*The voices of ESOL:*

*A narrative discovery of the learning experiences of students attending ESOL classes in a further education college in the North East of Ireland.*

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# Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

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**Abstract**

In the last 20 years, Ireland has gone through significant changes we have moved on from a land of Paddie's to a multicultural nation with a diverse demographic population. This can be evidently seen from our workplaces to our schools and colleges. One such note is the increase in participation levels within further education, particularly in the area of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes. The rise in Ireland's migrant population has seen the need for further provision in this area. Just in the last number of months, the war in Ukraine has forced civilians to flee and seek refuge in other countries. Many people have left Ukraine in hope of finding peace and solace to start a new life elsewhere. Ireland is one of the civilian's chosen destinations to find sanctuary. It is envisaged that Ireland's population will increase by 20,000, over the coming months as individuals flee Ukraine. It is also important to note that many other nationalities have come here to live out of free choice. Migrants have come to live in Ireland because of family connections, fleeing persecution, for educational pursuits or maybe they just want a change. Taking all the above into consideration. The seed was planted for the creation of this research to uncover the experiences of learners of ESOL classes as they navigate life in Ireland. On uncovering relevant literature around narrative inquiry there is limited coverage of the voices of ESOL students as they describe their learning journey with the English language in Ireland. To add to this literature on the narrative of students as they attend ESOL classes this study was created. Five learners were purposefully selected to take part in this inquiry to uncover their experiences and discuss challenges and triumphs as they learned and developed within the English language. From the findings of this discovery, three themes were ultimately chosen. "A Language of Power" "A Time and Place" "You learn I learn". These themes gave voice to the students as their journey in Ireland was uncovered and told.

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**List of Abbreviations**

**ETB – Education Training Board**

**ETBI – Education Training Boards Ireland**

**NALA – National Adult Literacy Agency**

**SOLAS - An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna, 'Further Education and Skills Service'**

**ESL – English as a second language**

**NFQ – National Framework of Qualifications**

**UDL – Universal Design for Learning**

**REALT - Regional Education and Language Teams**

**EAL - English as an additional language**

**ELL - English Language Learner**

**EFL - English as a Foreign Language**

**ESOL – English for Speakers of Other Languages**

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

This study aims to explore the experiences of students attending English for Speaker of Other Languages (ESOL) classes and their journey with education and learning the English language. This introduction will provide a backdrop to the study, the methodology, the research aims and objectives, the overall purpose of the enquiry and a summary of the chapters presented. It is a qualitative study that takes a narrative approach to uncover the experiences of students attending ESOL and their experience with attending education here but also before residing in Ireland. Narrative inquiry has been chosen and is deemed the most appropriate method to uncover these experiences and expose the learner's "voice", this framework generates meaningful insights into the opinions, beliefs, and recommendations of all respondents (Clandinin, 2006). This chapter begins by exploring the background and rationale for the study.

### 1.2 Background and rationale:

ESOL may be simply defined as "English language provision for adult speakers of other languages" (Cooke & Roberts, 2007, p. 5). Policy writers NALA (2000) define ESOL as "an umbrella term to include English Language Teaching (ELT) covering situations in which English is taught to all groups of learners who are non-native speakers" (p. 10). Provision for adult ESOL classes has been developing progressively since the mid-1990s, here in Ireland (SOLAS & etbi, 2018). It has developed continuously since then with improved resources for students who are learning English as an Additional Language (EAL) and is taught in a variety of different levels from Primary, post-primary schools, and further education institutes across Ireland. Basic language knowledge of the unfamiliar environment,

developed overtime is imperative to the learners of English, enabling integration of their new home, preparing for independence to become more active participants in society.

As Ireland continues to develop into a multicultural society certain target groups require English language tuition (SOLAS & etbi, 2018). As ESOL delivery in Ireland holds no national strategy, classes in the English language are delivered by local Education and Training Boards (ETB) all across Ireland. ETB courses are run on a part-time basis and are free to learners with some private centres requiring payment. As demand for provision has increased steadily, with a range of target groups seeking tuition.

> SOLAS & etbi, (2018) policy reports "Initially established to respond to a need for language provision for asylum seekers, it has expanded in line with the dramatic changes that have taken place in the structure of Irish society, with large numbers of immigrant communities, both settled and transient, throughout the country" (p. 2).

