findings of the present study echo those of Norton-Pierce's (1995: 23) work on immigrant women in Canada and second language learning, whereby "it was only over time that Eva's conception of herself as an immigrant — an 'illegitimate' speaker of English — changed to a conception of herself as a multicultural citizen with the power to impose reception". As this particular participant, Eve, continued to develop as a multicultural citizen, she developed with it an "awareness of her right to speak" (Pierce, 1995: 25).

Bourdieu (1999) therefore asserts that language (or dialogue between two people) is more than a simple conversation, but is rather a contest. Bourdieu (1999) is not alone in

28

proposing that conversation is rarely carried out for mere communication and that both speakers are in pursuit of symbolic profit. Austin (1999: 65) argues that, "the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action — it is not normally thought of as just saying something". For Bourdieu (1999), utterances possess value, whereby in a conversation, both sides attempt to increase the value of their words by dwelling on their linguistic competence. The value of the words, in the long term however, is defined by a complex combination of all the variables related to the groups that speak, the competence of the speakers, the social structure and the shared background of the speakers.

Norton (2000) has developed an economic metaphor to denote the subtle degrees of identity construction, referring to this as 'investment'. Building on Bourdieu's (1977) theory of cultural capital, this investment symbolises a student's active, continuing and context-sensitive commitment to language learning, and is representative as learners expend or invest their resources in pursuit of a better future (Dagenais, 2003).

In a general way, all users of a particular language can be viewed as one speech community to which language learners gain access by increasing their communicative competence in the language. As language learning is a means of increasing participation in a given community, it is linked to the process of constructing desired identities. Investment in second language learning is therefore essentially an investment in identity construction, with those who embark on this journey effectively doing so in order to gain cultural capital that varies, both in its nature and its value, in each of the communities in which the individual participates.

3.5 The Arabic language as a first, critical and heritage language

3.5.1 Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and its difficulties

In the UK today, almost six million people speak languages other than English (LOTEs) (Versteegh, 2014). Despite global flows of migration, commerce, media and diplomacy drawing people from widely-dispersed backgrounds into greater and greater contact, and thus proficiency in each other's languages becoming increasingly important, 62% of Britons surveyed by the European Commission speak no language other than English (British Council, 2014). Preceded by Polish, Punjabi, Urdu, Bengali and Gujarati, Arabic is the sixth most common immigrant language in the UK with over 160,000 speakers, and simultaneously the sixth most spoken language in the world, with over 200 million speaking the language as their mother tongue (Versteegh, 2014).

An awareness of a student's first language can facilitate a beneficial understanding of some of the difficulties they may face when learning English as a Second Language. Basic knowledge of the Arabic language, for example, will inform educators that Arabic is a member of the Semitic language family, whilst English is a member of the Indo-European language family. As a result of these two languages belonging to different language families, Arabic has few cognates with English and thus it can take a greater amount of time for such ESL students to internalise new words, particularly at the onset of the learning process.

Adjusting from writing the non-roman, right to left script of the Arabic language and other orthographic features such as the inclusion of only long vowels in writing, to the English script written from left to right and where short vowels are no longer invisible can be an incredibly difficult barrier to overcome for many ESOL learners. An often greater challenge is additionally the shift from broken plural forms for nouns and adjectives (as will be explained in the following paragraph), the existence of a 'dual' (also illustrated in the upcoming paragraphs) and the highly different syntax in Arabic, to the grammatical structures characteristic of the English language, ultimately placing greater importance on the teacher's awareness and understanding of such difficulties (Akasha, 2013).

In Arabic, there are two major forms of plural nouns: the sound and the broken. The sound plural is divided into the (sound) masculine plural and the (sound) feminine plural, and these plurals are produced by simply adding a suffix to the singular form. To create the broken plural form, however, the internal structure of the singular is altered. For example:

where   *Kitab* (كِتَاب)   refers to 'book'   (singular),

Kutub (كُتُب)   would refer to 'books'   (plural)

(No suffix added after the 'b' in Kutub; instead, the noun is changed internally).

(Language Guide, 2015).

These plural forms make up one of the most unusual aspects of the Arabic language, given the highly detailed grammar and derivation rules that govern the written language.

In addition to the masculine/feminine distinction mentioned in the sound plural form above, Arabic has singular and dual forms. While the singular form is used to refer to one person or object, the dual pronoun refers to two. For example:

Bayt (بيت)   =   one house   (singular)

Baytaan (بيتان)   =   two houses   (dual)

(Language Guide, 2015).

Arabic is a diglossic language, defined by the Oxford Dictionary as "a situation in which two languages (or two varieties of the same language) are used under different conditions within a community, often by the same speakers". The term is applied to Arabic in particular because it has distinct 'high' and 'low' (colloquial) varieties. Thus, as well as Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), or *Fus-ha*, several

regional forms of colloquial Arabic, which constitute the everyday language, exist in the countries where the language is spoken. While these dialects can substantially differ from one another, MSA is the variant of Arabic that is generally understood in all Arab countries and employed in formal occasions, newspapers, radio, television and speeches. It is also therefore the form that is "prevalently taught in class to foreign learners" (Fakhri, 1995: 135).

Over the past few decades, there have been many studies of contrastive linguistics and transfer errors of (colloquial) Arabic L1 students learning English as a Second and Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) (Scott and Tucker, 1974; Hanania and Gradman, 1977; Abu-Jarad, 1986; Lakkis and Malak, 2000; Bataineh, 2005; Raddawi, 2005; Altakhaineh, 2010). As a result of the dominant research on the Bilingual Approach to language learning (Auerbach, 1999), in which the first language (L1) is used in the teaching of the second (L2), the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) emerged in the 1960s. The CAH focuses on the differences and similarities between L1 and L2, with a transfer from L1 to L2 considered positive if the same structure exists in both languages. Where a certain structure does not exist in L1 or is very different, the transfer can lead to a production of incorrect language in L2 (Saville-Troike, 2006). Such studies on Arabic L1 interference in ESL learning have led to translation and contrastive linguistics approaches being applied professionally in EFL learning in Arab countries to facilitate better and more efficient results in English language learning.

3.5.2 Arabic as a Critical and Heritage Language and its use in the ESL classroom
Due to its perceived importance for the purposes of international diplomacy, global commerce and national security, Arabic is considered a critical language. In addition to Chinese, Farsi, Korean and Russian, Arabic is not only a traditionally Less Commonly Taught Language (LCTL) in the UK, but it is also typologically distant from English and thus requires extensive time and effort for native speakers of English to master. The relative difficulty of these languages has also contributed to their status as critical languages because this compounds the problem of balancing the limited supply of competent speakers with growing demand.

32

'Heritage language' (HL) and 'heritage language learner' (HLL) are expressions that have been defined in several different contexts, with emphasis varying from proficiency and frequency of use to contact with a community that speaks that language, self-identification with and the status of that community (Campbell and Christian, 2003; Carreira, 2004; Kagan, 2005; Lee, 2005; Valdes, 2005; Van Deusen-Scholl, 2003). 'Heritage language learner' (HLL) generally denotes a student not completely fluent or literate in a language with which s/he has a familial or cultural connection — a common characteristic in second-generation immigrant families (Campbell and Christian, 2003). Often the expression 'heritage language' is used synonymously with 'mother tongue', 'home language' or 'native language', but in some cases it could be neither a student's first nor dominant language, and may not be spoken in the home at all. Nonetheless, a heritage language maintains symbolic associations with a real community with which heritage learners can identify and in which they wish to participate (He, 2010).

Students whose heritage language is Arabic (such as the participants in the present research) may experience a range of different language development processes, and thus addressing their diverse needs can be more challenging for educators. With its diglossia and other linguistic aspects, Arabic is considered one of the most difficult languages in the world and has been ranked Category III (on a scale of difficulty from one to three) by the Foreign Service Institute (2014), along with Chinese, Korean, and Japanese. Where English as a foreign language requires approximately 1,000 hours of study to be mastered to proficiency (Cambridge English, 2014), Arabic, Chinese, Korean and Japanese are estimated to require approximately 1100 hours of intensive study for adults who are good language learners to reach advanced proficiency and 2200 hours to reach the level of superior proficiency that would support use of the language in a professional setting (Wang et al, 2010).

Despite the intricacy of the Arabic language and the time taken to learn it, once it is mastered (as is generally the case for adult Arabic L1 learners of English), teachers may choose to employ Arabic in the ESL classroom for the purpose of clarifying difficult items for less proficient learners so that they do not lag behind their peers. This finding was confirmed by the interviews and observations conducted in Al-Nofaie's study (2010) of the attitudes of teachers and students towards using Arabic in EFL classrooms

33

in Saudi public schools. The fact that beginners may require more explanation in Arabic because they have not yet made sufficient progress in English is consistent with Franklin's (1990) and Dickson's (1996) studies which revealed that using L1 with lower level students was a crucial factor in increasing teachers' use of L1. Dickson (1996) further suggests, however, that raising the motivation of the less fluent students would be a more suitable alternative to the use of L1 in the classroom. Stephens and Crawley (1994) propose the use of more appealing resources such as comic-books for increasing student motivation, for example, in turn effectively reducing the amount of L1 that teachers need to use to aid learning.

Where the ESL teacher is fluent in Arabic, the use of Arabic in the classroom appears to be an unavoidable phenomenon. Although the majority of the students who participated in Al-Nofaie's study expressed their desire not to overuse Arabic in the EFL classroom, in order to practice more English, they nevertheless acknowledged the value of being able to revert to Arabic to confirm understanding of vocabulary and grammar, and to instil a deeper-rooted confidence in the acquisition of English. The views of these students on the use of Arabic in this way are in agreement with those of Atkinson (1987), Cook (2001), Harbord (1992) and Nation (2003), all of whom regard the use of L1 as a natural and unavoidable learning approach in L2 learning. Nation (2003) further asserts that "it is foolish to arbitrarily exclude this proven and efficient means of communicating meaning", and that eliminating the use of L1 to support L2 learning would be equivalent to saying that pictures or real objects should not be used in the L2 class (Nation, 2003: 5; Nation, 1978). Thus, a learner's first language should be regarded as a useful tool to be used where needed, but not over-used.

3.6 Educational background and second language learning

3.6.1 The language acquisition timeframe

How long it takes to learn English as a second language and what forms of support students should receive in the language learning process are important questions that frequently arise among teachers and curriculum leaders. One of the most comprehensive studies conducted in this field has been the longitudinal study, from 1982 to 1996, of the language acquisition of 700,000 English language learners by Thomas and Collier (1997). The purpose of their research was to ascertain the length of time taken for students with no prior knowledge of English to accomplish native speaker proficiency. Taking into account factors such as the programmes and courses used to learn English, learners' first language, socioeconomic status and the number of years of primary language schooling, the study revealed that the most significant variable in determining the length of time taken to learn English was the amount of formal schooling students had received in their first language.

Thomas and Collier's findings also indicated that students on ESL programmes made less rapid progress than those on other programmes, such as bilingual immersion courses. In bilingual or 'dual' immersion programmes, native English-speaking students and native speakers of a foreign language are "purposefully integrated with the goals of developing bilingual skills, academic excellence and positive cross-cultural and personal competency attitudes for both groups of students" (Lindholm-Leary, 2001: 30). Commonly used in the United States, this method works by ensuring that simultaneous translation is never used and that, by the end of fifth grade, all students on the program are proficient in English, proficient in the target language and at or above grade level academic benchmarks.

Awareness and acknowledgement of the language acquisition timeframe is of notable significance in research that studies ESL, and will underpin my own research as the questionnaires distributed as part of my study will include questions on participants' prior exposure to English. This, in addition to questions on participants' formal schooling and education levels in their first language, will facilitate a more accurate

understanding of the effect of this phenomenon, the language acquisition timeframe, on participants' individual perceptions of progress in learning ESL.

3.6.2 Bilingualism and language learning

Thomas and Collier's (1997) findings, however, do not simply affirm that all bilingual courses are more effective than ESL courses, as bilingual programmes are not always feasible, particularly when learners come from multiple language backgrounds, as is often the case in UK ESOL classes and in the courses that participants of the present study were attending. One must therefore look beyond the programme label; the instructional methods employed should be assessed, the materials used evaluated and the qualifications and efficiency of the course teachers verified. In practice, this holds true regardless of the learner's first language, country of origin or socioeconomic status. A key point that can, however, be deduced from Thomas and Collier's research (1997) is the encouragement to maintain the native language in the home and to foster native language proficiency. In children, this can be achieved by attending after-school or weekend instruction in the first language.

Personal experience of this has convinced me that my aptitude for learning French, Spanish and German as modern foreign languages at secondary school was strongly influenced by my acquisition of Arabic from a young age through attending a comprehensive Arabic evening school four evenings every week. In addition to the Arabic and English languages, the evening school taught a range of subjects across the arts, sciences and humanities that not only complemented my education at "English" school but also enhanced my potential to learn additional languages and further developed my academic and interpersonal skills.

Director of the British Council's ESOL Nexus, Dot Powell (2011), asserts that whilst adults may initially be better at reading and writing in English, children more efficiently acquire speaking and listening. This, Powell elucidates, is because their brains are attuned to sounds and slang, and school "plunges" them into the new language (2011: 29). A non-native speaker of English can often be revealed by errors in pronunciation. This, Vulchanova et al (2014: 11) suggest, is due to the fact that the sensitive period for

speech perception is very short, and ends at only eight or nine months of age, with only bilinguals retaining this for longer.

The notion of speech perception, or the critical period, is a "window in early development during which a system is open to structuring or restructuring" on the basis of stimuli from the environment" (Hensch, 2005: 881). It was believed that, prior to and after this period, environmental effects could not affect the sensitivity properties of that particular system. However, Hensch claims that almost as soon as the concept was established, the definition of the critical period was being altered, as, even in systems other than speech (such as the visual system), it was found that experience could have an effect at times outside of the critical period, albeit not as profound. As a result, the terms 'sensitive' or 'optimal' period were introduced to denote the fact that the 'windows' do not always firmly close.

Much research has also been conducted on how speakers of a language perceive a second language. Fledge's (1995) Speech Learning Model, in particular, finds that a sound in the second language that is very different to a sound in the first language will be easier to acquire than a sound that is similar to a native language sound, as it can be distinguished as more obviously different by the learner.

Powell (2011) explains that already speaking a language or two additionally means one can learn the next language more efficiently. A study conducted by Abu-Rabia and Sanitsky (2011) examined the benefits bilingualism might have on the process of learning a third language. The study, which involved two groups of sixth grade students in Israel who were chosen to represent a sample of students studying EFL, revealed that students who know two languages have an easier time gaining command of a third language than students who are fluent in only one language. The first group comprised 40 students whose mother tongue was Russian and who spoke fluent Hebrew as a second language. The second group comprised 42 native Hebrew-speaking students with no fluency in another language, bar the English being studied in school as a foreign language. Abu-Rabia and Sanitsky (2011: 6) stress that because languages reinforce one another, they "provide tools to strengthen phonologic, morphologic and syntactic skills". These skills then provide the necessary basis for learning to read.

The study ultimately revealed that the application of language skills from one language to another is a critical cognitive function that facilitates a more efficient and successful learning process. Abu-Rabia and Sanitsky (2011) have thus argued that a tri-lingual education would be most fruitful when initiated at a young age, and when supplemented with highly structured and substantive practice.

According to Vulchanova et al (2014: 16), age is the most important factor in language acquisition: "There is a sensitive period in language learning, which is biologically determined, with an onset at birth and a decline around puberty. So the younger the immigrant, the better" (2014: 3). Since this decline is only gradual, teenagers are regarded as at an advantage over adults.

3.6.3 Educational background

A key factor for all immigrants learning English in the UK is their level of education. Powell (2011) asserts that this can vary from illiteracy to degree level and can have a major bearing on how students learn in the classroom.

Results from Dustmann's 1997 study indicated that education in both the home and host country positively affects language learning, with the latter having more noticeable effects. It was found that formal education also had a greater influence on writing competency than it did on speaking competency, and that, conditional on the education achieved by the individual him/herself, the father's education level has a strikingly prominent effect on language. For males in the study, a father having acquired basic schooling with a degree raises the probability of speaking the German language well or very well by 14%, and writing German well or very well by 10%. If the father acquired advanced schooling, or a university degree (which was the case for 4.1% of the sample population), these effects were even stronger (22% and 18% respectively).

Given that the focus of my study was women, it would be prudent to point out that for females, parental educational background is shown to exhibit even stronger effects on language proficiency. The fact that the father attended a school, without achieving a degree, increases the probability of speaking the language well or very well by 16%. If

the father acquired advanced schooling or a university degree (which was the case for 3.3% of the sample), this probability is raised by as much as 39% (Dustmann, 1997: 255). One explanation may be that factors which increase the motivation to acquire the foreign language are positively related to the father's educational background.

The conclusion that can be drawn from this review of the literature is that parental education has a considerable effect on language acquisition, over and above eventual effects on the offspring's educational achievements, with the father's education in particular interacting with the offspring's education. The magnitude of the conditional effect of this parental variable is surprising, and the results of Dustmann's (1997) study add to the findings of studies on inter-generational mobility (Solon, 1992; Zimmerman, 1992; Borjas, 1992).

This literature review has critically assessed the available research on motivation, varied learning environments, learner identity, first language and educational background, and highlighted the need for in-depth data on the practical implications of these factors on Arab women learners' acquisition of English as a second language.

4. Method

4.1 Research questions and aims

The aims and objectives of this research are summarised in two key research questions:

1. What are the most effective ways of examining the factors influencing the ESL development of Arab women?

2. How can ESL practitioners utilise information on learners' first language, educational background and identity to effectively engage students and improve learner progression?

The essential difference between aims one and two is the concept of progress in learning environments that are different from those prevalent in the Middle East and which participants would therefore be accustomed to. This comprises features such as the layout of desks in the classroom (such as individually-placed desks in contrast to the common large group tables arranged in islands in UK classrooms) and the modes of interaction, as in teacher-to-whole class compared with pair-work, group and melee activities.

The aim was to elicit participants' own perception of their progress, which is why questionnaires and focus groups were among the methods employed in this research. What is understood by 'progress' here is students' advancement in learning English and their development in adapting to and engaging with new learning environments. Furthermore, what is intended by 'new learning environments' here is a classroom structure and mode of student interaction that differs from the typical language classroom in the countries from which participants come. Thus, the students' perceptions of their progress were identified from their written responses, via Likert Scales, a range of statements in the form of a questionnaire, and their verbal contributions in the facilitated focus group.