This statement echoes the two definitions above as non-native speakers learn the English language, to take part in Irish society and settle here. Living in a new country presents challenges, some that may greatly differ from an individual's homeland, especially if language presents itself as a barrier. The social, legal, and cultural norms are different from going to the local shop to trying to access the government services for health, housing, or education these are difficult when you do not know how things work (Gilmartin, 2008). The initial culture shock and continuing stress of an unknown environment these challenges intensify when the language is misunderstood (Ćatibušić et al., 2019).

As our Ireland's migrant population continues to grow so does advancement in policy, strategy, and teaching resources. In the year 2014, SOLAS FET strategy was developed, this focused on literacy and numeracy development in the FET sector throughout Ireland. It noted that implementation of a clear policy, for ESOL provision would be applied over the years 2014 – 2019, with priority being placed on low-skilled and unemployed migrants

(SOLAS, 2014). This was a welcomed change in the FET sector having come a long way from no strategy or policy implementation since its commencement of ESOL. This strategy ensured that learner provision would be responsive to that of the requirements of a changing Irish economy and migrant population. This approach aimed to develop an integrated system of the FET sector in Ireland which in turn would meet the needs of the learners. (SOLAS & etbi, (2018), "Active Inclusion is one of the FET Strategy's five high level strategic goals including a commitment to provide a clear policy for ESOL provision, with priority to low-skilled and unemployed migrants" (p. 3). This policy has seen further modifications and amendments in the year 2020 with the implementation, of policy and guidelines from educational bodies, NALA, SOLAS and ETBI on the recommendations for the delivery of ESOL. On International Human Rights Day December 10th, 2021, a new set of guidelines was published to work alongside the 10-year literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy strategy this focused on the help of migrant learners improve their English language abilities. These guidelines and toolkit commissioned by SOLAS and CMETB to assist migrant learners to progress through further education, are to enable those working in the sector of FET ESOL to continue the practice and ongoing assessment of the English language competency of learners (Government of Ireland, 2021). All these implementations and policy alignments have been a welcomed addition to FET institutes across Ireland.

Numerous research studies on ESOL provision in Ireland and other countries provided useful references against which to explore this narrative inquiry while keeping in mind that little of them looked to hear the voice of the students themselves, focusing on curriculum, language learning supports, and teacher perspectives and strategies (Bippis & Eslami, 2013; Ćatibušić et al., 2019; Gilmartin, 2008; Little, 2000; Little, 2007; Telfer, 2014; Waksman, 2018). This research and Ireland's new vision for the next decade to enlist further supports for people with unmet literacy skills (Bailey et al., 2020) will help create a pathway for

learners of ESOL in "the furthest behind first" (NALA, 2020b, p.6). ESOL provision and English language acquisition are required to meet the migrant learners' needs to live and navigate their way in Ireland on a personal, social, educational, and vocational level. We now live in a multinational Ireland so it is important that individuals coming to reside here can negotiate their way around with the ease of language attainment. In the last number of months, Ukrainian refugees fled their country to find sanctuary many of whom escaped to European countries like Ireland. "Language integration programmes are necessary at the earliest stage possible after arrival, adapted to each person's linguistic competence needs, and combining language learning with the learning of other skills and competencies or work experiences" (SOLAS & etbi, 2018, p. 4). In the last number of years, ESOL provision has been steadily on the rise as figures from 2015 show 12,362 learners registered for classes with projections for 2019 near 18,000 (NALA, 2020a) these figures have grown rapidly in the past number of months due to the arrival of migrants from Ukraine and individuals from other parts of the world. As Ireland enters a new 10-year strategy to support learners in literacy, numeracy and digital literacy skills it is envisaged that language support will in intensify to provide speakers of other languages provisions from 12,000 – 20,000 (Government of Ireland, 2021, p. 56) in the first half of the strategies lifetime, this is a welcomed improvement across the board.