However, since factors such as motivation cannot purely be investigated by asking participants for their views, my own observation of students in class supplemented the

data collected, and allowed me to gain first-hand insight into the dynamics of the lesson and the interaction between students and with their tutor.

4.2 Rationale for the methodology, paradigm and type of enquiry

The choice of methodology in this study was guided by the research questions and the epistemological and ontological orientations underlying the investigation. The paradigm that informed this research process was of an interpretivist nature, defined by Burton and Bartlett (2009: 21) as "not viewing society as having a fixed structure [...] because the social world is created by the interactions of individuals". This approach was adopted as it was the most appropriate for the research questions and the intention to "interpret the specific" by understanding the meanings behind the actions of the participants (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011: 35). The research was conducted through a mixed methods enquiry, where two of the data collection methods — observations and the focus group — were qualitative, and one, the questionnaire, was quantitative.

The mixed methods approach has been recognised as an approach to research that increases validity. The concept of mixing different methods was developed in 1959 when Campbell and Fiske (1959) employed multiple methods to study the validity of psychological traits. They encouraged other researchers to employ their "multimethod matrix" to examine multiple approaches to data collection in a study, and this prompted the mixing of methods. Soon after, approaches associated with field methods — such as observations and interviews (qualitative data) — were combined with traditional surveys (quantitative data) (Sieber, 1973). It was acknowledged that all methods have limitations, and that biases inherent in any single method could neutralise or cancel the biases of others. As a result, triangulation was established as a means for seeking convergence across qualitative and quantitative methods (Jick, 1979).

Several further reasons for mixing different types of data subsequently emerged from the original concept of triangulation; for example, the results from one method could help develop or inform the other method (Greene, Caracelli, and Graham, 1989). One method could also be nested within another to provide an insight into different units or levels of analysis (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998). Alternatively, the methods could

serve a larger, transformative purpose to change and advocate for marginalised groups, such as people with disabilities and ethnic/racial minorities (Mertens, 2003).

These reasons for mixing methods led writers from around the world to develop procedures for mixed methods strategies of inquiry and to take the numerous terms found in the literature, such as multimethod, convergence, integrated, and combined (Creswell, 1994) and shape procedures for research (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003). The strategy of the 'sequential procedure' was employed for my study. This is where the researcher seeks to elaborate or expand on the findings of one method using another method. By combining both quantitative and qualitative data in this study, I, the researcher, was able to gain a breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration, whilst counteracting the weaknesses inherent to adopting each approach alone. For example, while quantitative research is weak in understanding the context in which behaviours occur, qualitative research can be regarded as deficient because of the potential for subjective interpretations made by the researcher and the difficulty of generalising findings to a large group. Thus, conducting organised research that made use of both approaches was likely to yield more accurate data.

The greatest benefit to my research of using a mixed methods approach was the potential for triangulation; the use of several means to examine the same phenomenon. Triangulation allowed me to identify particular factors influencing Arab women's learning of English more accurately by approaching them from different vantage points, using different methods. Furthermore, a mixed methods approach was particularly suitable for this study as the findings that arose from responses to the statements in the questionnaire shaped the questions that were posed in the focus group. Thus, the quantitative method here informed the qualitative method that followed, and was pivotal to the functioning of the research findings.

4.3 Triangulation
A total of three data collection methods were employed in this study, facilitating a "fix" on the data (as illustrated in Figure 1 below) through the structure identified by Silverman (1993: 99) as "investigator triangulation", whereby "more than one observer (or participant)" is used in a research setting.

Figure 1: Researcher Triangulation

Observations

Focus Group

Questionnaires
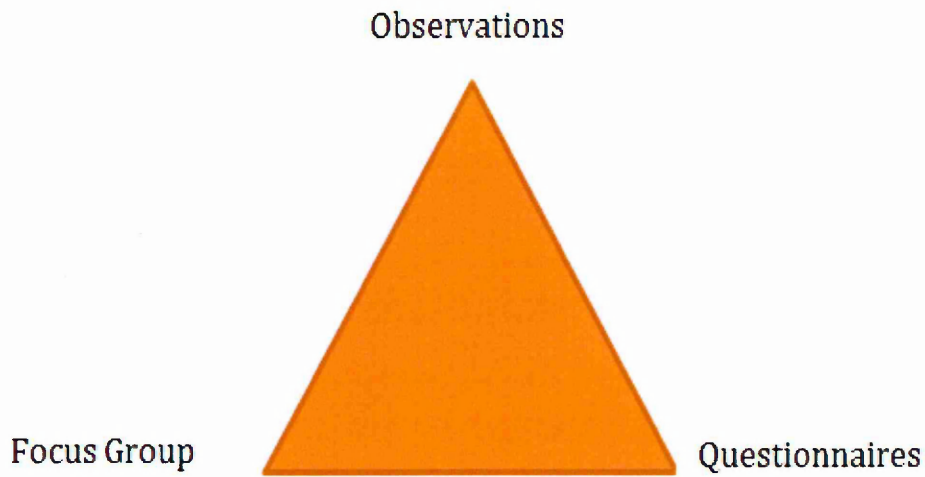
The independent observations from these three sources granted my data more validity as the objective of my data collection methods was to probe, primarily, the Arab women learners' thoughts, values, "prejudices, perceptions, views and feelings" on the subjects of identity, interaction and progress (Wellington, 2008: 71). Whist the overarching purpose of the questionnaires and the focus group was to elicit the unobservable, I was not looking to establish any inherent truth. Postmodernist theory has, after all, taught us that there is "no single or absolute truth in social situations" (Usher and Edwards, 1994: 19 cited in Wellington, 2008: 71). A demographic snapshot of the participants in the research is provided in Figure 2 below. All ten participants completed the questionnaire, seven were observed in ESOL classes and six took part in the focus group.

Figure 2: Profile of Participants

PARTICIPANT	AGE (years)	MARITAL STATUS	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	LENGTH OF TIME IN UK (years)	NUMBER OF CHILDREN	EMPLOYMENT STATUS
Ro'aa	24-29	Married	Libya	Less than 1	0	Unemployed
Fayrouz	24-29	Married	Iraq	4-6	2	Unemployed
Kadija	24-29	Married	Yemen	7-9	2	Unemployed
Amal	30-35	Married	Iraq	4-6	1	Unemployed
Anisa	30-35	Single	Libya	Less than 1	0	Employed (Teacher of Arabic)
Sanaa	30-35	Married	Libya	4-6	2	Unemployed
Abidah	36-41	Married	Yemen	10-12	3	Unemployed
Zeynah	36-41	Married	Yemen	10-12	3	Unemployed
Maysoon	42-47	Widowed	Sudan	20-22	6	Unemployed
Rinaad	48-53	Married	Saudi Arabia	20-22	4	Unemployed

4.4 Observations

Researchers of motivation in particular have increasingly come to realise the limitations of psychologically-based approaches, i.e. those which rely on the individual student and their self-reports of agreement with broad statements about motivation. Gardner (2006: 243), for example, argues that motivation "definitely cannot be assessed by asking individuals to give reasons for why they think learning a language is important to them" as reasons need to be supplemented with and evidenced by observable behaviours. Since a motivated person "expends effort, persists in the activities, attends to the tasks, shows desire to achieve the goal, enjoys the activities, etc.", a purely survey-based study will simply not capture the data required to allow a judgement on motivation to be made (ibid).

Furthermore, aspects of the learning situation, such as the influence of the teacher, the group and the course, in addition to factors related to the learner, such as the desire for self-confidence and achievement, have been identified by to Dörnyei (2003) as having a major impact on language learning motivation, and thus observations of students in class are indispensable in this research.

Observation was the first data gathering method to take place. Notes were taken and recorded on an Observation Schedule (see Appendix 4) every ten minutes, in order to exclude researcher bias, during two two-hour ESOL classes of ten and twelve students respectively. The purpose of these observations was to identify the "physical" and "interactional" settings that the participants were engaged in (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011: 314). This involved taking note of the arrangement of students and teachers in the classroom, the layout of desks and chairs and the formal, informal, verbal and non-verbal aspects of the session, such as the Arab learners' interactions with each other and their tutor and their enthusiasm to contribute to discussions.

Although the process of observation was time-consuming, this particular method was employed as it offered direct access to behaviour and facilitated the observation of participants' actions rather than thoughts, thus enhancing the depth of the data. Whilst observing, I took into account my impact, as an observer, on those being observed, which was at first that of a 'space invader'. The learners were conscious of my presence,

as I situated myself in the front corner of the room, which may have initially influenced their behaviour and led them to act unnaturally; but as the session went on, they appeared to have forgotten about my presence. My role throughout the observations was that of a "complete observer", as I was not an official member of their group (Gold, 1958: 217). I learnt in this process of collecting data that it was impossible to make a complete record of observation due to the complexity of human behaviour, but rather it would be more reasonable, ontologically, to look for patterns and unique events taking place, in order to make the interpretation of the observations more fruitful.

4.5 Questionnaire and piloting

After having observed two classes, I was ready to embark on the second data collection method that would allow me to measure and compare findings: the questionnaire. I had ten participants eager to assist me, and so after piloting and redrafting my questionnaire (see Appendices 5 and 6 for the first and final versions of the questionnaire respectively) with several of my own ESOL students who were not participants in the study, I came to a final questionnaire of 75 questions. These were organised into six sections: you and your family, the classes you go to, your opinions on your progress, language learning confidence, your identity and plans for the future (see Appendix 6).

The questionnaire was used to contribute to the research questions by obtaining essential personal information required for the study (such as age and marital status), followed by individual responses to behavioural and attitudinal statements to gauge students' own perceptions of progress and the influencing factors in their journey of learning ESOL. The questions presented in the questionnaire flowed logically from one to the next, from the factual to the behavioural and attitudinal and from the general to the specific. Aside from ensuring that the questionnaire was presented in clear, basic English to enable ease of completion and adherence to ethical considerations, I was nonetheless aware that the printed word raises problems "unforeseen in spoken, human contact" (Wellington, 2008: 105). It was for this reason that I intended to pilot the questionnaire with similar respondents to ensure comprehensibility.

The use of questionnaires as a data collection method presents numerous advantages, particularly in research that is predominantly qualitative, such as this. Ackroyd and Hughes (1981) identified that questionnaires are not only practical and relatively straightforward to administer and analyse, but large amounts of information can also be collected from a large number of people in a short period of time, in a cost-effective way. I chose to use questionnaires in this research as they are familiar to most people, and the ESOL student participants could respond to them relatively easily. They have also allowed me to compare and contrast findings in a more objective way than the observations and focus group did.

The ultimate advantage offered by the questionnaire to this research was the ascertaining of answers, feelings and opinions on topics, such as identity, that may have been too sensitive for the participants to verbalise or state in a group. Although all participants were able and wished to complete the questionnaire in my presence (in case clarification was required), this data collection method could have been completed elsewhere and returned. In either context, questionnaires allow participants time to think about their answers and respond effectively (Munn, Pamela and Dreyer, 1999).

The Likert Scale employed in the questionnaire is an "ordinal psychometric measurement of attitudes, beliefs and opinions" (Uebersax, 2007: 9). In engaging in such data collection, respondents are required to indicate a degree of agreement or disagreement with a defined statement in a multiple-choice type format. Whilst it can be argued that the attitudes of a population for one particular subject or topic exist on a vast, multi-dimensional continuum, whereas the typical Likert Scale is clearly uni-dimensional and offers only 5-7 options of choice, the benefits of employing such scales in this research lie in their accommodation of participants' neutral or undecided feelings — a situation I became conscious of at the outset during my pre-research recruitment discussions with the prospective participants. Furthermore, whilst it can be common for Likert Scale respondents to avoid selecting the "extreme" options, such as "strongly agree" or "strongly disagree", for fear of negative implications associated with these extreme ends, the scales themselves serve an invaluable function in research as they do not require the participant to provide a concrete 'yes' or 'no' answer, and therefore do not force the participant to take a stand on a particular topic. Rather, the

Likert Scales allow them to respond in a degree of agreement, in turn also simplifying the question-answering process for the respondent — a highly valued factor in this study since the participants' first language is not English. Moreover, as the Likert Scale is one of the most universal methods of data collection, they are recognisable (as was the case by participants in this research, despite the fact that they had never taken part in educational or academic research as such) and thus more easily understood. Ultimately, the Likert Scale is highly versatile and efficient, and its responses are easily quantifiable.

I gained an invaluable insight into essential improvements that were required after piloting and distributing the first draft of my questionnaire to my ESOL students. Primarily, there was inconsistency in the way in which the questions had to be answered. For example, two sections of the questionnaire (Sections 3 and 4) involved a series of statements that required agreement by responding on a Likert Scale. However, in Section 3, instructions to the participant clearly stated to choose a number on the scale, from 1 to 5, denoting "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree", respectively. In the section 4, I asked participants to choose *letters* from the Likert Scale, from "SA" to "SD" to denote "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" respectively. Although the underlying aim of both sections was the same, the difference in wording (numbers to letters) in the answer options caused confusion for the students completing the questionnaire.

Moreover, while the options in Section 3 were expressed in the order of "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree", the lettered options in Section 4 were expressed in the opposite order — from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". Such presentational aspects of the questionnaire may have initially appeared insignificant; however, following the piloting of this data collection method, it became evident that the way in which these features were employed, ordered and presented had the potential to cause serious confusion.

Finally, the Likert scale had been used differently in different sections. Whilst in questions 24 and 25, a five on the scale represented "very well", in questions 29 to 38, a five represented "strongly disagree". This led many of the students to circle the incorrect number, and I was able to decipher this as the students' acknowledgement of and verbal responses to the questions did not correlate with the written responses they

were opting for. I was able to swiftly notice this and clarify the order of the scale for the students at the time, but upon completion, immediately edited the questionnaire so that a response of a five denoted the most positive or highest degree of response in all cases.

After editing, correcting and reordering questions, with better spacing and use of colour in response to students' feedback, I was able to finalise a clear and user-friendly questionnaire with a range of essential question types, from open and closed to factual and attitudinal, with others addressed in Likert Scales. Participants were asked for 30 minutes of their time after one of their lessons to complete the questionnaire in my presence so that I could assist if further clarification was required, and which was required. Due to family commitments, appointments and childcare demands, this initially took place with six of the ten participants after one lesson, with the remaining four unable to stay any longer than the duration of the ESOL session. An alternative time and date was agreed for meeting with the remaining four participants to complete the questionnaire.

An interesting remark was made by one of the participants as she was completing the questionnaire. "Is this for Home Office?", Amal asked as she looked to her peers for agreement. I reassured Amal, and the other participants, that the findings were for the purposes of this research study alone, but I believe that she may have asked this because she found the questions on personal data were numerous or possibly intrusive, despite their generic nature on common forms. The questions about age, marital and residency status appeared on the first page of the questionnaire; and retrospectively, I see these would have been better placed at the end of the questionnaire so that participants were not discouraged from giving honest answers for feeling that they were being closely investigated.

A different participant asked if she could "print and sign the questionnaire with a fake name". Sanaa had signed the research participant consent form with her real identity, but upon reviewing the questionnaire, it appeared that she did not wish to sign this for fear that her views would to be traced to her or that she would be identified from her answers. I reassured Sanaa that she did not have to provide her real name on the questionnaire if she did not wish to, reminding her that the names were all to be

changed to pseudonyms in the study. Amal and Sara's reactions to the questionnaires revealed an underlying hesitation, not to taking part in the questionnaire itself, but to having their identities linked to their responses. This was very telling and could be a potential explanation for anomalies in findings if participants did not respond to the questions openly and accurately for fear of eventual identification.

4.6 Focus group

After completing the observations and questionnaires, a 45-minute timeslot was arranged to conduct a focus group. The objective of the focus group was to bring together a group of people — Arab women learners of English — in order to create a "conducive environment" where participants could stimulate and "spark each other off" (Wellington, 2008: 125).

My role during the focus group was that of moderator and facilitator, as I seated myself with the five students around a table to allow eye contact and to create a convivial setting (ibid). A list of topics for discussion was prepared (see Appendix 7), and this was shared with the focus group participants in the form of questions to initiate the talk. The focus group was audio-recorded with participants' permission and brief summary notes were composed during and after the focus group. This research method proved to be the most beneficial to the study as it produced a "substantial set of data in a short time" (ibid). Focus groups produce large amounts of data, and converting this data to information and knowledge is central to the validity and effectiveness of the research. Analysing the findings ultimately led to insight development and discovery, with such qualitative data requiring judgment to be exercised in order for quality and direction to be achieved.

A mere 35 minutes with the learners gave me an incredible insight into their lives and answered several of my questions regarding their experiences of different learning environments and the negotiation of their identities throughout. Further, it became clear that their participation in the focus group in itself empowered them by giving them a voice. Expressing interest in what they had to say appeared to make them feel more independent and confident in their abilities, and I noticed three of them standing,

50

as they left, with beaming smiles and sense of achievement for expressing their views in English.

Owing to the fact that this was a group activity, my level of control, as researcher, was naturally reduced. I was therefore aware that controversial, sensitive or irrelevant topics could arise. (This did occur in practice, as one of the participants asked me mid-way through the focus group if I liked dancing!) However, I believe this may have occurred because this particular student had a lower proficiency in English than her peers, and appeared to lose focus when she couldn't understand or communicate a message. I attempted to limit such risks and manage the focus group effectively by returning the discussion to the original focus as and when required.

4.7 Reflexivity, bias and positionality

I aimed to maintain reflexivity at all times in the research process by adopting a "responsible response to difference" (Tolich and Davidson, 1999: 65). The perspective or position of the researcher ultimately shapes all research — quantitative, qualitative and even laboratory science. However, developing reflexivity, where the context of knowledge construction is attended to systematically at every step of the research process, is essential for high-quality, effective research, rendering the findings more reliable.

There is often an assumption among researchers that bias or skewedness in a research study is undesirable. As Malterud (2001: 484) writes, "Preconceptions are not the same as bias, unless the researcher fails to mention them". Naturally, different researchers will approach a study from different positions, thus potentially leading to the establishment of varied, although equally valid, understandings of a particular situation under investigation. In a primarily qualitative study as this, the researcher is often constructed as the human research instrument. My desire to explore this research topic on Arab women learners of English stemmed from my countless interactions with Arabic speakers during my teaching years who would share their experiences of learning English in the UK, highlighting how the positive aspects significantly raised their confidence and gave them a tremendous sense of achievement, whilst there remained factors that they viewed as adjustable in order to better their overall learning

experience and perception of progress and achievement. This notion of being a human research instrument is explored by Malterud (2001: 483), who asserts that, "A researcher's background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate and the framing and communication of conclusions".

Soon after commencing observation, I realised that what I observed was dependent not only on what there was to be observed, but on the expectations I brought to the act of observation, a notion agreed upon by Swann and Pratt (2003). This is where a consideration of my positionality as researcher became necessary; I embarked on this research with a belief that there was a relationship between active learning classroom layouts, educational background and perceived attainment. I did not, however, allow my individual hypothesis to influence the data I collected, and this was ensured by maintaining an open mind throughout the research process. I did not ask leading questions in the questionnaire and consciously avoided head-nodding or comments that signalled personal opinions, such as "great" or "definitely", in the focus group.

Further, reflection on my positionality reminded me that my gender may have affected what I saw. Denzin and Lincoln (1994: 12) propose that, "there are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of the observer and the observed". Thus, I believe that having been a female researcher working with a group of female participants made the research process smoother by eradicating reluctance to participate based on gender. I also appreciated the benefit of this factor when I approached Anisa for her consent to take part in the focus group, which was held over an evening dinner, when she asked "Just us ladies?" I was able to reply to this, "Yes, the focus group would just involve us ladies". Anisa responded keenly with, "Ok, that's ok, I'll do it!" Again, at this point, all participants were reminded that the entire research project was based only on women, and this statement appeared to give the participants a sense of value and appreciation, as they smiled and nodded upon hearing that their individual and unique learning experiences were of interest to the wider teaching field, and that their views and voices mattered.

Anisa did appear to be one of the shyer participants in the study, and this was particularly evident during my observations of the lesson. During the focus group, she expressed her comfort in "making mistakes" and "learning confidently" when there were no male students in the class. Her enthusiasm and willingness to talk and express her feelings and opinions during the focus group were clear evidence of her statements — she was simply more comfortable being herself around learners of the same gender. When I enquired individually about Zahra's statements in a brief post-focus group discussion, she clarified that cultural factors played a part in the way that she felt, and that she was not used to learning in classes of mixed gender. In Yemen, her country of origin, Anisa studied at a girls-only school up to high school. Thus, ethically, my focus group was expedient as I had not only eliminated the potential to cause harm, but also facilitated a positive environment where this particular participant could remain in her comfort zone.

Tailoring to such preferences in the research process proved to make participants more prepared to state their honest opinions and challenge accepted wisdom. The data was collected by an "outsider" in the sense that I, the facilitator, was not an ESOL student or associated with the institution at which the data was collected in any way. Simultaneously, however, I was an "insider" in the process in that I shared the same heritage language (Arabic) and gender of the participants. Debates around the insider-outsider status of researchers have focused on the contrast between the perceived objectivity and detachment of researchers with outsider status as opposed to the benefits of otherwise "special insight" that might be open to insiders (Perks and Thomson, 2006: 18). Burton (2006) argues that interviews and focus groups in particular both lose and gain something from being cross-cultural; what they lose is meanings — especially those conveyed through tone or silence, however, as an outsider, participants may feel that they can be more open, which appeared to be the case in this research.

4.8 Approach to data analysis and interpretation

The data gathered in this study was analysed by initially grouping respondents' answers to each question, followed by the organisation and classification of answers into the broad categories outlined in the literature review and data analysis chapters of this thesis. The findings were subsequently reflected upon in order to facilitate clarification on how they fulfilled the original research objectives and answered the defined research questions. Based on the evidence found and the knowledge deduced, the data was examined to detect theories that developed, whilst implications of the results were carefully considered in order to ascertain the meaning and significance of these theories in practice and to identify emerging themes.

The focus group, in particular, produced a large amount of data, and thus converting this data to information and knowledge through recording and analysis was essential for the effectiveness of the research. Analysing the findings in this way enabled thorough representation of the data in the analysis and discussion chapter of the thesis. The process of data analysis ultimately led to insight development, with the qualitative data in particular (stemming from the focus group and observations) requiring close judgment in order for quality and direction to be achieved.

4.9 Reflections on the process

The empirical research took place as initially planned for two reasons; firstly, the order in which the data collection methods were implemented was, in practice, not only feasible but also coherent, as the broader data collection methods (observations) led logically onto the more specific (focus group). Secondly, the situation at the teaching centre at the time of collecting the data was not disparate to the time that it was initially visited for the proposal to be composed. This rendered the organised plan both consistent and reliable, granting it the credibility to be carried out accordingly. One change, however, was made to the plan during the observation, and this was that participants were not asked to sign the observation notes made at the time to confirm that what was witnessed and construed was correct. This was because participants' varying proficiency in English became more evident as the observation progressed, and thus asking them to verify all of the notes that were taken would have been too tedious and time-consuming a task for them. This would have additionally gone against one of

the core aims of this research, which was to benefit participants and the teaching field, and to ensure non-malfeasance and that no harm arises as a result of participation in any way. In response to this change in plan, participants were, instead, asked to verbally confirm a summarised explanation in a friendly post-observation discussion.

5. Ethical considerations

5.1 Introduction

All educational research should be conducted with an ethic of respect for "the person, knowledge, democratic values, the quality of educational research and academic freedom" (BERA, 2004: 5). This respect should be guaranteed for any individual directly or indirectly involved in the research process, regardless of age, sex, race, religion or political beliefs. Full ethical approval to conduct this study was granted by the Research Ethics Committee of Sheffield Hallam University.

Modern internationally-agreed research ethics can be said to have begun with the Nuremberg Code of 1947. Drafted by lawyers, after the Nazi war crimes trial, the Code begins:

> "The voluntary consent of the human subject is absolutely essential [...] The person concerned should [...] be able to exercise free power of choice, without the intervention of any element of force, fraud, deceit, duress, overreaching, or other ulterior form of constraint or coercion; and should have sufficient knowledge and comprehension of the elements of the subject matter involved as to enable him to make an understanding and enlightened decision" (HHS, 2000: 17).

The Code highlighted the vital importance of unpressured voluntary consent, as a means of preventing dangerous or abusive research. The principle of *voluntary participation* requires that people not be coerced into participating in research, and this is especially relevant where researchers had previously relied on 'captive audiences' for their subjects — such as prisons or universities.

Closely related to the notion of voluntary participation is the requirement of *informed consent,* whereby prospective research participants must be fully informed about the procedures and risks involved in the research and must give their consent to participate. Ethical standards also require that researchers not put participants in situations where

they may be at risk of harm as a result of their participation. Harm and risk arising from research are often defined in physical terms, yet individuals tend to report emotional distress as the most serious problem. For example, women in deceptive breast cancer research, or parents whose deceased babies' organs were removed without their consent, generally stated that they would have consented to the research had they been asked (WMA, 2008). Their main grievance was that they were not asked, and the problem of feeling deceived, betrayed or exploited can occur in any kind of research involving people; hence, the endeavour to determine common standards across research disciplines.

In order to help protect the privacy of research participants, two key principles are applied. Almost all research guarantees confidentiality for participants; they are assured that identifying information will not be made available to anybody not directly involved in the study. Anonymity, the stricter standard, essentially means that the participant will remain anonymous throughout the study, even to the researchers themselves. The anonymity standard is evidently a stronger guarantee of privacy, and can, at times, be more difficult to accomplish, especially in situations where participants are required to be measured at multiple time points, such as in a pre-post study (Williams, 2003).

Researchers exercise beneficence in several ways, described in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007: 11) in the following words:

> "in assessing and taking account of the risks of harm and the
> potential benefits of research to participants and to the wider
> community; in being sensitive to the welfare and interests of
> people involved in their research; and in reflecting on the social
> and cultural implications of their work".

The above description signifies that several elements to beneficence exist. The concept has been given a similarly broad range of meanings in other authoritative sources such as the Belmont Report (HHS, 1979: 5), which states that, "persons are treated in an ethical manner not only by respecting their decisions and protecting them from harm,

but also by making efforts to secure their well-being". Securing research participants' well-being, or ensuring beneficence, as described in the Belmont Report (HHS, 1979: 7), therefore necessitates the investigator to follow two general rules. The first is to "do no harm" and the second is to "maximize possible benefits and minimize possible harms".

With regard to the first general rule of beneficence, the authors of the Belmont Report did not intend for researchers to attain the standard of "above all do no harm", which is commonly viewed to be the first principle of medical ethics. Rather, the Commission intended to prohibit the deliberate injury of any human participant for the purpose of developing new generalizable knowledge, no matter how important that knowledge may be.

The second general rule of beneficence obligates researchers to design their data collection procedures in a way that will maximize the probability and magnitude of benefits to individual participants as well as to wider society whilst minimizing the probability and magnitude of injury to individual participants. The potential risks of participation in the research and the promise to pursue the individual or collective benefits are disclosed during the process of obtaining informed consent.

Although some authors have argued that the two rules described above are fundamental ethical principles — beneficence (to do good) and non-malfeasance (to do no harm) — in the context of empirical research such as this, where current Arabic-speaking women are being studied regarding their learning of English, it is more pertinent to consider harms and benefits in relation to each other, and thus regard them as a single principle.

Although clear ethical standards and principles exist, there may be times when the need to conduct accurate research clashes with the rights of potential participants. Thus, a number of procedures have been developed which assure that researchers will consider all relevant ethical issues in formulating their research plans. To address such needs, most institutions and organisations have formulated an Institutional Review Board (IRB), a panel of persons who reviews proposals with respect to ethical implications and decides whether additional actions need to be taken to assure the safety and rights

of participants. By reviewing proposals for research, IRBs also aid the protection of both the organisation and the researcher against potential legal implications of neglecting to address important ethical issues of participants (Williams, 2003).

The principle of respect for autonomy recognises that ultimately only research participants can decide for themselves whether to consent to take part in research. It is for these reasons that the ethic of respect implies several responsibilities, detailed below, on the researcher's part. Primarily, I made explicit at the outset and prior to each data collection procedure that participants had the right to withdraw from the process, should they wish, at any time within two weeks of commencement. I did not advantage one group over another and, as exemplified above in the critical analysis of my methodology, all data collection procedures were fair and ensured that no "detriment" arose as a result of participation (BERA, 2004: 8).

I ensured that accountability was at the centre of this research by gaining the necessary ethical approvals from participants. I also chose to involve participants in decisions by sharing both "the process and the product", and engaging respondents with key theories and interesting findings that arose after data collection (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 27). I asked participants to verify my observations through friendly discussions after the lessons. After all, I aimed to give the participants a voice, to empower them and grant them the opportunity to shape my research.

Ultimately, I based my research on trust. Establishing rapport is acknowledged as essential to the research process and is considered even more important when participants come from different cultures (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998: 14). I established trust with the participants by engaging in casual discussions to get to know each other prior to undertaking the research with the aim of "breaking the ice" and creating a safe and friendly atmosphere in which participants felt they could openly contribute.

5.2 Selecting and briefing participants
Arab learners of ESOL in the UK are a population comprising numerous different variables, among which are age, gender, nationality, marital status, educational background and length of time in the UK. The sample for this research includes

participants ranging in as many variables as is possible in order to widen the scope of the study.

A sample of ten individual participants attending adult community learning ESOL classes at different levels (Entry 2 to Level 1) in Sheffield was obtained by communicating with teachers across the city about the study. The Arab women participants varied in age, nationality, educational background and length of time in the UK. Prior to undertaking the research, I arranged for an informal discussion with prospective participants to take place at the organisation where the classes were held in order to brief interested participants on the research process, and to subsequently gain voluntary informed consent from all individuals willing to participate.

5.3 Benefits for participants of taking part in the research

It is hoped that the participants gained a number of pertinent benefits from partaking in this research. First and foremost, respondents had the opportunity to express their opinions and feelings on a subject that directly affects them, to an audience — the researcher and fellow educators — that would receive and value these immensely. This, in turn, highlighted experiences and practices that were positive and led to praise for the associated individuals and departments.

Participants' feedback also shed light on particular aspects of their learning journeys that could be considered and addressed for future improvement. Depending on the duration of their study of English at the institution, participants may experience some of the improvements made as a result of their participation in this study, thus enhancing the quality of their individual experiences whilst attending the institution, and ultimately developing their motivation to learn and achieve their personal goals.

5.4 Obtaining participant consent

To gain initial consent for accessing the students, I approached ESOL course leaders at a number of organisations in the city and explained the nature of the study. I additionally provided an information letter (Appendix 3) detailing the objectives of the research and how participants and the institution would benefit from participation, followed by a consent form that required their signature (Appendix 1). Given that the student

participants in this research were individuals whose first language was not English, I was working with individuals who had characteristics of "vulnerable adult participants" (BERA, 2004: 61). The essential factor that granted me authorisation to work with these individuals was that I held a valid Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check which was available for participants to view on request (BERA, 2004). Any form of deception was also eliminated from the process by making explicit all aims and purposes of the research prior to its implementation.

Participants' voluntary informed consent was secured prior to data collection by clearly explaining the objectives of the research and facilitating opportunities for questions to be asked and clarifications to be made, as I considered the fact that this may have been the first time some (or all) participants had been the subjects of research. I also provided all participants with a consent form translated into Arabic (Appendix 2) to ensure complete understanding and avoid misinterpretations due to the potential language barrier. I maintained patience throughout the data collection process, and particularly in this task, as gaining voluntary informed consent from ESOL participants took a greater amount of time than previous work with native English speakers had taken, simply due to the varied proficiency levels of the participants. Consent was confirmed by participants' signing of the formal consent form (Appendix 1).

5.5 Participants' right to withdraw

All participants had the right to withdraw from the research process at any time within two weeks of its commencement, and it was my duty to make this clear from the outset, both verbally and within the consent document (Appendix 1). I further clarified that they should not feel pressured to say or do anything they were not comfortable with. Had any agreed participant wished to withdraw from the study, I would have thanked them for their time and interest and sought another participant in a voluntary, informed manner. Participants' awareness and understanding of their right to withdraw was confirmed by their signature on the consent form.

5.6 Confidentiality and debriefing participants

Participant confidentiality was maintained throughout the research by guaranteeing anonymity for all individuals involved. This was ensured, after acquiring informed

participant consent and signatures on forms (Appendix 1), by creating and using pseudonyms to present results in the discussion, and for reporting and interpreting findings.

The privacy of participants will continue to be maintained by my use, storage and destroying of their personal data in accordance with the Data Protection Act (Great Britain, 1998). I explained to all participants, in the form of a simple, logical and clear conversation, why and how personal data relating to them was to be stored and used and to whom it would or may be made available. Participants were also reminded that confidentiality may not be maintained where a disclosure regarding safeguarding was made, in order to protect all those involved in the study.

It is considered good practice for researchers to debrief participants at the conclusion of their research (BERA, 2004). Thus, after my research had been conducted, I arranged a meeting with participants to thank them for their input and to share a summary of the key findings. In the near future, I also plan to request feedback from the participants on their experience of taking part in this study in order to ascertain the effects it may have had on their individual journeys to learning English in the UK.

6. Analysis and discussion

The following chapter will offer explanations, interpretations and critical analyses of the empirical data gathered from the research process. It will present the most interesting and salient aspects of the findings in themes corresponding to the five subheadings of the literature review, and will refer to the purpose of this study and to existent academic literature in order to contextualise the results. Before turning to these themes, I provide a reminder of the profile of participants in the research (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Profile of Participants

PARTICIPANT	AGE (years)	MARITAL STATUS	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	LENGTH OF TIME IN UK (years)	NUMBER OF CHILDREN	EMPLOYMENT STATUS
Ro'aa	24-29	Married	Libya	Less than 1	0	Unemployed
Fayrouz	24-29	Married	Iraq	4-6	2	Unemployed
Kadija	24-29	Married	Yemen	7-9	2	Unemployed
Amal	30-35	Married	Iraq	4-6	1	Unemployed
Anisa	30-35	Single	Libya	Less than 1	0	Employed (Teacher of Arabic)
Sanaa	30-35	Married	Libya	4-6	2	Unemployed
Abidah	36-41	Married	Yemen	10-12	3	Unemployed
Zeynah	36-41	Married	Yemen	10-12	3	Unemployed
Maysoon	42-47	Widowed	Sudan	20-22	6	Unemployed
Rinaad	48-53	Married	Saudi Arabia	20-22	4	Unemployed

6.1 Educational background and language learning

The field of ESL teaching and factors affecting student progress has been the subject of much controversy over the past few decades, as several factors can influence how successful an individual is at learning a second language. Littlewood (1984) stated that a person's motivation to learn and the qualities of the opportunities to learn are two of these factors. Of evident significance, however, are also the individual's ability to learn and their exposure to education prior to learning this second language.

In response to the distributed questionnaire, seven of the ten participants stated that they attended school (to high school level) in their home country, and four of these were also educated to degree level. All participants learned Arabic as their first language, and this was also the main language used by the higher education institutions and themselves during their undergraduate study. With the exception of one student, who additionally spoke Spanish, the participants knew just two languages — Arabic and English.

The findings of Thomas and Collier's large-scale (1997) study, which revealed that the most significant variable determining the length of time taken to learn English as a second language was the amount of formal schooling students had received in their first language, were echoed in the responses that my research participants gave. Their confidence in English and constant improvement in their acquisition and application of the language were, in their view, much to do with the fact that they had received a solid education in their home countries, if not to degree level, than at least to high school level. Most learners were attending two two-hour ESOL classes per week at the time of data collection, and eight of the participants had been doing so for at least eight months. During the focus group, when asked about attendance and their own perceptions of when they experienced the most significant increase in confidence in English, all participants agreed that this occurred after just three to six months of classes. After this point, they stressed that their progress was steadier.

Only two participants' mothers were educated to degree level, whilst two were educated to high school level and the remaining six reached a maximum of primary

schooling. Only one of the participants' fathers was educated to degree level and one was educated to high school level, whilst the remaining eight had not received any form of formal schooling. Amal, who was herself educated to degree level, having graduated in Business Management in Iraq, was the daughter of an engineer who had instilled in his children a passion for education. Amal expressed greater confidence in English proficiency, both in person during data collection and, as expressed in her questionnaire, prior to enrolling on her ESOL course than her peers whose fathers were not educated to degree level.