Equally personal and professional experiences have led me to this chosen topic of uncovering the learning experiences of students of ESOL. Before completing this Masters's programme at NCI and entering the teaching profession, I worked in the area of community employment that along with my own personal learning efforts and overcoming them all brought me to this desired dissertation topic. In my role as a teacher, I have been exposed to students from all over the world who work hard to learn and progress within this country of Ireland. I am a believer in hard work and determination will help you succeed in your goals,

this coupled with education can open the minds and doors of anyone who consciously wishes to commit to education. This research mission will assist adult literacy organisers, tutors, and most importantly students attending these classes as it shines a light on their experiences and amplifies their voices. It is intended that it will also show the journey of learning that many ESOL students embark upon as they come to live in Ireland.

## 1.3. ESOL literacy and ESOL language clarification

For clarification purposes, a description of the difference between "ESOL literacy" and "ESOL language" classes are provided for the readers of this study. The learners that attend ESOL classes can come from professional educated backgrounds, or many have received little to no formal education in their homeland. ESOL literacy implies teaching and learning that focuses on language and literacy development in the English language. It is designed for learners who have difficulty in their mother tongue with reading and writing or may never have held a pen before (National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), 2019). These learners require additional support to acquire English language literacy competency and then progress to complete ESOL language courses to enable society participation. If learners do struggle with reading and writing in their native language, they may significantly struggle in these skills within the English language. This is where determination and patience are required for this learning process along with support from the ESOL teacher. The "English language" classes focus on English language development for students who do not have literacy difficulties in their native country. These learners may have been exposed to the English language in school, at work or as an additional language. Many of these ESOL language learners will be familiar with the alphabet we use in English or exposed to such writing systems in Chinese or Arabic (NALA, 2019). These learners who have already been exposed

to these language principles often find it easier to transfer the skills and knowledge to English language acquisition of speaking, reading, and writing.

Purposefully in this research, all the learners taking part are at an ESOL language stage of either a QQI Level 3 or 4 standard. In their journey, some of these learners have been previously exposed to English before residing in Ireland the remainder have started at level 1 or 2 and continued with their language journey until they reached a QQI level 3 or 4 standards. "As language learning is a lifelong process" (Gilmartin, 2008, p. 98) commitment, and motivation, are required to foster the acquisition of English language learning skills to continue learning outside the classroom.

## 1.4 Purpose of the research study:

This study aims to uncover and hear first-hand the experiences of students as they attend ESOL language classes providing them with a platform to share their voices. Connelly & Clandinin (1990), describe analysing narratives to actively find the voice of the participant in a particular time, place or setting. This study endeavours to represent the student's recollections, about their experiences, feelings and life events that have led them to study the English language here in Ireland. This research uncovers the learners of ESOL educational experience prior to residing in Ireland, how they are now, and their plans for the future with education, employment and life. The aims and objectives will also be in line with uncovering barriers to learning and challenges that the students of ESOL language classes encounter. These will also be addressed in line with the literature provided in the next chapter (Comings, 2007; Crowther et al., 2010; Government of Ireland, 2021; NWT Literacy Council, 2013). Although barriers and challenges are addressed it is important to note that uncovering the learner's experiences, and individual's story is of utmost significance to this area in research and to inform professional practice and organisation policy and procedures in line with ESOL

education. As educators, it is important to remember the other elements of life that learners encounter while attending education ESOL language classes.  This research will create pathways for further research in the area of language learning showcasing how the learning experience can change lives and the significant "power of education" on learners attending ESOL language classes.

In line with the above, the following aims and objectives of this dissertation are outlined below to help uncover the voices of ESOL.

**Aim:**

To discover the experiential learning journey of a student attending ESOL classes as they develop their English language ability.

**Objectives:**

- To uncover the learner's motivations for joining ESOL classes and returning to education as an adult in Ireland.

- To investigate key challenges that the learners encounter while attending ESOL classes and residing in Irish society.

- To explore the student's future plans with learning, education and work.

- To enable the learners to showcase the approaches they apply to learn English both inside and outside the classroom.

**1.5 Methodology**

Narrative inquiry has been chosen and is deemed the most appropriate method for this qualitative study, discovering the experiences of ESOL students with learning or developing their language ability while becoming part of Irish society and gaining English language competency. The researcher wants to act as the interpreter of the individual learner's story of learning the English language through ESOL classes. Creswell (2013) defines narratives as "Narrative stories tell of individual experiences, and they may shed light on the identities of individuals and how they see themselves" (p. 71). The paradigm of interpretivism is used to investigate the experiences of the participants of ESOL and how they find the overall experience of learning the English language and navigating life in Ireland.