Dustmann's (1997) study indicated that education in both the home country and the host country positively affects language learning, with the latter yielding more perceptible effects. Other than the preparatory English courses they were attending, none of the participants of this study had received any education in the UK. Dustmann also found that formal education had a more significant impact on writing competency than on speaking, and for the participants who were educated to degree level, this was certainly true. These participants rated their reading and writing skills as higher than their speaking skills, even prior to the commencement of their ESOL courses.

However, Dustmann's study found that, conditional on the education achieved by the individual him/herself, the father's education level has a strikingly prominent effect on language proficiency. Of the four participants who were themselves educated to degree level in my study, it was found that only one of their fathers was a university graduate. What was of greater interest was the fact that the mothers of these four graduate participants were educated to at least high school level, with two having graduated with degrees. Thus, whilst Dustmann (1997) believed that factors which increase the motivation to acquire a foreign language are positively related to the father's educational background, the results of my study indicated otherwise, and demonstrated the impact of the mothers' educational background on their daughters' perceived competence in English as a second language.

Parental education evidently has a considerable effect on an individual's efficiency in learning a second language. Their education, and as the findings of this study have

65

shown, the education of the mother in particular, interacts with the offspring's education, and the magnitude of this conditional effect is surprising.

Educated mothers, assuming that they have a high socio-economic status, are more likely to be able to provide their children with direct assistance in learning their mother tongue, and subsequently, a second language. This could take the form of paying for private tutoring or simply creating a home environment that is considered educationally favourable, such as purchasing more books for study in the home. The schools that the participants of this study attended in their home countries, which are often determined by their parents' socio-economic status, may have also led to different levels of resource availability to teach English as a second language. Schools in affluent areas are more likely to have additional resources for teaching the target language, including the most recent technological learning tools and better trained teachers with a stronger command of English. The students in those schools may also have had greater opportunities to use English as a second language.

One factor that emerged from this study was the importance of individuals' beliefs about their potential for success in learning the target language. Bandura (1977) posited that learners' beliefs about their own competency in accomplishing a given task (learning English as a second language, in this case), or self-efficacy in social-cognitive psychology, are a significant predictor of academic success. Self-efficacy itself, however, which has been primarily approached as an individual's cognitive entity, may be much more socially-oriented than has been considered the case thus far. Parents' beliefs about their children's ability to learn a second language, as well as learners' own beliefs about their competency, can additionally be a major predictor for their children's second language learning outcomes (Block and Cameron, 2002).

In the specific context of this study, for example, Amal explained that there was great pressure on her and her siblings to excel in education. She explained that, throughout her school and university years, she had grown up with the belief that it was very bad to fail, whether in the sciences or languages. She stressed that she felt little emphasis was placed on the experience of learning itself, and that the education system in her home

country, Iraq, did little to alleviate this stress, since curricula were very much exam-based and target-driven.

Under this belief system, Amal was certainly able to achieve, as she graduated with an honours degree in Business Management and had a confidence instilled in her to achieve, which was evident in her command of English. Nonetheless, she felt that she could have gained much more from her years in education than she did, and attributed much of her success to her mother. She explained that her mother's esteem for education, and her patience and perseverance in the bringing up of her children to achieve the very best that they were capable of, ultimately motivated and prepared Amal to succeed in learning English as a second language.

Eight of participants rated their reading and writing skills as more advanced than their speaking and listening since attending ESOL classes. This could be explained by the fact that the speech perception period (as discussed in the literature review) is very short, ending at only eight or nine months (Vulchanova et al, 2014), and thus significant improvements in verbal fluency were not as noticeable to the learners themselves. Only one participant, Sanaa, was bilingual, having learnt Spanish alongside Arabic from a young age. Sanaa expressed a confidence in her English that stood out from the other participants, not only in her fluency, but in her willingness to ask for clarification when needed, for example, if she did not fully understand something during the questionnaire and focus group processes. She explained herself: "I don't really worry about making mistakes in class and I always like to contribute", adding that she was rarely anxious about asking questions that may be perceived as "silly" and believes this has been her key to rapid development in language learning.

Abu-Rabia and Sanitsky's (2011: 6) examination of the benefits of bilingualism on the process of learning a third language supports this finding, as their study illustrated that languages reinforce one another by offering "the tools to strengthen phonologic, morphologic and syntactic skills", which subsequently provide the necessary basis for learning to read. The application of language skills from one language to another is thus an important cognitive function that can facilitate a significantly more productive learning process.

Thomas and Collier's research (1997) led to the encouragement of utilising learners' native languages to foster language proficiency. When asked about the use of their first language, Arabic, in ESOL classes, participants explained that when the message communicated to them, implicitly or explicitly, in class or at the institution is "leave your language and culture at the classroom door", they also leave a central part of who they are — their identities — at the door. When they feel this rejection, their personal and conceptual foundation for learning is undermined and, in turn, they are much less likely to participate actively and confidently in classroom instruction. The participants' responses implied that it is insufficient for students' linguistic and cultural diversity to be passively accepted in class. Whilst answering the questions on identity in the questionnaire, the learners proposed that teachers and organisations should be more proactive in responding to this issue, and take the initiative to affirm students' linguistic identity.

Bilingualism has well-documented positive effects on linguistic and educational development. When children first develop their abilities in two languages throughout their primary school years, they develop a deeper understanding of language and how to use it effectively (Cummins, 2000). They gain more practice in processing the language and are able to compare and contrast the ways in which their two languages organise reality. Cummins' (2000) research additionally suggests that bilingual individuals may develop more flexibility in their thinking as a result of processing information in two different languages.

Although some educators are suspicious of bilingual education (or mother tongue teaching programs) for fear of such programs taking time away from the learning of the second language, it is known that students under this instruction are in fact learning concepts and intellectual skills that are equally relevant to their ability to function in the target language (Baker, 2000). Immediately after my observations of participants in their English classes, I enquired about their opinions on this type of instruction, as I felt this was an appropriate time to encourage students to think about this mode of learning, given that they would be in the frame of mind to compare it to the regular ESOL lesson they had just attended. Upon explaining this type of programme and how it worked in

practice, only three participants expressed that they were in favour of bilingual education. The reservations held by the remaining seven participants were exactly as those held by educators in the field — that using the first language in class undoubtedly had to take away from the learning of the target language. However, since the participants were attending ESOL classes and not undertaking a subject-based academic programme, it was more relevant to make connections with first language use in the classroom than to over-examine the concept of bilingual education programmes.

On the topic of the use of Arabic in the ESOL classroom, the learners explained that their ESOL lessons were one of the few places where they felt it was a supported opportunity to practice and develop their English, as they admitted that they rarely spoke English for practice at home. They wanted to avoid "taking a shortcut", as Abidah described the use of first language to aid second language learning, with the intention of making swifter progress on their course and working towards many of their diverse career goals.

One argument in support of the use of the first language in second language acquisition has been that students who know particular skills in their mother tongue will generally know the skills in another language. For example, students who know how to tell the time will understand the concept of telling time. In order to tell the time in the second language therefore, they need not re-learn the concept of telling time; rather they simply need to acquire new labels or 'surface structures' for an intellectual skill they have already learned. The concept of surface structure, and many other aspects of transformational grammar, was popularised by Chomsky (2002). In *Syntactic Structures* from 1957, Chomsky explained that a sentence's surface structure is exactly what we read on the page or hear a person say (2002). Thus, Arabic speakers may initially find the reading of grammatical structures or languages skills on paper in English challenging; however with the support of their teacher, they can overcome this immediate language barrier and recognise the labels and terminology, which in turn may lead to learners realising that they already hold some recognition or knowledge of the concept.

Similarly, at more advanced stages, there will be transfer across languages in academic and literacy skills, such as knowing how to distinguish between the main idea and the

supporting details of a written passage or story, identifying cause and effect, distinguishing fact from opinion and mapping out the sequence of events in a story or historical account (Baker, 2000). Spending instructional time in class through the first language, therefore, is not always regarded a hindrance to students' development in the target language. The Foyer program in Belgium, which develops students' speaking and literacy abilities in three languages (their mother tongue, Dutch and French), recently provided clear evidence of the benefits of the use of first, and indeed a third, language in the classroom (Cummins, 2000).

The above discussion on educational background links to the following section on identity, where an analysis is presented of the most influential concepts on learners' sense of who they are. The women's attendance at their ESOL courses was viewed as an investment, and their active commitment to this an advantage, as will be revealed and explained in the forthcoming section.

6.2 Investment and identity in language learning

Weedon (1987) and Edwards (2006) argue that language plays a significant role in how individuals constitute themselves. Second language learning is therefore viewed here as socialisation, whereby the customs and ideologies of a surrounding culture are inherited and disseminated to provide an individual with the skills and habits required for successful participation. According to Clausen (1968: 5), these acts of adapting behaviour to the norms of a culture or society are "the means by which social and cultural continuity are attained". Moreover, Norris (2007: 657) states that identity is "constantly interactively constructed on a micro-level, where an individual's identity is claimed, contested and re-constructed in interaction and in relation to the other participants". It therefore becomes more evident that the process of language acquisition is a dynamic interaction between the language learner and the social reality.

This interaction between the learners and their surroundings led participants in this study to respond in interesting ways to the 22 identity-based questions in the questionnaire. Upon reading each of the statements and selecting a number from the Likert Scale to indicate how important they felt each was to their sense of identity, those

that gained the greatest and least agreement from participants are presented in the chart below (Figure 3):

Figure 3: Participants' ranking of identity concepts

STRONGLY AGREE

My personal values and moral standards

Being a wife and/or mother

Being a good friend to those I really care about

My occupational choice and career plans

My religion

My reputation (what others think of me)

My social class, the economic group I belong to whether lower, middle or upper class

My academic ability and performance (e.g. the grades I earn and comments I get from teachers)

AGREE

My ethnic background

My personal goals and hopes for the future

My feeling of belonging to my community

My physical appearance (my height, weight and the shape of my body)

My feeling of pride in my country, being proud to be a citizen

My social behaviour, such as the way I act when meeting people

NEUTRAL

My feeling of being a unique person (being different from others)

Where I live or where I was raised

My physical abilities, being coordinated and good at athletic activities

My first language, or my regional accent or dialect

DISAGREE

My political opinions or activities

Being an ESOL student as an adult

My age, belonging to my age group or being part of my generation

STRONGLY DISAGREE

The things I own (my possessions)

As the chart indicates, participants believed that a large number of the statements were important to their sense of identity, and disagreed with only a few. The focus group was instrumental for exploring with the students some of the justifications for the identity ratings they had given in the questionnaire, with the discussion revealing the following. In response to the statement about the importance of academic ability and performance on identity, both Amal and Anisa explained that they were raised (in Iraq and Libya, respectively) to feel great fear of failure, and thus their time in education was very much based on studying well to pass exams. In contrast to her own education in Iraq, Amal felt that in the UK — not exclusively in the context of ESOL classes, but also in her son's primary schooling — there is a stronger focus on learning, irrespective of the length of time this takes, rather than working solely towards exams.

Upon further questioning of how they perceived the exam-based education system in their home country to influence their current progress in learning English as a second language in the UK (as this was one of the focuses of my research), the students responded that this impeded their creativity and hindered their own educational interests from thriving. This led to a lack of confidence in autonomous learning and under-developed experience of applying theory to real, context-based practice.

Tests are evidently one of the ways of evaluating the efficiency of learning and teaching, and in modern society are used to manage the educational system in a scientific and unbiased manner. Fulcher (2009: 14) argues that, in practice, testing exists to "create or reinforce the identity of the state, increase the sense of belonging to the state, select and allocate individuals to roles or tasks that benefit the collective and introduce hyper-accountability to ensure uniformity and standardization". In the field of education, consensus exists that the testing process influences both teaching and learning, termed "washback" in language education (Alderson and Wall, 1993). This influence may have a positive or negative impact depending on the context of the test.

Amal and Anisa's experiences of predominantly test-based education systems tended to be negative, and as a result they regarded their academic ability and performance as significant parts of their identity. They believed they held a gamut of skills that were simply not acknowledged by the education systems in their home countries, and they

expressed a clear desire to engage with more student-led environments where ideas and experiences could be shared and opportunities to follow their educational interests more closely would be facilitated.

For eight of the participants, reputation was of great importance to their sense of who they were. Participants did not elaborate as much on this during the focus group; however, my observations of the ESOL classes gave me real insight into how this could have been affecting their learning of ESOL in particular. A common occurrence for the participants was to avoid asking questions in class about content that they believed they should have prior knowledge of. For example, my position as observer at the side of the classroom, seated just outside the learners' horseshoe seating arrangement, allowed me to witness two of the participant students debating who was going to ask the tutor to repeat the difference between the present continuous and the present perfect tense. Apprehension about making mistakes on "easy" topics in front of the rest of the class led a number of learners to avoid asking for clarification. In situations such as these, the students would be heard expressing the fact that they did not understand a particular concept, but the question would seldom reach the tutor. Other students would ask their peers for clarification and this evidently sufficed in many, if not most, cases.

Connecting these findings to established literature offers a possible explanation for the reason behind such a large proportion of the participants wishing to avoid making mistakes in lesson. Bourdieu's (1977) theory that language competence and effective communication serve as a marker of social status and educational attainment may have, consciously or subconsciously, taken effect in these students' actions. By learning English as a second language, these students are essentially participating in a community in which they hope to become fully legitimate members, and thus may experience apprehension about how they may be perceived.

Bourdieu's (1999: 67) notion that the value assigned to an utterance depends on the power relations established between both parties was echoed in the observations I made of these students in class. In this study, seven of the participants initially viewed themselves as immigrants with little power to speak English, but after only five months

of language learning, these women's identities had developed into those of citizens with greater confidence to speak English, and in turn, to be appreciated in this language.

Austin's (1999) theory that dialogue between individuals is more than a simple conversation could also be seen in practice in this study, as the learners debating who was to pose the question to their tutor appeared to be in a contest with their educator (tutor). Here, participants' utterances were evidently perceived by them to possess value, as though there was a pursuit of symbolic profit taking place, and therefore the learners were dwelling on their linguistic competence to raise the value of their words (Bourdieu, 1999).

The two participants who expressed a more neutral response to the notion of reputation impacting on identity found it difficult to understand why students would feel this way about consolidating their learning in front of others. Their comments were not a challenge to their fellow participants (as they had no knowledge of each other's questionnaire responses), but simply rhetorical questions from their own perspective on why adults, in a fairly relaxed learning environment as an ESOL lesson, would avoid asking the teacher questions. Clearly, personalities and personal experiences of prior education played a role in shaping learners' willingness and enthusiasm to explore that which was necessary for their understanding and progression.

This echoes Norton-Pierce's (1995: 23) study on immigrant women in Canada and second language learning, which found, "it was only over time that Eva's conception of herself as an immigrant — an 'illegitimate' speaker of English — changed to a conception of herself as a multicultural citizen with the power to impose reception". As this particular participant, Eve, continued to develop as a multicultural citizen, she developed with it an "awareness of her right to speak" (Pierce, 1995: 25).

The effects of family responsibility on performance have typically been identified as having an adverse effect on work effort, particularly for women (Lobel and St.Clair, 1992). In turn, relatively low effort in work or study can limit opportunities for positive performance outcomes and progress. In my study, nine of the ten participants were married or had children, or had both characteristics, and six of these learners believed

75

that many of their educational and career goals were unachievable for as long as they had young children (under the age of 11). The focus group and observations demonstrated that this had a direct impact on their participation in class, as the intended outcomes set by the students, in collaboration with their tutors, did not seem realistically accessible whilst they were not able to commit with time and focus outside of lessons, and, evidently at times, during lessons. Concerns about their children's health, worries about how they were going to fare in a major homework assignment, thinking about when and what to begin cooking when the ESOL lesson ends and who was going to pick the youngest up from nursery were but a few of the responsibilities held by these wives and mothers, and which would occupy much of their concentration in lessons.

Learners, as a result, believed that their occupational choice and career plans, which most participants agreed were highly significant to their identity, were affected by their roles as wives and mothers. Participants who expressed a long-term goal of seeking work in their home countries, for example, expected to be equipped with English as a second language. They did, however, admit that greater commitment and availability, or investment, as argued by Norton (2000), would be required for this to be accomplished. This investment would take the form of an active, ongoing and context-sensitive commitment to learning English as a second language, and become evident when students expend their resources in pursuit of a better future (Dagenais, 2003).

All participants rated their personal, religious and moral values as central to their sense of identity and, during questionnaire completion, expressed that this shaped their worldview. The learners explained that they could be the students they wanted, and communicate successfully with their tutors and peers without compromising their beliefs and this was a great source of comfort for them. Developing greater cultural awareness was one of the key suggestions that participants made when asked about what they believed would improve their learning experience and, in particular, in their teacher's delivery and management of the lesson.

It is common for issues of poor dialogue and communication to surface when individuals from different social and cultural contexts fail to correctly understand each

other. Nordby (2003: 64) argues that, "even if a speaker is genuinely interested in communicating with another person, it is difficult to secure successful communication if the other person's beliefs about the world are very different from the speaker's beliefs". This effect is exacerbated if they know little about each other's beliefs. Nonetheless, the ESOL teacher merely possessing knowledge of his or her students' cultural and personal beliefs does not guarantee successful communication. A teacher may be aware that his or her students have particular beliefs and experiences shaped by a specific social and cultural history, yet choose to ignore this fact. Alternatively, a tutor may attribute to his or her students beliefs with no clear reason why they would hold them. In situations as these, the issue is not one of meaning (Bach 1994; Davidson, 1984), but rather one concerning an unsympathetic attitude. Nordby (2003) therefore argues that being neither uninformed of nor prejudiced towards a learner's socio-cultural context and background is essential for successful communication when persons from different social and cultural contexts interact.

From the observations, questionnaire responses and focus group contributions, it ultimately became evident that the participants viewed their attendance on ESOL courses as an investment — that which Norton (2000) refers to as a gradual form of identity construction. The women's active commitment to learning English as a second language in pursuit of a better future, whether in the UK or abroad, and whether for the purpose of self-advancement or to adopt the skills and knowledge required to become effective sources of support for their children and families, was discernible, and simultaneously one of the motivating factors for their progression. The learners' investment in second language learning was therefore essentially an investment in identity construction, embarking on this journey in order to gain the cultural capital in each of the English-speaking communities in which they chose to participate, from their formal appointments with professionals such as doctors, to their everyday recreation and leisure activities.

The above analysis leads to the upcoming section on motivation, as we will begin to see how a range of factors surrounding the learners promote or inhibit their learning, and how, similar to identity factors, motivation factors can impact on student engagement and progression.

6.3 Motivation in language learning and the use of first language (Arabic) in the classroom

According to Dornyei (2003), the influence of the teacher, the group and the course can have a substantial effect on language learning motivation. It was clear from my observation that the participants had a good relationship with their tutor. They were comfortable in class and there were no overt signs of obstacles or hindrances to their communication. The students were evidently enthused when they were assigned activities to complete in pairs or small groups, and their attentiveness would clearly rise. When asked about this in the focus group, the women responded that group work was one of the key times that they could converse with other freely, ask for clarification if required and assess each other's understanding of what they had studied so far that lesson. The shyer students in particular, who clearly appeared conscious of making mistakes in front of fellow students, engaged in the group work unreservedly. The teacher of this course exhibited an awareness of the apprehension of this student and that of other non-Arab students about open participation, and therefore effectively incorporated group interaction in the organisation of activities.

For seven of the participants, ESOL lessons were also the only time that they would actually meet, for they each had several other responsibilities outside of lessons. They did not, however, shy away from admitting that group work in class was also an opportunity for them to catch up with each other on matters not related to ESOL or even learning in general.

It took the vast majority of participants (eight) 10-20 minutes to travel to their ESOL classes (see Figure 3 below). Eight participants attended two two-hour classes weekly, whilst two were enrolled on an ESOL course that entailed three three-hour sessions on a weekly basis.

Figure 4: Length of time taken for participants to travel to their ESOL classes
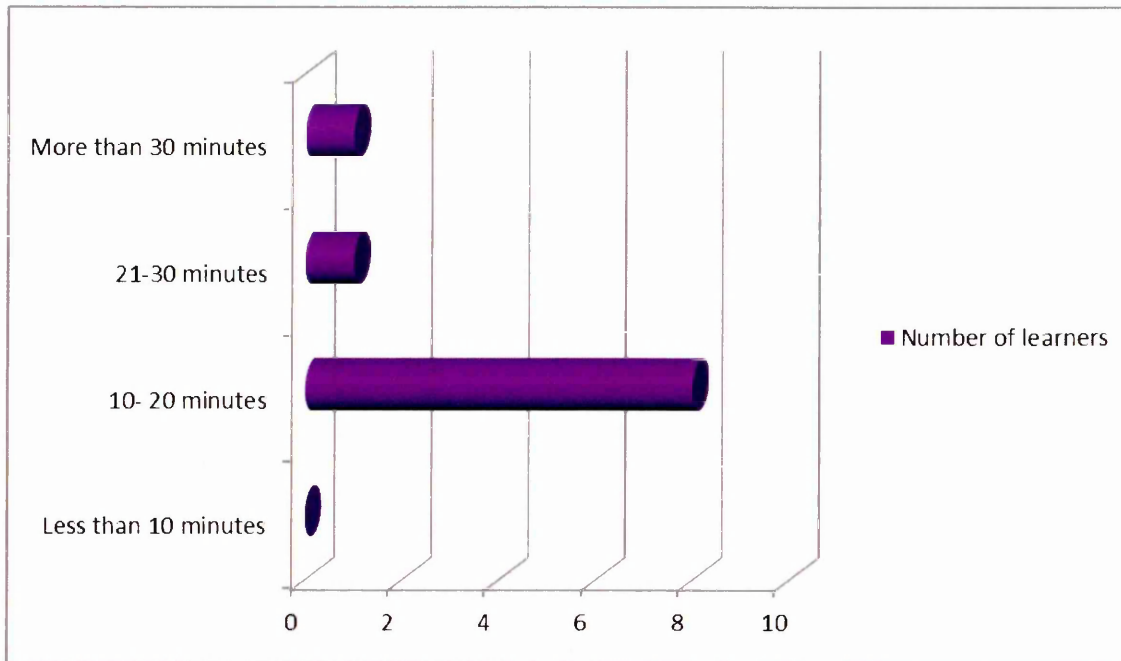
As discussed in Section 1 of the findings (on the effects of educational background on perceived progress and achievement), the women were attending ESOL lessons for a number of reasons, but nonetheless shared a similar motivation to maintain their progress in class. It is accepted that the key psychological component required for self, or autonomous, learning is motivation: the initial force to begin learning and the essential factor to maintain the learning process (Dörnyei and Ryan, 2015). However, although learner autonomy is an acquirable skill, many of the learners had exiguous experience of, and in turn little confidence in, this mode of learning. This led to evident trepidation in two of the observed women, as they presented the tutor with a number of questions the moment the task was set. The teacher explained the task and offered guidance on where some of the research required for the autonomous learning activity could be found. Although the students were set an autonomous task to engage in and submit the following week, it was clear that the instructions were insufficient.

To illustrate, in this particular observed lesson (at Entry 3 level), the students were asked to independently compose a piece of informative writing about their home

country for homework. They were made aware that they were allowed to use the Internet or any other reliable source to conduct the research and retrieve the information they required. At this point, the learners' apprehension about their understanding of and ability to complete the task was noticeable. Had the tutor offered some criteria that students were required to meet in order to complete the task successfully, such as a bullet-pointed list covering the topics of food, festivals, weather, culture, significant monuments, etc., the learners would have had a clearer understanding of the teacher's expectations of them. After the lesson, learners shared with me their wish for clearer and more detailed instructions for tasks, especially those that were expected to be completed autonomously. If the tutor gave basic instructions as these during the lesson, they explained, then time and availability would permit them to ask for regular progress checks and confirmation that they were completing the task correctly. In a situation such as the one observed, however, where the autonomous learning activity was set merely five minutes prior to the end of the lesson, learners had neither the time nor availability to fully grasp what was expected of them. This led to a lack of confidence in engaging with more independent tasks, despite the fact that learners were evidently capable of completing the task, and to a high standard, but after much stress, time and confusion.

Scarce instructions for activities were but one of the factors that impacted negatively on student motivation in the study. Motivation also decreased with the lack of flexibility for class times. Learners revealed that they often felt preoccupied in lessons, and this was apparent from the observations, as discomfort signals in body language, distractions by text messages and a lack of productivity were all visible. Because most of the women had children (some of whom were very young), attending ESOL classes in the afternoon meant that the learners could not collect their children from nurseries and schools on time. This necessitated arrangements for friends or neighbours to do so, since most of their husbands were also working, and contact with this friend or neighbour would often continue into the lesson if changes of plan occurred or the school needed to speak with the parent of the child.

Signs of discomfort were discernible in participants' body language during observations, from neck rubbing and nail biting to fidgeting and leg shaking. Wendler (2015: 8)

explains that the neck is "home to many nerve endings that, when rubbed, lower the heart rate and offer comfort". In turn, when a person is nervous or uncomfortable, they unconsciously touch their neck to activate the nerves that have a calming effect. Observing the learners in class in this way facilitated great insight into some of the obstacles to motivation and learning which could subsequently be discussed in the focus group, where the participants were happy to elucidate.

Whilst intrinsic motivation (where learners persevere primarily because they find learning interesting and rewarding) has long been regarded the most desired and influential form of motivation, Ryan and Deci (2000) posit that a sustained effort to learn can nonetheless be achieved if extrinsic motivation (where learners are driven by academic grades or professional opportunities) is internalised. In my study, despite only two of the participants expressing intrinsic motives for studying ESOL, almost all learners were on target academically, if not ahead. Achievement at these points, participants explained, was possible because they felt able to complete tasks independently due to clearer explanations and more instructions from their teacher.

It was evident, during the focus group, that much of the learners' overall desire to succeed, their perceived progress and overall confidence was also due to the internalisation of initially extrinsic motivation. This internalisation appeared to have taken form by two of three possible factors: "perceived competence" and "relatedness" (Ryan and Deci, 2000: 72). The learners clearly demonstrated their capability in completing the tasks in lessons, and the outcomes of the teacher's formative assessments, progress checks and feedback in class during observations bore testimony to this. Relatedness was an evident way of the students' extrinsic motivation being internalised as their behaviours were influenced and valued by the significant other to whom they felt (or wanted to feel) attached — in this case, their tutor.

During questionnaire completion, questions 34 and 35 of section 3 (on learners' opinions of their progress) prompted striking responses from a small number of participants which revealed a link between self-efficacy and educational background. Only three participants indicated that they were excited to attend their ESOL classes, however all ten agreed, or strongly agreed, with the belief that going to ESOL classes

would help them to find a job if they were seeking one. When asked if they could elaborate on their responses, a number of the participants explained that in many towns in their home country, it was undesirable for women to work in professions other than medicine or teaching. More significantly, as women from educated and middle-class backgrounds, three of the participants stated that it was frowned upon for them to take on a job of any kind. As a direct result of these societal influences, participants stated that, since arriving in the UK, they were more determined to achieve in their ESOL lessons and were more motivated to succeed in gaining the necessary English qualifications that would permit them to work.

It was fascinating to learn, however, that the participants whose mothers were educated to degree-level were the participants who regarded themselves as emanating from middle-class families (and who expressed greater confidence in their abilities as second language learners), yet were, in practice, discouraged from taking up work. In Kormos and Csizér's (2008) study on motivation to learn English as a foreign language, it was found that social class had an overall medium-size effect on motivational factors. My study has further revealed that self-efficacy beliefs in particular were the most strongly related to socio-economic status. The explanation for this could be as follows: as discussed in greater detail in section one of my findings (on educational background), the participants in my study whose mothers were educated to degree level exhibited a greater degree of confidence, not only in their ability to learn English as a Second Language, but also in their broader academic and personal skills, as the learners explained that positive reinforcement and praise were effectively employed by their parents from a young age. Bandura et al (1996) found that parents' academic aspirations for their children were directly influenced by socio-economic factors; in turn, this engendered a considerable effect on students' self-efficacy. This study has shown that Arab women ESOL learners who emanate from educated backgrounds hold firmer beliefs about the ultimate success of their language learning efforts. It can be deduced, therefore, that self-efficacy is a precursor to success in ESOL, just as Bandura (1986) implied that it was a precursor to effective learning in general.

A large part of self-efficacy beliefs emanate from indirect experience, therefore observations of others accomplishing the same task successfully is a promoting factor. It

is expected that the participants who self-reported as being from a high socio-economic background would have been exposed to more examples of proficient second language users in their environment than learners of lower socioeconomic background.

As Dornyei (2009b) claimed, the Ideal L2 Self (the person that the language learner wishes to become) can act as a significant motivating factor in learning a second language as learners' visions of future accomplishment and success are significant driving forces. Although there were similarities between the effects of learners' self-reported social class on their Ideal L2 self and on self-efficacy in my study, the impact on self-efficacy was more substantial. It was clear that the women from the middle or upper classes were more confident about their success in learning English as a Second Language. These results echo those found in Lamb's (2012) study, where students who resided in rural areas, who were mostly from lower social classes, had noticeably weaker opinions of themselves as efficacious users of ESOL in the future. My participants' responses to section 3 (about opinions on their progress) of the questionnaire also lend support to Oyserman and Fryberg's (2006: 23) premise that if learners are not exposed to role models in their particular social context in a given academic domain, then "possible selves in this domain are likely to be missing entirely or will be so global as to be useless as a self-regulatory mechanism".

Whilst a second language learner may have a desire to identify or become more involved with native speakers of that language, he or she may alternatively embark on this learning journey because they trust that it will aid in the accomplishment of particular goals, whether academic, professional or personal. Gardner and Lambert's (1959) integrative and instrumental factors of motivation were expressed by the participants of this study, and many learners were motivated to study ESOL for more than one reason. Three participants indicated integrative reasons for attending their ESOL classes compared to seven who expressed instrumental motives for their ESOL learning. A notable pattern emerged from participants' responses to the questionnaires: half of the women who stated instrumental reasons for learning ESOL had been in the UK for less than twelve months. These learners were learning English for the primary goals of gaining further educational qualifications or enhancing their career prospects with better jobs. The participants who were enrolled on ESOL courses to learn more

83

about the British and other cultures, to socialise and make new friends, or to simply take a break from home, had been residing in the UK for a minimum of three years. Perhaps this was an indication that newcomers were principally concerned with achieving that which entailed a pre-defined route and perseverance, and which led to a desired educational or career-based outcome, especially since a number of the participants (four) were educated to degree level in their home countries.

Qualified immigrants (QIs), which made up four of the study participants, are growing in number throughout the world (Gaillard and Gaillard, 1998), and their nature is changing: "Contrary to the first waves of immigrants, who were often illiterate and used nothing but their physical skills in their jobs, the new immigrants possess important academic and cultural capital" (Bettahar, 1999: 35). Although participants were not asked about their reasons for migrating to the UK in my study, the vast majority willingly disclosed this information during the focus group as part of their responses to why they were studying ESOL. This information revealed that migration itself presents several challenges for QIs; the women were mainly motivated to come to the UK for family factors (such as spouses coming for further qualifications or work in the UK) and for the opportunity for international experience. A smaller proportion of participants (two) explained that they left their home countries because of insecurity and the desire to escape economic problems or poor working conditions. Of course, the reasons behind these learners' original migration may be a combination of factors embedded in each of their personal stories. These motives are similar those found in the literature on the migration of QIs and self-initiated expatriate assignments (Carr et al., 2005; Suutari and Brewster, 2000). Self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) seek out international careers or assignments through their own initiative rather than being assigned to them by a company or organization. SIEs may do this for a number of reasons, such as having limited career opportunities in their home country or a great "interest in the host country location" (Doherty at al., 2011: 607).

A further prominent factor affecting students' motivation was linked to the teacher's understanding and appreciation of the language-based difficulties Arabic speakers have when learning English. During the focus group, the participants explained that had their tutors actioned the knowledge that they evidently had of the Arabic script being written

from right to left, the students may have had greater opportunities for practice activities to help overcome problems such as the common confusion with the mirror letters *d* and *b* and *p* and *q*. Simple handwriting worksheets were suggested by the participants who felt that ample practice in this aspect would address the issue of poor penmanship.

The fact that English and Arabic belong to two different language families (Indo-European and Semitic, respectively) has resulted in few cognates (shared words between the languages). This, in turn, leads to few transfer-related errors when learning English as a Second Language, but greater intrinsic difficulty nonetheless. The participants stressed that writing in particular was a major point of difficulty for them, and they had identified that there was a difference in word order between the two languages. Again, tutors being familiar with the fact that sentences in Arabic followed a verb-subject-object order may have helped them to appreciate why learners would say *"Went Amal to university"* rather than *"Amal went to university"*. As a result of such orthographic, syntactic and literacy factors, the learners perceived themselves as having slower recognition and processing of letters (especially vowels, of which the short are generally omitted in Arabic script). The students also expressed difficulty in literacy skills involving speed, such as note-taking, dictation, skimming and scanning, the first two of which could be seen during my observations of the lessons. Therefore, participants felt that more tailored, and often grammar-specific, lesson activities would help them overcome barriers to progression that they had now identified.

When asked in the focus group about their opinion on the use of their first language, Arabic, in ESOL lessons, the participants' responses were overwhelmingly negative. The learners explained that if their tutor was fluent in Arabic, they would undoubtedly like to make use of this resource to for clarifications so that they would not lag behind their peers in learning. They did, however, stress that this would tempt them to speak more Arabic in lessons, simply because they could, and because they would be understood by their tutor. Thus, nine of the ten participants essentially perceived the use of L1 in the ESOL classroom to be a hindrance to learning, with the disadvantages of this resource (the teacher's fluency in the learners' first language) significantly outweighing the benefits (see Figure 3 below). These views of the participants echo the findings of Atkinson (1987), Cook (2001), Harbord (1992) and Nation (2003), all of whom regard

the use of L1 as a natural and unavoidable learning approach in L2 learning. Nation's (2003: 5) argument that "it is foolish to arbitrarily exclude this proven and efficient means of communicating meaning" clearly rings true in ESOL learning. Participants' responses ultimately confirmed that a learner's first language should be regarded as a useful tool which, like other tools, should be used where needed rather than over-used.

Figure 5: Participant perceptions on the use of L1 in the ESOL classroom
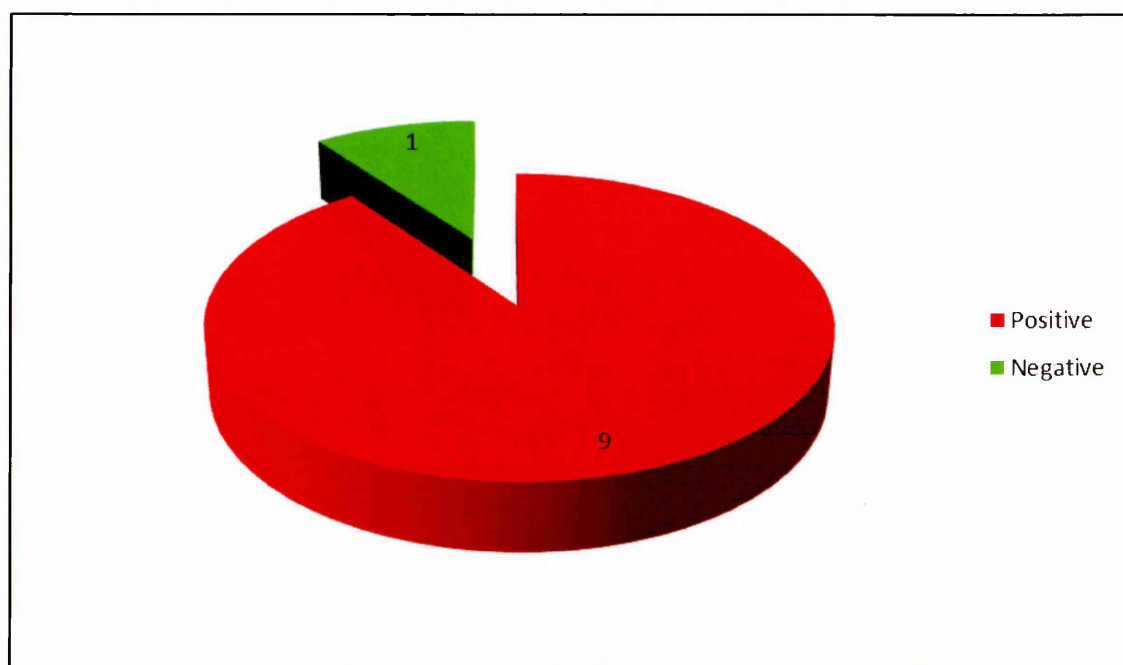
Where the ESOL teacher is fluent in Arabic therefore, the use of Arabic in the classroom appears to be an unavoidable phenomenon. Although the vast majority of the participants expressed their desire not to overuse Arabic in the ESOL classroom, as did the participants of Al-Nofaie's (2010) study, the reason being to practice more English, they nonetheless acknowledged the value of being able to revert to Arabic to confirm understanding of vocabulary and grammar, and to instil a deeper-rooted confidence in the acquisition of English.