Interpretive methods generate insight and understanding of behaviour, explaining their perspectives while not dominating them this will be achieved through open-ended and semi-structured questions (Scotland, 2012). Interpretivist researchers tend to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, and the complexity of the research that is being studied Ryan, (2018) zoning in on the subjective voice of the student's experience with ESOL, education and their lives in Ireland. Students were also asked to bring an artefact to the single meeting, one that signified their learning journey, and this would be then used as a metaphor for their journey with learning ESOL and education (Appendix V).

The next section gives details on the overall outline of the study with an overview of its contents.

**1.6 Summary of Chapters**

This dissertation is broken down into the following chapters, to provide a clear progression of the research undertaken. Chapter two discusses the literature connected with this study, the papers enlisting positives, and others in contradiction with the methods of ESOL and its practices while others include reports and new strategies for the next decade. Various influential writers have assisted in the thoughts and questions that have been posed around this study some of these include Bunning (2016), Comings (2007), Crowther et al. (2010), Gilmartin (2008), Little (2000), (2007) and Mathew-Aydinli (2008).

As Ireland now embarks on a new 10-year literacy strategy, new reports and policies have also been released by Irish educational organisers NALA, SOLAS, ETBI and The Department of Education, all of these have provided this research with a statistic on facts and figures of learners of ESOL classes. All this literature will add to the overall journey and my practice as an educator. Chapter three looks at the chosen methodology to work mutually with answering the research questions, aims and objectives to uncover the learners of ESOL experiences. It begins by looking at the narrative research method employed and why it was viewed to be the best fit for this intended research. It discusses taking on the role of a narrative researcher collecting the stories from individuals about individuals lived and told experiences (Creswell, 2013, p. 71). These stories of the narrative took shape from the questions are various themes that were asked of the participants. These questions were formed from answers about their past, present, and future (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

The Paradigmatic Positioning took an interpretivist approach which is well suited to investigate students' perspectives of their learning experience (Bryman, 2012) The main endeavour of the Interpretivist paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) and this is the desired result to uncover the voices of experience. The next sections look at the theoretical framework of Bronfenbrenner's

(1979) Ecological Systems Theory that supports and guides this study alongside narrative inquiry of experiences of learners of ESOL. The next parts provide an insight into the participants and the purposeful section choice to enlist the learners. Data was collected in the form of interviews both open-ended questions and semi-structured that enabled an informal conversation to take place where organic answering was produced. The answers were then analysed using Braun & Clarke's (2006) Thematic Analysis which provided a six-step process that enabled the coding process to begin. This was completed manually and with the help of coding software.  The next sections described how ethical considerations were adhered to by policy guidelines from the National College of Ireland Ethics committee and the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) to ensure a duty of care to all participants and organisations involved in this study. Finally, quality and rigour were examined to ensure a meaningful trustworthy study was produced with my place in this story ultimately told.

Chapter Four presented the findings and discussion that arose from the data collection, analysis and coding process. This chapter was divided thematically, with an overview of the theme structure, and a conclusion to the findings and narrative of the learner's experiences. These findings were linked back to or in opposition to the found literature in Chapter Two. The final chapter, of this study, is Chapter Five, which reveals the responses to the overarching questions posed about this narrative inquiry of learners of ESOL, contributions to the field, research recommendations, limitations of the study and a summary of the final chapter.  Following Chapter Five, a number of documents are attached forming the appendices.

**1.7 Conclusion**

   This chapter provides an outline of this research dissertation to uncover the voices of ESOL learners. It takes the form of looking at the background and rationale for the study, describing both professional and personal reasons for undertaking this topic. The purpose of the research aims and objectives. The chosen methodology is seen as the best fit for the overall research design and journey, with a summary of the chapter. The next chapter delves into the literature on ESOL learners, language, theories, and strategies that have been discovered through this exploration.

**Chapter 2: Literature Review**

**2.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides an appraisal of the literature relating to the learners attending ESOL (English Speakers of Other Languages) and their experience with learning the English Language. The concept of ESOL language literature largely focuses on the syllabus, teaching strategies, and teacher practice with little research on the voices of the student's experiences as they develop their English language ability. It is envisaged that the student's experience will be captured and retold through this dissertation.

**2.2 Origins and history of ESOL**

The teaching of ESOL (English as a Second Language) originated in the 15$^{th}$ century with the arrival of trading and settlement of humans throughout the globe. The British were at the forefront of the development of these programs to gain better connections with their colonies and to further open trading routes, with the need for communication in English (Hamilton & Hillier, 2009). With the rise of the British empire, the language of English began to grow, and during the next 200 years, teachers were sent from Britain to educate other nations on the traditions, culture, and English Language. As people would not give up their native language the British then favoured a bilingual education system that both their mother tongue and English could be spoken, this was then the start of modern English as a second language as we know it today (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). From the 18$^{th}$ century onwards as immigration to America was on the rise this too brought many English-speaking people there. As the English language was gaining significance it too was met with opposition but by the end of World War II 1945, the US realised a need for the importance of foreign languages which in turn led to a greater increase in ESL education (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). By the 20th century, the language teaching profession was on the rise due to the multicultural nations

with this and the development of policies and procedures around the pedagogy of language along with government funding and policy implementation aided ESOL education. ESOL has gained its distinctive provision within many further and higher education centres implementing this as they would have for adult literacy and numeracy divisions.

As it stands today English is the most spoken and studied language in the world with approximately 1.5 billion people speaking English, but less than 400 million use it as a first language (Breen, 2019). Richards & Rodgers (2001) suggest "60 per cent of today's world population is multilingual from both a contemporary and a historical perspective, bilingualism or multilingualism is the norm rather than the exception" (p.3). As we now live in a multicultural globe and increase for the need of ESOL classes are required now more than ever before. ESOL language learning is important for non-native English speakers to live and navigate daily life and experiences in Ireland (NALA, 2014). It is an important resource for migrant communities to function as part of Irish society.


**2.3 ESOL, the learners, identity and belonging:**

As this research study focuses on the experience of students attending ESOL classes and how they have come to learn the English language in Ireland, much of the research uncovered has covered curriculum and teaching experiences and limited academic research on the experience of students attending ESOL language classes (Bunning, 2016; Gilmartin, 2008; Howard & Logan, 2012; Mathews-Aydinli, 2008; Ro & Ryu, 2013). The arrival of the global pandemic and emergency remote learning has led to the increase of multimodal communication embedded alongside core traditional learning approaches to English Language Teaching (Hafner, 2020).

Digital technologies permitted classes to be online and opened a world of opportunities forlearners and teachers. Embedding traditional methods of language learning alongside newer methods can enhance learning for the students of ESOL classes. Multimodality supports a universal design for learning and can add significant benefit to language learners (Quirke & McCarthy, 2020), examples of this could include text and audio supports for reading and hearing, use of visual images and their relationship to words. These multimodal methods can encourage learners to develop language acquisition, and learner autonomy while aiding successful teaching.

As the Ukraine and Russian war continues since February 2022, this has caused an influx of learners from Ukraine to seek asylum throughout Europe. These migrant language learners will enrol in various ETBs and language learning providers to competently gain English Language acquisition to exercise their voices and advocate for themselves as they develop in communities in Irish society (Bunning, 2016; Catibušić et al., 2019; Nagy, 2018). Enabling the students of ESOL classes to showcase what learning of the English language they have accomplished both in and outside of the classroom, and to express their identities when learning and developing the English language.  Connelly and Clandinin (1990) state, "humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives" (p. 2). This research will look at how the learners experience English classes and how their overall experience of learning has changed since they arrived in Ireland which includes varying lengths of time from four to sixteen years. These learners make up part of our Irish communities, as workers, parents, friends and colleagues. These students might include migrants from EU countries, South Asian, and Somali communities as well as asylum seekers seeking refuge from persecution as the people of Ukraine are currently experiencing.  The learners attending ESOL courses bring stories to the classroom in the form of life experiences from their nations, based on their own beliefs, customs, and language identity, it is important