Conducting observations of the learners in their ESOL classes proved invaluable for seeking a more valid account of how motivation ensued in practice. Simply watching a

lesson take place in a language learning environment can offer an insight of immense significance for exploring motivation. Research has highlighted the limitations of studies that investigate this phenomenon by asking students to self-report on their motivation, with Gardner (2006) asserting that psychologically-based approaches are inadequate. This is due to the fact that a motivated person "expends effort, persists in the activities, attends to the tasks, shows desire to achieve the goal, enjoys the activities, etc.", and a purely survey-based study will simply not capture the data required to allow a reliable judgement on motivation to be made (Gardner, 2006: 243). Therefore, since participants' verbal responses in the focus group and written responses in the questionnaires need to be supplemented with visible behaviours, observations provide an evidence-based understanding with the potential to reveal even more profound behaviours, such as the teacher's influence on the learners and the students' desire for self-confidence and achievement.

In summary, the effect of educational background on self-efficacy in learning a second language in the present study can be illustrated through theoretical and instructional factors. At the theoretical level, educational background has an evident influence on the type of goals learners set and, consequently, on the effort students invest in second language learning. This was deduced from the questionnaire responses and during the focus group where learners stated the amount of time spent outside of lessons learning and practising English, and the type of speakers they interacted with most (such as native English speakers or fellow ESOL learners with different first languages). Parental expectations were also precursors to learner motivation. At the instructional level, participants indicated that large class sizes, a lack of resources and limited instructions about autonomous activities both contributed to reduced levels of motivation in learning ESOL. Much of the "relaxed" environment, participants clarified, was due to small, friendly classes.

The above discussion and analysis draws attention to the need for tutors to work closely with their students in order to learn more about their individual and educational backgrounds. Setting, or being allowed, designated time for one-to-one sessions with leaners at the beginning of the ESOL courses will facilitate the opportunity for teachers to ask questions that will reveal rich information about learning preferences and

strengths and weaknesses. As this study has found, this can have a profoundly positive effect on both the learning experience and progress of the student and on the relevance and effectiveness of the teaching. The following section on learning environments adds to this discussion on positive learner experiences, as observations of the participants in class and their contributions in the focus group shed light on the significant impact that simple changes to the layout of the classroom can have on students' desire to learn and engage.

6.4 Learning environments and Learning

The notion that the spaces we live and work in affect us is widely acknowledged (Gieseking at al., 2014). Naturally, therefore, people are likely to take well to soft colours, find clutter distracting and high temperatures uncomfortable. This notion has not, however, always been accepted in schools or wider educational environments; a spokesman for the Department for Education (Booth, 2012: 7) recently stated: "There is no convincing evidence that spending enormous sums of money on school buildings leads to increased attainment. An excellent curriculum, great leadership and inspirational teaching are the keys to driving up standards." Teaching is undoubtedly central, however if small amounts of money, or simply making structural or presentational changes at no extra cost, could make a significant difference to students' attainment (Barrett et al, 2013), then it becomes a phenomenon worth investigating.

In the focus group, the women participants were shown four different classroom layouts: the nested desks, the circle layout, the horseshoe and rows. They were each asked to select the seating design they preferred for classroom learning, and were given additional blank paper to illustrate any of their preferences if they were not one of the four shown. Four of the six focus group participants expressed a preference for the nested desk layout, whilst a surprising two favoured the row layout (see Figure 4 below). This confirmed the overall popularity of the clustered desk design over any other design, but simultaneously revealed that an interestingly representative proportion of the students still preferred the more traditional row layout.

Figure 6: Participant classroom layout preferences
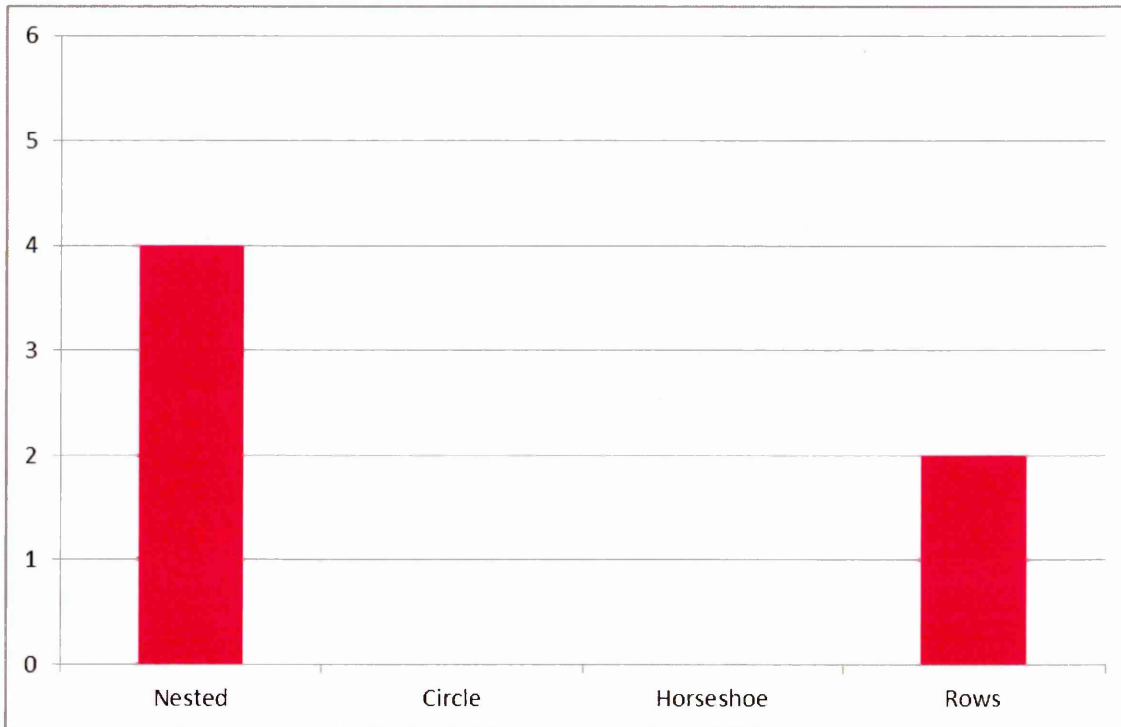
When asked about the reasons for their choices, the participants who preferred the nested desks arrangement explained that when seated in this way, they could communicate better with their peers. Sanaa and Maysoon, in particular, stated that this layout enabled them to "make eye contact with each other" and "feel more confident doing the work" as they could rely on each other for immediate support before asking the teacher or the wider class. This supports Hastings and Chantrey-Wood's (2002) research, which found that group-work, facilitates collaborative learning, small group teaching and, further, better access to resources. In the ESOL classroom for example, arranging the desks in groups in order for learners to work together allows at least four students to reach and use one centrally placed set of resources, such as the worksheets, role-play cards or activity sheets. If the learners were to be seated individually, in pairs or in a horseshoe, however, a greater number of resource sets would have to be produced or, alternatively, the sets would have to be passed more frequently between the students, ultimately leading to a less efficient learning process.

Whilst Ceryan et al. (2014), Sanders (2013) and Turner and Patrick (2004) implied that students who occupy the front rows of the classroom are generally more attentive than students at the back, the learners I observed in the ESOL lesson did not seem to fit this expectation. Moreover, because the desks were arranged in a horseshoe, it made little difference where the students chose to sit, as some leaners viewed the middle section of the horseshoe (illustrated by the red arrow in Figure 4 below) to be the equivalent of sitting at the front of the class in a row-based layout, as this offered the best view of the board and the teacher.

Figure 7: The middle section of a horseshoe classroom arrangement

For two of the participants, sitting at either end of the horseshoe was a conscious choice and a preference in order to be able to leave the room, without disrupting the lesson, to take expected calls from their children's nurseries or carers. This was, in turn, evidence, in line with Woolner's (2010) theory, that students who chose to sit at the back, or, in the case of the horseshoe arrangement, at the ends of the horseshoe were not necessarily less hard-working or less committed to learning than their peers.

The reasons two of the participants preferred rows were twofold: Firstly, Fayrouz and Ro'aa explained that they were accustomed to this arrangement of seating as it was used throughout education in Iraq and Libya, respectively. When I enquired about the interaction pattern of classwork in their home countries, Fayrouz and Ro'aa confidently expressed that they were able to engage in individual, pair *and* group work whilst seated in rows. Thus, because the learners expressed that they could clearly work with another one or two students when seated in rows, they believed they could effectively learn and engage in all activities productively, and didn't feel they were necessarily "missing out" by not having nested group tables to work at. Secondly, both Fayrouz and Ro'aa pointed out that, to them, the row arrangement was not dissimilar to the horseshoe arrangement that was characteristic of the ESOL classes they were currently attending here in the UK. Therefore, they found benefit in, and a personal preference for, the row layout, despite the prevalent research (Fernandes, Huang and Rinaldo, 2011; Garrow-Oliver and Kostouros, 2014) that argues that row-based classroom seating is less effective for collaborative learning- a form of interactive learning that UK schools and universities evidently promote. Clearly, learners' past educational experiences can shape their future preferences, and an effective teacher should be astute to this possibility. Simply arranging classrooms based on existent research analyses and assuming that these are the best ways for one's students to learn, without consulting the students themselves, could be a complete dismissal of learning styles and preferences, in turn hindering, rather than promoting, learning progress.

These findings agree with those of the Salford-based study (Barrett et al., 2013) that exposed a strong correlation between the built environment of the classroom and student attainment, but particularly in reading, writing and mathematics. Although the investigation was a longitudinal study of primary school children, the evident link between learning environments and achievement can nonetheless be applied to any level of students in an environment where teaching takes place.

The study found that six out of ten environmental factors exhibited significant correlations with the students' performance: lighting, colour, choice of furniture, access (quick and clear connections with corridors and other spaces), flexibility (of rearranging furniture for a range of activities) and complexity (a greater site and

attractive interior décor). The researchers (Barrett et al, 2013: 688) concluded that "This clear evidence of the significant impact of the built environment on pupils' learning progression highlights the importance of this aspect for policymakers, designers and users." All other factors being equal, the results indicated that a young student could make two SATs sub-levels more progress during one school year than an equivalent student in the "poorest" classroom environment (ibid), equating to a whole year's average improvement for a learner in reading, writing and maths.

During the focus group, the participants in my study explained that memories of schooling in their home countries were associated with bright beams of light streaming through the classroom curtains. This would hinder their study, forcing them to have to regularly move around the classroom or block the windows in order to avoid the bright light and be able to see the board, the teacher and other students. These findings support Barrett at al's study (2013), which found that daylight was important in the classroom learning environment, but had to be regulated by effective glare control, and not blocked with furniture or by having the blinds completely down.

The focus group discussion ultimately revealed that the two principles of environmental design which affected the participants' perceived attainment were: whether the room stimulated them and the extent to which they felt familiar with the learning environment. While the impact of colour is often overlooked, it is an inseparable part of our everyday lives. Studies (Kaya and Epps, 2004) indicate that it plays an important role in emotion, communication and productivity, and, while the research is varied, it is undisputed that the use of colour can have a substantial effect on emotion, ultimately influencing an individual's productivity in studying or working. Studies on emotion and colour (Lee, Andrade and Palmer, 2013) have illustrated a direct link between colour and positive and negative feelings, and the use of colour can aid in defining a room's purpose, whether for study or relaxation. It was not surprising to see, during my observations of the ESOL lessons, that the walls were neutral in colour- white or beige- with some rooms having the organisation's logo colour as an occasional accent. Participants shared the view that similarly bare and plain walls were also the norm in their home countries. Sanaa explained that bright and boldly coloured classrooms were associated with and more common in private schools, where leaders and architects

made a conscious effort to appeal to and recruit new students with modern and attractive interiors.

Setting the appropriate tone for learning should, in practice, begin the moment a student enters the building, not just when they enter the classroom. Due to the nature of ESOL provision in the UK, however, the majority of course providers do not have their own buildings to run the courses in. ESOL lessons generally take place in community centers and primary schools. They do, however, also take place in offices, libraries or forums. Therefore, it is very likely that the entrances to the buildings, the corridors and open spaces will not have been designed with students in mind. The question, then, is not if classroom design affects student learning, but rather how it does so. Subsequently, the challenge is how designers, teachers and students themselves can effectively collaborate to create exceptional learning environments, those that motivate and inspire learners, and teachers, to work more effectively and creatively.

Whilst classrooms are used for diverse reasons, the primary intent is effective learning, and thus colour choice in the room should maximise information retention and encourage participation. When asked about the wider environmental choices associated with the classroom and their learning spaces, the participants expressed a wish for "fresher looking" spaces with brightly coloured walls and more organised space on the walls to not only share interesting facts about their different countries and cultures, but to display examples of their work. This, the students explained, would give them something to read and engage with before, and even after, lessons.

This points to Clayton and Forton's (2001: 17) work on classroom spaces, which indicates that a classroom filled with the work of students is "a delight to be in and sends a message to students that their work and their learning are important". Moreover, my participants implied that they longed for greater input in the display process, and to be able to choose what they wanted to exhibit. Clayton and Forton (2001) argue that in actually taking on responsibility for displays, students acquire the opportunity to hone important social and academic skills. When learners take an active role, or further, take the lead, in choosing work for displays, they learn to reflect on their work. The learners explained that they were aware that learning English would

93

be a journey that takes time, and if only perfect work was displayed, this may only be possible at the end of terms, or even at the end of the year. The participants were therefore suggesting that they would like "practice work" (as stated by Rinaad), or work in progress, to be displayed as well as completed work. This was not surprising to hear in the focus group, as Clayton and Forton (2001) also found that creating displays that acknowledged effort rather than perfection allowed students to better understand that learning is a process of growth, not merely mastery.

As it is likely there will be shy students in every class, allowing the learners to play an active part in operating and contributing to the display boards provides an opportunity to appreciate the work of others, and encourage the quieter learners to get involved in a comfortable and engaging way, in turn nurturing empathy and respect and promoting a stronger sense of classroom community. The positive classroom environment that is expected to develop as a result of this activity could also reduce some learners' apprehension about participation that was discussed in section three of the analysis (on reputation and identity).

There are numerous ways in which ESOL students can be involved in setting up the wall displays. For examples, learners could select pieces of their own work, such as writing activities, for the tutor to assemble into a display. They could use coloured paper to create the background wall for the display wall, or, alternatively, they could manage and maintain the display boards by changing the work on show on a monthly basis.

Whilst most of the participants in my study had been to school in their home country, others had not, and therefore had little experience of measuring, cutting or using tools. When the learners expressed their desire to take a greater part in the display, Anisa and Ro'aa stated that they would enjoy and value the craft work element of the process. Helping the tutor to set up classroom displays therefore enables students to develop their skills in writing, measuring, cutting and using tools, and managing the displays facilitates an opportunity for the learners to develop organizational and evaluating skills, essential for classroom life and beyond.

Sanaa and Abidah pointed out that having posters on their home countries, cultures, foods and traditions displayed on their ESOL classroom walls had a significantly positive effect of making them feel like they had a regular learning base and that the classroom was unique to them. This was evidently effective as the learners did not have to study in a different classroom each week. This familiarity with the learning environment therefore established a sense of comfort and reassurance, and was effectively supplemented with encouragement from their tutors to make the classroom their own and creatively contribute to the display walls.

When the students mentioned the lack of inviting colours in their ESOL classrooms, I asked how they would change this if they could, and the learners responded stating their favourite colours, some of which included red and purple. Although it is a common belief that bold and bright colours are stimulating for the mind, they can, in practice, hinder progress, and the participants may not have appreciated that these colours were not the most effective for the classroom environment. Lee, Andrade and Palmer (2013) argue that the key to establishing an environment conducive to learning is, in fact, to not over-stimulate learners, explaining that this is often caused by large areas of bright colours, particularly reds and oranges. According to Kaya and Epp's (2004) investigation: The *Relationship between color and emotion: a study of college students*, green is associated with relaxation and calmness, followed by happiness, comfort, peace, hope and excitement. Yellow, however, was perceived to be a lively and energetic colour, eliciting positive emotions associated with summer time. Grey was connected to negative emotions, including sadness, boredom, confusion, tiredness, loneliness and fear.

These findings on effective use of colour in learning environments differ with classrooms for children, who, unlike adults, thrive in brighter-coloured environments. In these situations, Clayton and Forton (2001) propose that bright colours *can* be used on the walls as well as in the furniture, and can symbolize that certain parts of the room are used for particular purposes. Reading time, free-play and group activities are but a few examples of these. Since colour is not used in large amounts on furniture, Walstra (2007) asserts that it does not have the same impact as bright colours on walls, but can

add colour to an otherwise dull classroom. Thus, in the adult ESOL classroom, one way of incorporating a colour such as red, the colour suggested by one of the participants in the focus group, without it becoming a hindrance to learning, could be through pieces of furniture in this colour. Reds, oranges and yellows in desks, chairs, cabinets and drawers can be used to elicit liveliness, attention and excitement in the classroom.

The findings of my study and their placement within existent research indicate that the physical environment is a significant matter for learning in the classroom. A factor as apparently simple as room shape can have a noticeable effect on students' learning experience, such as, for example, how, in a long room where the teacher would be expected to stand in front of the class, it would be more difficult to establish eye contact, causing students to feel that their relationship with their teacher is distant. Therefore, it is essential that the factors constituting the physical learning environment, from room size, room shape, seating arrangement and furniture to lighting, thermal conditions, colours and noise are amply considered in order to establish the most productive and enjoyable ESOL learning experience.

6.5 Teacher Toolkit

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations for teachers can be been made in an attempt to help make the learning of English as a second language a more motivating experience and successful investment for students. Instructors are required to put a great deal of thought into delivering courses that will maintain student interest and yield obtainable goals. The following suggestions, however, serve as an expedient starting point as they can be implemented at all levels:

1. Ensure students have access to material that will stimulate and provide them with opportunities to personalise the classroom environment, before the lesson begins if they arrive early, during break times and after lessons. This can be achieved by displaying cultural facts and wall posters around the classroom in the various languages of the ESOL students, which creates a low-anxiety instructional climate where the linguistic and cultural experience of each student is accepted. Personalizing the environment creates a learner-centred classroom that has the potential to increase students' desire to learn. Students who feel safe and comfortable will ultimately feel more secure taking chances and will display greater motivation to contribute in class without the fear of being criticized. Offering learners a chance to arrange the desks in the way that would make them feel most comfortable also gives the impression that there is no limit to what can be done to create a warm and cheerful place where learning and studying is enjoyed. This suggestion is derived from the findings of the focus group discussion on learning environments and different modes of classroom interaction.