for their stories to be heard not only by educators or language tutors but by all faculties if further education institutes. As the learners that attend ESOL classes are adults over the age of sixteen having worked and been educated in their native country they too bring prior learning experiences from the lives they have led to this point, these past experiences will in turn influence the condition under which future learning experiences are had (Roberts, 2003). Learning a second or subsequent language is a long task that takes many years to perfect (Bunning, 2016), this process is further demanding when cultural norms differ for the learner, searching for employment, accessing services for health or housing, and even small everyday tasks like grocery shopping are all difficult tasks when the language of the host community is unfamiliar to an individual (Gilmartin, 2008). Traditionally, ESOL learners fall into various categories which include ESOL literacy and ESOL language classes, in any of these classes there is often a mixed ability of learners, which include highly educated skilled professionals wanting to learn or improve their English language or individuals that have not attended formal education and lack basic literacy skills to participate and benefit from the standard ESOL classes (NALA, 2020a).

In the year 2008, a review of the English Language provision in Ireland was conducted which revealed the low competence of the English language ability of non-Irish nationals. This brought a change in Irish education standardisation for English language students and the implementation of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) where a learner of the English language would hold at least a level 3 as an acceptable standard to function as a part of Irish society (Byrne et al., 2014). Since then, Ireland's population of migrants from across the globe has grown dramatically, with figures of students attending ESOL classes having risen steadily over the last 10 years, in 2015, there were 12,362 attending by the year 2018 it had reached 15,000 learners participating in ESOL classes (NALA, 2020b). Ireland has become a multicultural society which has therefore increased the demand for English

language classes to allow students to learn or enhance their English language capabilities and function as a citizen of Ireland. Due to the number of increasing migrants within Ireland, there has been an increased demand for ESOL English classes, (Nagy, 2018) with even more migrant learners arriving in Ireland as Russia invades the country of Ukraine this number is set to rise over the coming months, as the new migrants participate in English classes provided by programmes like The Fáilte Isteach group and Local ETBs (Riegel, 2022).

It is of great importance in our work as educators of migrants, learning the English language to inform ourselves about the students that attend ESOL classes about their "various worlds and experiences" (Cooke, 2006, p.57). What they have learnt and experienced before residing in Ireland, what influences their language learning, what works for them when learning and how their experiences outside of the classroom are shaped by the learning they do inside the classroom. It is of paramount importance that students learning the language of English, are supported with learning activities that align with their experience and goals to help develop their language abilities (Bunning, 2016). Strategies to learning have evolved over the years and are no longer segregated into a one size fits all approach to language acquisition and to go mere go beyond survival English (Ćatibušić et al., 2019) in terms of subject content and how the material is delivered. Learners of ESOL bring stories to the classroom and they share their life experiences with us through narrative conversations but learning a new language can take shape in a variety of methods. New methodologies of teaching can enable students attending ESOL to gain confidence in their English vocabulary, collaborative methods encourage students to connect. This can be through a means of art-based practice, digital means and technologies according to Yang and Lawrence (2017) "these creative modes of expression are especially effective with students with literacy difficulties or for whom English is not their first language as they are not limited to verbal communication" (p. 96.)

**2.4. Language**

The ESOL classrooms hold a variety of different nationalities from all corners of the world. Within these nationalities are different people, genders, feeling, requirements, experiences, and life goals. These learners often arrive at a particular destination for a specific purpose. However, some learners of ESOL may not have come from a choice of freedom (Bunning, 2016), about the choice of movement, not all migrant learners will come to Ireland some individuals will be excepting from persecution or political unrest. As individuals realise and create possibilities for themselves by adapting to their new culture as they progress with English language acquisition. While interacting with society, their socioeconomic needs, life goals, preparation for meaningful employment or navigating their way in society, communities, and home life (Cervatiuc & Ricento, 2012). These language learners can see life beyond English language accomplishment, as they come to terms with the new way of life and culture, they are creating plans, to become workers, employees, students, and community members (Bunning, 2016). Attaining the English "language that connects across continents and centuries, classes and cultures" (Feeley, 2007 p. 22) brings migrant ESOL learners together so that goals, ambitions, and desires can be heard and developed. For learners to be able to tell their stories, they require English language acquisition to share their stories of culture and to hear and understand other learners' adventures also. With English language competency, shared stories and experiences can take place Richmond (2002) describes "The patterns of a learner's self-identity, their community and culture" (p. 10) are illuminated by the students delivering their stories through the English language. As Feeley, (2007) writes "Literacy is one of the most fundamental and valuable forms of educational currency and is the key to unlocking the larger coffers of other forms of capital economic, social and cultural" (p.15). Moving and living in a new country presents many obstacles for learners of the English language. The level at which a learner can