2. Dedicate time at the beginning of the course to conduct one-to-one sessions with the students for the purpose of getting to know them and their learning goals. Prior to this, the students may not have thought about their goals, and therefore asking them also encourages them to reflect on why they are learning English. They may come to realize that they are attending the ESOL course because they want to develop more independence, be able to help their children with schoolwork or become more confident chatting with friends in English. This

knowledge of students' individual goals can then be used to plan and deliver lessons that will be of direct relevance and interest to them. The instructor can also use this opportunity to learn more about the learner's first language, which would help in understanding the linguistic difficulties faced by students in learning English as a second language. If the course has already begun and it is not possible to assign an entire session for one-to-one discussions, individual learning plans (ILPs) can be used effectively to achieve the same outcome. Encouraging learners to describe what they enjoyed or found challenging in lessons allows the teacher to keep a record of students' strengths and points for development, and differentiate activities accordingly. This suggestion is based on the findings from Sections 2 and 3 of the questionnaire, and from the contributions on motivation made during the focus group.

3. Establish a friendly classroom atmosphere. Creating a safe and comfortable environment where all learners feel recognized, valued and a part of the whole is a significant factor in encouraging motivation. Naturally, this may take time as students adjust themselves to a new setting, but the desired standards can be identified and set from the beginning of the course through ground rules. Students should be encouraged to devise the ground rules, whilst still authorised by the tutor, in order to generate a sense of accountability and responsibility. In particular, the importance and need for respecting each other should be highlighted. The positive and friendly atmosphere can also be maintained by displaying colourful pictures and projects completed by previous years' students. This gives learners the impression that learning English will be both enjoyable and achievable. This suggestion arose from the findings on identity in Section of 5 of the questionnaire and from the discussion on the concept of reputation during the focus group.

4. Encourage students to set their own short-term goals. Directing their studies toward their own expectations can help ESOL learners achieve, as determining their own language needs and defining why they want to learn the language reinforces motivation. Instructors could encourage learners to have short-term goals such as communicating with English speakers at least once a day or

reading one paragraph of an English story every day, and support them in pursuing these goals. This suggestion has been made based on the findings on motivation from Sections 2 and 3 of the questionnaire.

5. Support all students in becoming more active participants in the lesson by facilitating group work activities where there is greater focus on the contribution of each member. This can help learners to see a clear purpose for improving their communication skills in English, and successful communication in the target language should, in turn, lead to a sense of accomplishment among the students (as discussed in the literature review section on motivation. Group work can also give quieter students an opportunity to express their ideas as they may find it easier to speak in groups of three or four than to an entire class. Once students have spoken in small groups, they usually become less nervous about speaking in front of the class as a whole. Group activities also enable students to work cooperatively, in turn increasing class cohesion. This suggestion stems from the focus group discussion on interaction patterns and preferences in the classroom.

6. Offer opportunities for friendly competition. Adults enjoy competition in the language learning classroom, and games are not the only way this can be achieved. Tutors can have learners compete in any activity by simply assigning a time limit, and rewarding the learner who finishes first or answers more questions correctly by allowing them to choose a short video clip for the class to enjoy at the end of the lesson. Timed activities are particularly beneficial for Arabic L1 speakers as they allow the learners to efficiently develop their skimming, scanning and comprehension skills. This suggestion has been made as a result of classroom observations which revealed that learners would benefit from and enjoy greater practice on time-based activities.

7. Cater to the students' skills and exploit their talents. Before this can be accomplished however, the teacher must have dedicated some time at the beginning of the course (see point number two) to get to know the learners, their

interests and development needs. Most students are talented at one thing or another, so the one-to-one session or productive ILP records will allow discovery of these talents are. Students who are artistically-inclined, for example, may draw pictures or sketches of a story that can be read aloud to the class. Learners who enjoy cooking could bring in a dish and share the recipe to initiate a lesson on imperatives and instructions through recipe writing. The possibilities are endless, but the key lies in getting to know the learners well so that their skills and experience are identified. This eventually leads to the learners themselves becoming the class resources and eliminates the need for retrieving materials and texts from irrelevant contexts. Successful language learning is ultimately linked to the student's passion, and instructors should find ways to connect to this passion. This suggestion is made especially in response to Amal and Anisa's statements and concerns with regard to the "dull" education systems in their home countries overlooking their, and students in general, individual interests.

8. Use realia as much as possible in the classroom. The use of real life objects is a great way to motivate students of all ages in all subjects, but can be especially effective in second language learning as the target language is naturally associated with another culture. For a lesson on getting to know each other, for example, rather than just telling the rest of the class about themselves, learners could be asked to bring in photos, in addition to any items they feel represent them. The teacher can incorporate realia into every lesson by bringing in small objects that have a meaningful connection with the topic of study. This suggestion has been made as a result of classroom observations in this study, which indicated that this was clearly well-received by the learners and identified as good practice.

9. Create situations in which students will feel a sense of accomplishment. This can be achieved by building on learners' strengths; for example, if a learner writes good simple sentences in the present simple tense, this could be utilised as a starting point for the accomplishment of a wider goal, such as being able to describe hobbies and interests on a CV to find work. Offering positive feedback and reinforcement can increase students' satisfaction and encourage positive

self-evaluation. Ultimately, a student who feels a sense of accomplishment will be better able to direct their own learning outcomes. Praise, in particular, can build learners' self-confidence and self-esteem. Nonetheless, giving positive feedback should not be mistaken for correcting mistakes without giving explanations. It is essential for the instructor to highlight the strengths in a student's work and to provide a clear explanation of their mistakes. Learners value their teacher's ideas when they feel that their good work is acknowledged, in turn encouraging them to evaluate their work for further progression. This final suggestion is made based on the participants' contributions to the focus group, when a discussion on the concepts of praise by teachers and confidence-building by parents was sparked.

7. Conclusions

7.1 Contribution

There is much yet to be discovered about the lives and language experiences of the diverse population of adult ESOL learners in the UK and this study develops such knowledge by focusing on those who are women. I have drawn on theories of motivation, identity, first language, educational background and learning environments to address how participants' multi-faceted lives and experiences affect them as learners of English. The thesis highlights how profoundly such factors influence these learners, in ways even they are not always conscious of, and how such backgrounds may also be unknown to tutors and policy-makers, proving the necessity of acknowledging and endeavouring to attend to how their unique and complex lives can intersect with their motivations to learn. Focus groups, observations and detailed questionnaires were employed to ascertain these findings and a toolkit was formulated from these for teachers to refer to in the teaching of ESOL to Arab women learners.

In this study, I, as researcher, valued the everyday language (Arabic) the women participants sometimes used to tell their stories, which "shapes their particular understanding of their worlds and the subject positions they took up within different discourses" (Treleaven, 2003: 265). Indeed, I encouraged the use of their first language during data collection as they expressed that this facilitated better articulation of their voices and opinions for the purposes of this research. This thesis has illustrated that women at different life stages, with varied priorities and concerns around learning English at that particular time, require supportive courses that attend to these issues. Such tailored programmes should aim to empower learners to identify and seek solutions to current real-life problems and to set their own targets. In providing a supportive environment, Auerbach (1997: 32) highlights a number of benefits in particular of learners working in homogenous groups: "if they are all women or all mothers, if their children are similar in age [...] it will be easier to find common issues and to develop an organizational basis for acting on them". Thus, co-teaching, mentoring and more direct work with and by women learners themselves can play a significant part in the enhancement of ESOL provision, whilst at the same time developing supportive environments that acknowledge and address the impact of learning English

on women's self-esteem in their external and private worlds. Since this study comes at a time when provision is moving swiftly towards a unidirectional 'ESOL for work' programme in many areas, such spaces can be encouraging and facilitate opportunities to share personal stories, fears and challenges and develop effective strategies in turn to address them.

7.2 Key findings

The aims of this study were twofold. The first was to uncover most effective ways of examining the factors influencing the ESL development of Arab women. The second was to investigate how ESL practitioners can make use of information on learners' first language, educational background and identity to effectively engage students and improve learner progression. In investigating the ESOL experiences of community learning students in South Yorkshire and the barriers to their progression through observations, questionnaires and a focus group, this study found that the physical environment of the classroom, from size and seating arrangements to lighting and colour use, had a considerable impact on their motivation to learn in class. A more profound connection, however, was found between educational background and self-efficacy beliefs. Due to societal influences and expectations, students from educated and middle class backgrounds in their home countries faced obstacles in embarking on their desired careers. As a direct result, these learners were highly motivated to achieve and succeed on their ESOL courses in the UK, as they considered this their opportunity to enter the field and profession they preferred. They expressed greater determination to work towards gaining the necessary English qualifications that would permit them to work in the UK.

Students viewed the use of first language by teachers and other students in class as generally negative, as it encouraged them to revert to Arabic whenever they were faced with challenging work, rather than persevering in English. Parental education had a considerable effect on ESOL learning, as educated mothers- with high socio-economic status in particular- were able to provide their children with more tailored support, from affording private tuition to creating an educationally-favourable home environment. Social class was, in turn, an influencing factor in second language acquisition as students who attended schools in more affluent areas had superior

resources for learning English as a second language, greater access to new technological learning tools and greater opportunities to use English as a second language.

Motivation is clearly a critical factor for second language acquisition as it defines students' willingness to approach learning. Teachers of English as a second language who hope to provide meaningful instruction, however, must strive beyond considering how to raise the motivational levels of their students, both within the four walls of the classroom and in their relationships with their students. They must exercise their diverse communication skills and thoroughly get to know their learners in order to appreciate how their students' individual identities, cultural backgrounds and experiences of education might, as this study has demonstrated, shape their engagement with the course, their interaction with other students and, ultimately, their achievement in learning English. Fillmore and Snow (2000: 3) similarly argue that "Too few teachers share or know about their students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, or understand the challenges inherent in learning to speak and read Standard English". Hence, in order to teach ESOL students effectively, teachers need to be conversant with their students' educational experiences and the culture leading to the formation of their *selves* for educational success. ESOL provision does not typically incorporate rigid progress checks and assessments. This study therefore contributes to the field of English language teaching and learning by proposing that this is accomplished through organised, designated time for one-to-one sessions with each student at the beginning of the course, greater focus on formative assessment and purposeful, actively-worked individual learning plans.

7.3 Further research
I suggest that there is wider applicability of this research partly because South Yorkshire is one of several regions which recently experienced intensive immigration, and because women's narratives on concepts such as motivation and identity often have wider resonance and can form part of a collective understanding of women's emerging relationships with the English language.

Nonetheless, further beneficial research in this field may take the form of an investigation of teachers' experiences of teaching ESOL to Arabic L1 speakers. This

could be accomplished by conducting focus groups which facilitate the opportunity for tutors to offer their insight into the areas of difficulty, both for their Arab students and for themselves as practitioners, in learning and teaching English as a second language. However, the recursive and often iterative nature of qualitative research suggests that a research question may be refined or altered as new data and issues surface in the study. Classrooms are complex environments in which teachers can engage in as many as 1000 interpersonal situations during a stretch of 6 hours, with as many as 200 or 300 interpersonal exchanges in an hour (Jackson, 1991). In turn, an almost infinite number of research questions are inherent in the context of the classroom, the context of teaching, and the context of learning, and thus examining the direct experiences and insight of teachers through reflection, observation, conversation and focus groups has the potential to serve an invaluable contribution to the study of learner progression in the field of English language learning.

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9. Appendices

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

would be grateful if you could read the information below and then sign at the bottom.

esearcher's name: Sundus Alzouebi   **Supervisor's name:** Dr Diana Ridley

esearch title: Interaction, educational background and identity: a study of Arab women learning English in the UK

bout me and the project:
am currently studying a Masters in English and will be conducting a research project as part of my course. I m interested in the learning experiences of Arab women studying English as a Second Language, and herefore the main purpose of my research is to explore how the first language, educational background and earner identity of these students affect their progress in new learning environments. I intend to explore spects of teaching and learning that students find most valuable for their English language development and hat promote more culturally-responsive learning environments.

am hoping to recruit 10 students whose first language is Arabic to take part in this research between January nd March 2015. In order to collect the data that I require, I will firstly ask all participants to complete a uestionnaire. I will then observe some English classes and organise a focus group with a selection of articipants. I will make notes throughout and may audio-record the focus with participants' permission. I will eep participants informed of my progress at regular intervals, and I guarantee that I will observe good ethical onduct and do no harm throughout this research, especially by ensuring anonymity of all participants and taff involved.

have read the above information and the nature and objectives of the research project have been explained me. I understand and agree to take part in the project.

understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.

understand that the researcher (Sundus) will do no harm by following ethical research guidelines and that er aim is to provide beneficial research for teachers of Arabic students.

understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any time within 2 weeks of the start of data ollection, and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.

understand that my conversations and contributions may be audio-recorded during the focus group.

understand that notes may be taken during the focus group.

understand that the information gathered in the research project may be published but that my personal nformation will remain confidential and I will not be identified in any published material without my prior consent.

understand that data will be stored in hard and electronic form by the researcher (Sundus) and by the niversity. This data will include any audiotapes and field notes. I understand that I may have access to the ata that concerns me if I give adequate notice (normally one week) to the researcher (Sundus).

understand that I may contact the researcher (Sundus) by email or mobile if I need any more information bout the research.

-ame…………………………………………   **Signed**……………………………….…   **Date** ……………………….…………………………….

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<u>**موافقة المشاركين في البحث**</u>

أرجو قراءة المعلومات الواردة أدناه ومن ثم التوقيع في الأسفل.

اسم الباحثة: سندس الزعبي   **اسم المشرفة:** الدكتورة ديانا ريدلي

عنوان البحث: دراسة لاستكشاف تجارب النساء العربيات في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية.

عني وعن البحث:

أدرس حاليا ماجستير في اللغة الإنجليزية في جامعة شيفيلد هالام, وسيتم إجراء مشروع بحث كجزء من الدورة التدريبية الخاصة بي. أنا مهتمة
تجارب المرأة العربية في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية. بالتالي, فإن الغرض الرئيسي من بحثي هو استكشاف دور اللغة الأولى (اللغة العربية
والخلفية التعليمية وهوية الطالبة التعليمية في تقدمها في بيئات تعلم جديدة. أنوي أيضاً تحديد صفات التدريس والتعليم التي، في آراء الطالبات،
الأكثر قيمة لتطوير لغتهن الإنجليزية و التي تعزز بيئات تعلم أكثر دراية ثقافيا.

أود العمل مع ١٠ طالبة عربية لهذا البحث في ربيع ٢٠١٥. من أجل جمع المعلومات التي أحتاجها، سأطلب أولا من جميع المشاركين إك
استبيان, ومن ثم سوف أحضر بعض دروس اللغة الإنجليزية في الجامعة, ثم انظم مناقشة جماعية ومقابلات فردية مع مجموعة من المشارك
سوف اكتب مذكرات وأسجل المناقشة الجماعية والمقابلات، بإذن المشاركين, على شريط. سأبلغ المشاركين بانتظام عن تقدمي وسوف است
سلوك أخلاقي لجيد ولن اضر في إجراء هذا البحث، وخاصة بعدم الكشف عن هوية الطلاب والموظفين المشاركين.

✓ لقد قرأت المعلومات الواردة أعلاه، وطبيعة وأهداف البحث تم شرحها لي. أفهم وأوافق على المشاركة في هذا البحث.

✓ أفهم الغرض من هذا المشروع ومشاركتي فيه.

✓ أفهم أن الباحثة (سندس) لن تفعل أي ضرر باتباع المبادئ التوجيهية للأبحاث الأخلاقية, والتي هدفها هو توفير بحوث مفيدة للجامعة ولمجال
اللغة الإنجليزية.

✓ أفهم أنني قد انسحب من البحث في أول إسبوعين من البحث وأن هذا لن يؤثر على وضعي الآن ولا في المستقبل.

✓ أفهم أن محادثاتي ومساهماتي في المقابلة والمناقشة الجماعية قد تسجل.

✓ أفهم أن مذكرات قد تكتب خلال المقابلة والمناقشة الجماعية

</div>

130

✓ أفهم أن المعلومات التي سيتم جمعها في البحث قد تنشر ولكن ستبقى معلوماتي الشخصية سرية, ولن يتم تعريفي في أي عمل منشور دون موافقتـ
مسبقاً .

✓ أفهم أن سيتم تخزين البيانات على الورق وإلكترونيا مع الباحثة (سندس) وجامعة شيفيلد هالام. وسوف تشمل هذه البيانات أي أشرطة صوـ
وملاحظات مكتوبة. أفهم أنني قد اصل إلى البيانات التي تهمني إذا أعطي مهلة كافية (أسبوع واحد عادة) للباحثة (سندس).

✓ أفهم أنني قد أتواصل مع الباحثة (سندس) عن طريق البريد الإلكتروني إذا كنت بحاجة إلى مزيد من المعلومات حول البحث.

الاسم .... توقيع .... التاريخ................

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LETTER

Dear Course Leader,

Re: Permission to Undertake Research

My name is Sundus and I am currently studying a Masters in English by Research at Sheffield Hallam University. The course is based on an individual research project, and I will be conducting research on the learning experiences of Arab women studying English in the UK. The main purpose of my research is to explore how the first language, educational background and learner identity of these students affect their progress in new learning environments. I intend to explore aspects of teaching and learning that students find valuable for their English language development, whilst simultaneously establishing methods that could generate even more culturally responsive learning environments. I would be grateful if you would give your consent for me to carry this out.

I am hoping to recruit 10 learners who have Arabic as a first language to take part in my research in spring 2015. My data collection methods will comprise a questionnaire, observations and a focus group with students attending English classes at your institution. I will make notes during observations and may audio-record the focus group with participants' permission, and will keep you informed of my progress throughout the data collection process.

I guarantee that I will observe good ethical conduct throughout this research and will ensure non-malfeasance, especially by maintaining anonymity for all student and staff participants.

I would be very grateful if you could sign and return the Research Participant Consent Form enclosed at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely

Sundus Alzouebi

OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

Date of observation:

Duration of Observation:

Level of class:

Classroom layout: Nested desks/ Horseshoe/ Circle/ Rows/ Other:

No. students (in total) present:

No. Arab women students present:

Time	Teacher Activity	Student Activity	Interaction mode (individual/pair work group work/melee/ teacher-whole class/other)	Notes

Name: **Signature:**

Thank you very much for completing this questionnaire. All information will be kept safely by me and your name will not be seen in the project.

Section 1: questions about you and your family.
Please circle your response.

1. Are you …?

Male/Female

2. How old are you?

18-23   24-29   30-35   36-41   42-47   48-53
   54+

3. Are you …?
Single   married   divorced   widowed   other (please state:
_____)

4. Do you have children?
        Yes (how many? _____)   No

5. Do you work?
        Yes (What is your job?
_____
        How many hours do you work every week?
_____
        Which language do you mainly use in your job?
_____)
        No

6. Which country do you come from?

_____

7. Did you go to school in your home country?
    Yes (Up to which stage? _____)
    No

8. What is your highest educational qualification?

_____

9. What was the main language used when you got your qualification?

_____

10. What is your mother's highest educational qualification?

_____

11. What is your father's highest educational qualification?

_____

12. How long have you been in the UK?

Less than 1 year   1-3 years   4-6 years 7-9 years 10-12 years
More than 13 years

13. Do you currently live…?

Alone   Family   Relatives   Friend(s)   Other (please state:
_____)

14. What language did you first learn as a child?

_____

15. Do you speak any other languages?

No   Yes (What language(s)? _____

Section 2: questions about the classes you go to.

16. How long does it take you to travel to your English class?

Less than 10 minutes   10-20 minutes   21-30 minutes   more than 30 minutes

17. How many English classes do you go to every week?

1-2   3-4   5-6   7-8   9-10   More than 11 classes

18. What level is your English class?

_____

19. For how long have you been going to English classes?

1-3 months   4-6 months   7-9 months   10-12 months   1-2 years More than 2 years

**20. What are your reasons for going to English classes?
(Tick as many as you need to)**

To improve English for everyday life	
To speak to native speakers of English	
To find a job	
To go to college or university	
To get British Citizenship	
To socialise with different people	

To learn about other cultures	
To have a break from home responsibilities	
Other:	

21. Do you go to any other classes during the week?
No

Yes   (Please circle which classes:)
Maths   ICT   Citizenship   Health and Fitness

Cooking   Art   Driving Theory   Other (please state:
_____)

22. How many of these other classes do you go to altogether?

0   1-2   3-4   5-6   7-8   9-10   More
than 11

23. How much time do you spend on homework for your English class each week? *(Circle one)*
   Less than 1 hour   1-2 hours   3-4 hours   4-5 hours   More
   than 5 hours

24. Before starting any of your ESOL classes, in English, how well did you feel you could: *(circle one)*

Not at all
Very well   1   2   3   4
               5

   Understand what you hear? 1 2 3 4 5
   Speak?   1 2 3 4 5
   Read?   1 2 3 4 5
   Write?   1 2 3 4 5

137

25. As you are now studying, in English, how well do you feel you can:
(*Circle one*)

Not at all   **Very well**
1   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**

Understand what you hear? 1 2 3 4 5
Speak?   1 2 3 4 5
Read?   1 2 3 4 5
Write?   1 2 3 4 5

26. When do you speak English? (tick as many as you need to)

In class   with English friends   with friends from my country
at home   at work   other (please state:
_____)

27. Does coming to the English classes make you feel that your English is improving?
Yes   No   Not sure

28. What do you do in your free time?
_____

Section 3: your opinions on your progress.

Please circle one number under each statement to show how you feel:
                1   2   3   4   5
Strongly agree   agree   neutral   disagree   strongly disagree

29. The ESOL classes I go to help to make me more confident.
                1   2   3   4   5

138

30. The ESOL classes I go to allow me to make new friends.

         1   2   3   4   5
31. The ESOL classes I go to help me interact with people outside
of class.

         1   2   3   4   5
32. The ESOL classes I go to allow me to be able to travel more.

         1   2   3   4   5
33. I always feel like contributing in the lesson.

         1   2   3   4   5
34. I feel excited about coming to my ESOL classes.

         1   2   3   4   5
35. I feel that coming to the ESOL classes will help me find and
get a job.

         1   2   3   4   5
36. Coming to the ESOL classes makes me want to get involved in
other classes or activities.

         1   2   3   4   5
37. Coming to the ESOL classes makes me want to continue
learning English.

         1   2   3   4   5
38. Coming to the ESOL classes makes me think more positively
about my life.

         1   2   3   4   5

Section 4: _Language Learning Confidence_

Read each statement, and then circle the answer that is true for you.
This is what the letters mean:

SD= Strongly Disagree **D**= Disagree   **N** =Neither agree nor disagree
A= Agree   **SA** = Strongly Agree

39. I get nervous when I am supposed to speak English in class. SD/D/N/A/SA

40. I'm not afraid of making mistakes when I read out loud in English. SD/D/N/A/SA

41. I feel frustrated when I don't understand every word my English teacher says. SD/D/N/A/SA

42. I often get bored or distracted in my English class. SD/D/N/A/SA

43. I feel a lot of pressure to do well when I have a test in English. SD/D/N/A/SA

44. I like the way that English is taught in my class. SD/D/N/A/SA

45. I think English is easier for me than other students in my class. SD/D/N/A/SA

46. I don't worry about getting bad grades in English. SD / D / N / A / SA

47. I would be willing to speak English with a native speaker I didn't know. SD/D/N/A/SA

48. I think I am good at learning languages. SD/D/N/A/SA

49. I enjoy learning English. SD/D/N/A/SA

> Please explain this answer. What do you like or not like about it?
(Write 1-2 sentences:)

_____

_____

Section 5: your identity

Please circle one number under each statement to show how you feel:

Not important   Extremely important
   1   2   3   4   5

50. The things I own (my possessions)
   1   2   3   4   5
51. My personal values and moral standards
   1   2   3   4   5
52. My age, belonging to my age group or being part of my generation
   1   2   3   4   5
53. My first language, or my regional accent or dialect
   1   2   3   4   5
54. My ethnic background
   1   2   3   4   5
55. My social class, the economic group I belong to whether lower, middle or upper class
   1   2   3   4   5
56. My religion
   1   2   3   4   5
57. My social behaviour, such as the way I act when meeting people
   1   2   3   4   5
58. My physical appearance (my height, weight and the shape of my body)
   1   2   3   4   5
59. My personal goals and hopes for the future

1	2	3	4	5

60. My academic ability and performance (e.g. the grades I earn and comments I get from teachers)

1	2	3	4	5

61. My occupational choice and career plans

1	2	3	4	5

62. My feeling of being a unique person (being different from others)

1	2	3	4	5

63. My reputation (what others think of me)

1	2	3	4	5

64. My feeling of pride in my country, being proud to be a citizen

1	2	3	4	5

65. My feeling of belonging to my community

1	2	3	4	5

66. Where I live or where I was raised

1	2	3	4	5

67. Being a good friend to those I really care about

1	2	3	4	5

68. My physical abilities, being coordinated and good at athletic activities

1	2	3	4	5

69. My political opinions or activities

1	2	3	4	5

70. Being an ESOL student as an adult

1	2	3	4	5

71. Being a wife or a mother, or both

1	2	3	4	5

<u>Section 6</u>: ***Plans for the Future*** *Circle one answer for each question.*

- Are you fluent in English now?   Yes   No   Almost

- If you are not fluent now, do you expect to become fluent in English someday? Yes   No   Maybe

- Do you hope to use English in a job or career? Yes   No   Maybe

- Do you think it will be easier to learn another language after studying English? Yes   No   Maybe

Name: Signature:

Thank you very much for completing this questionnaire. All information will be kept safely by me and your name will not be seen in the project.

Section 1: you and your family
Please circle your response.

1. Are you …?

Male/Female

2. How old are you?

18-23   24-29   30-35   36-41   42-47   48-53
    54+

3. Are you …?
Single   married   divorced   separated   widowed   other
                                                                (please
state: _____)

4. Do you have children?
        Yes
(How many? _____)   No

5. Do you work?
        Yes   No
(What is your job? _____
 How many hours do you work every week? _____
 Which language do you mainly use in your job? _____)

6. Which country do you come from?

_____

7. Did you go to school in your home country?
     Yes   No
(Up to which stage? _____)

8. What is your highest educational qualification and subject?

_____

9. What was the main language used when you got your qualification?

_____

10. What is your mother's highest educational qualification?

_____

11. What is your father's highest educational qualification?

_____

12. How long have you been in the UK?

Less than 1 year   1-3 years   4-6 years
7-9 years   10-12 years   More than
13 years

12. Do you currently live…?

Alone   with family   with relative(s)   with friend(s)   other
                                                    (please
state: _____)

14. What language did you first learn as a child?

_____

15. Do you speak any other languages?

       Yes   No
(What language(s)? _____)

_____

Section 2: the classes you go to

16. How long does it take you to travel to your English class?

Less than 10 minutes   10-20 minutes   21-30 minutes
more than 30 minutes

17. How many English classes do you go to every week?
1-2   3-4   5-6   7-8   9-10   More than 11
classes

18. What level is your English class?
_____

19. For how long have you been going to English classes?

1-3 months   4-6 months   7-9 months
10-12 months   1-2 years   More than 2 years

20. What are your reasons for going to English classes? (Tick as many as you need to)

To improve English for everyday life	
To help me speak with native speakers of English	
To find a job	
To go to college or university	
To get British Citizenship	
To socialise with different people	
To learn about other cultures	
To have a break from home responsibilities	
Other:	

21. Do you go to any other classes during the week?

Yes   No

(Please circle which classes :)

Maths   ICT   Citizenship   Health and Fitness

Cooking   Art   Driving Theory   Other (please state: _____)

22. How many of these other classes do you go to altogether every week?

0   1-2   3-4   5-6   7-8   9-10   More than 11

23. How much time do you spend on homework for your English class each week? *(Circle one)*

Less than 1 hour   1-2 hours   3-4 hours   4-5 hours
More than 5 hours

24. Before starting any of your ESOL classes, in English, how well did you feel you could: *(Circle one number)*

Understand what you hear?	1 2 3 4 5
Speak?	1 2 3 4 5
Read?	1 2 3 4 5
Write?	1 2 3 4 5

Not at all				Very well
1	2	3	4	5

25. As you are now studying, in English, how well do you feel you can:
(Circle one number)

Understand what you hear?	1 2 3 4 5
Speak?	1 2 3 4 5
Read?	1 2 3 4 5
Write?	1 2 3 4 5

Not at all				Very well
1	2	3	4	5

26. When do you speak English? *(Tick as many as you need to)*

In class   with English friends   with friends from my country

at home   at work   other (please state: _____)

27. Does coming to the English classes make you feel that your English is improving?

Yes   No   Not sure

28. What do you do in your free time?

_____

Section 3: your opinions on your progress

Please circle one number under each statement to show how you feel:

Strongly disagree   disagree   neutral   agree   strongly agree

1   2   3   4   5

29. The ESOL classes I go to help to make me more confident.

1   2   3   4   5

30. The ESOL classes I go to allow me to make new friends.

1   2   3   4   5

31. The ESOL classes I go to help me interact with people outside
of class.

1   2   3   4   5

32. The ESOL classes I go to allow me to be able to travel more.

1   2   3   4   5

33. I always feel like contributing in the lesson.

1   2   3   4   5

34. I feel excited about coming to my ESOL classes.

1   2   3   4   5

35. I feel that coming to the ESOL classes will help me find and get a job.

1   2   3   4   5

36. Coming to the ESOL classes makes me want to get involved in other classes or activities.

1   2   3   4   5

37. Coming to the ESOL classes makes me want to continue learning English.

1   2   3   4   5

38. Coming to the ESOL classes makes me think more positively about my life.

1   2   3   4   5

_____

Please circle one number under each statement to show how you feel:

Strongly disagree   disagree   neutral   agree   strongly agree

1   2   3   4   5

39. I get nervous when I am supposed to speak English in class.

1   2   3   4   5

40. I'm not afraid of making mistakes when I read out loud in English.

1   2   3   4   5

41. I feel frustrated when I don't understand every word my English teacher says.

1   2   3   4   5

42. I often get bored or distracted in my English class.

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43. I feel a lot of pressure to do well when I have a test in English.

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44. I like the way that English is taught in my class.

1   2   3   4   5

45. I think English is easier for me than other students in my class.

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46. I don't worry about getting bad grades in English.

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47. I would be willing to speak English with a native speaker I didn't know.

1   2   3   4   5

48. I think I am good at learning languages.

1   2   3   4   5

49. I enjoy learning English.

1   2   3   4   5

Please explain this answer. What do you like or not like about it?
          (Write 1- 2 sentences :)

_____

These statements describe different aspects of identity.

Please read each statement carefully and choose a number from the scale below to show how important you feel it is to your sense of who you are.

Not important				Extremely important
1	2	3	4	5

50. The things I own (my possessions)

1   2   3   4   5

51. My personal values and moral standards

1   2   3   4   5

52. My age, belonging to my age group or being part of my generation

1   2   3   4   5

53. My first language, or my regional accent or dialect

1   2   3   4   5

54. My ethnic background

1   2   3   4   5

55. My social class, the economic group I belong to whether lower, middle or upper class

1   2   3   4   5

56. My religion

1   2   3   4   5

57. My social behaviour, such as the way I act when meeting people

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58. My physical appearance (my height, weight and the shape of my body)

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59. My personal goals and hopes for the future

   1   2   3   4   5

60. My academic ability and performance (e.g. the grades I earn and comments I get from teachers)

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61. My occupational choice and career plans

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62. My feeling of being a unique person (being different from others)

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63. My reputation (what others think of me)

   1   2   3   4   5

64. My feeling of pride in my country, being proud to be a citizen

   1   2   3   4   5

65. My feeling of belonging to my community

   1   2   3   4   5

66. Where I live or where I was raised

   1   2   3   4   5

67. Being a good friend to those I really care about

1   2   3   4   5

68. My physical abilities, being coordinated and good at athletic activities

1   2   3   4   5

69. My political opinions or activities

1   2   3   4   5

70. Being an ESOL student as an adult

1   2   3   4   5

71. Being a wife or a mother, or both

1   2   3   4   5

Section 6: plans for the future

Please circle one answer for each question.

72. Do you believe that you are fluent in English now?

        Yes   No   Almost

73. If you are not fluent now, do you expect to become fluent in English someday?

        Yes   No   Maybe

74. Do you hope to use English in a job or career?

Yes   No   Maybe

75. Do you think it will be easier to learn another language after studying English?

Yes   No   Maybe

FOCUS GROUP PROMPTS

Date: **Time:**   **Duration:**
**Venue:**   **Participants' names:**

1. How are you all today?

2. How was your last English lesson?

3. Did you enjoy it?

4. Can you tell me what you studied in your last lesson?

5. Do you think your English lessons are useful for you? In what way? If not, why?

6. Do you generally enjoy coming to your English classes?

7. Do think the lessons you attend will help you in your life outside of classes?

8. If so, in what way?

9. Generally, do you feel happy when you're in class?

10. Do you have any feelings of worry, anxiety or stress when you're learning in class?

11. Do you feel that coming to class is a good use of your time?

12. Do you feel there is anything in particular that your teacher/organisation does that helps you learn better in class?

13. Do you feel there is anything in particular that your teacher/organisation does that helps you feel more confident in your life outside of class?

14. If your ESOL teacher could speak Arabic, how would you feel about him/her using your first language (Arabic) to help you translate and understand things in English?

15. Do you feel motivated to improve your English?

16. Do you feel there is anything in particular that makes it difficult for you to learn in class and enjoy the lesson?

17. Is there anything that you wish your teachers/organisation did that you think would help you develop in your life outside of classes? (e.g. in helping your children, starting other courses, looking for a job, etc)

18. What do you want to achieve from coming to your ESOL classes?

19. Do you feel that you are supported and encouraged in class to achieve your personal aims?

20. Is there anything that is not a part of your ESOL classes that you feel increases your motivation to learn and helps you move closer towards your goals?

21. Is there anything else you would like to say about your motivation in class?

22. At school in your home countries, how was the classroom most commonly arranged? (Choose from below or draw the design on the blank sheet of paper given to you)
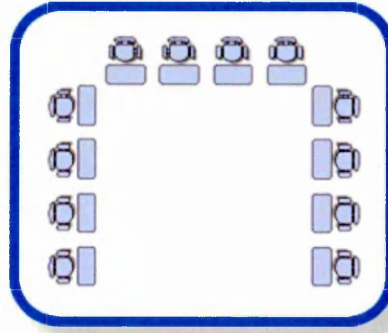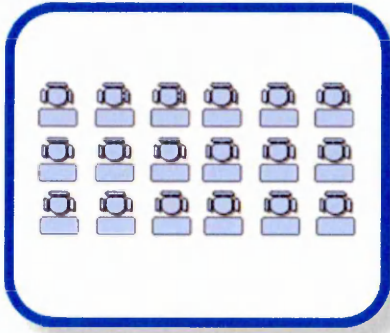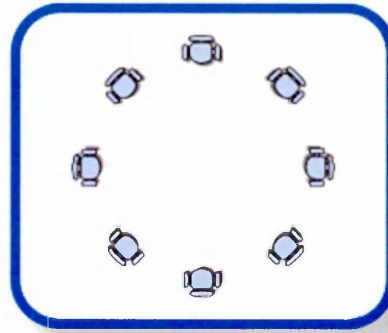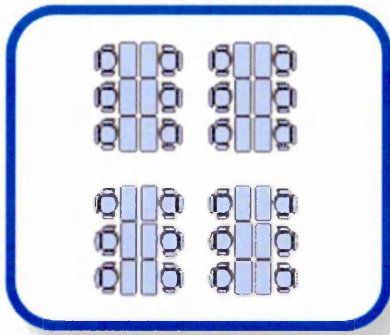
Other:

ιt
.chool
in your home countries, how did you and the other students mostly interact for classwork?
(Choose from below)

Individually
Teacher-whole class
In pairs
In groups
In melee form
Other: _____

24. At school in your home country, what colour(s) were the classroom walls usually painted?

25. What colour(s) are your ESOL classroom walls in the UK painted?

26. If you could change the colour of the walls or furniture, and the design of the classroom, what would you do?