relate to the second language and their mother tongue will play a vital role in determining the English language learning tasks (Little, 2000). Cultural differences, educational background and previously linguistic ability all have a pivotal role to play in language acquisition. To survive and function in an unfamiliar place, learners of language must gain knowledge of English to function as part of society and eventually become part of a community. This in time will become an invaluable educational currency for the learners of ESOL to develop a life in their new home. This connection of development can be paralleled in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory the microsystem is bidirectional influences within the exosystems as the learner develops in Ireland. Howard and Logan (2012) suggest "Cultural and societal literacy asserts that an individual needs to become adept in more than just words and numbers" (p.61). When adult learners attend ESOL classes it is essential they are engaging in learning activities that are meaningful and relevant to their life experiences before residing in Ireland and encourage their language development (Bunning, 2016). Involving the students in a curriculum relevant to their overall experience as it is now and prior to living in Ireland is crucial for language development (Roberts & Cooke, 2011; Gilmartin, 2008; Baynham, 2006; Nelson & Applyby, 2015).

The term whole language learning is also very relevant to the writing of this paper and something I agree with on the level of both a student and educator. Brockman (1994) gives an appraisal of the term "Whole Language" a philosophy of literacy instruction based on the concept that learners need to experience language as an integrated whole" (p.7). This viewpoint has relevance to the learners in this research study and ESOL students overall learning experience of the English language. As individuals, learn and grow with the language and in time by increased exposure to the language in their surroundings of the classroom and community and their lifelong learning journey. Other important key writers on

whole language principles include (Watson, 1989; Huang, 2014) and one that I believe resonates with ESOL learning and teaching as Gillin, (1991) describes.

> (Gillin, 1991) summarises: The whole language is simply what its name implies: language, which is whole, language which is complete. It is not phonics drills, vocabulary tests, comprehension exercises, or spelling lists. It is not a hierarchy of skills and subskills that can be checked off on a chart. It is a realization that human beings possess a need to communicate, and the understanding that literacy helps to fulfil this need. (p.7)

As learners of ESOL attend English classes and navigate their way through Irish society the key importance of attending these classes is to enable these migrant learners to take part in Irish society. These learners are part of towns, villages and communities all over this island and it is important they can navigate life here in a practical manner. The uses of grammar, reading comprehensions and fill-in-the-blank exercises are necessary but enabling whole language learning to become part of a community of culture is significantly more important to a learner.

### 2.4.1 English Language Teaching Terminology

The following section provides an overview of definitions, acronyms and key terms used in the teaching of the English language. In Ireland, there are numerous terms for the teaching of the English language and multiple public and private educational bodies that enable learners from other countries to become proficient with English. Some of these organisations include Education and Training Boards (ETBs), Language International, implementation of (REALT) (ETBI, 2022) to support the needs of Ukrainian children arriving in Ireland enabling children to enter the education system in Ireland, NALA offers blended approaches to learning and Fáilte Isteach community initiative. English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students complete this form of English language learning as an additional language in their

own country and an example of this would be in Somalia students learn some subjects through English or Chinese students being taught English in China. English as a Second Language (ESL) is used to describe learners of English who are now living in an English-speaking country and require the English language to function and be part of society. English Language Learner (ELL) is the most common term used for students whose primary language is not English, and who are currently attending or enrolled on an English language course. ESOL is widely used in Ireland for the description of English language or literacy classes in the NFQ. These levels can be anywhere between QQI levels 1 and 5 when learning the English language. Before class engagement students take part in a one-to-one assessment to identify where their capabilities sit within the ESOL classes and levels. The ESOL programme is designed for students where English is not their dominant language and to prepare learners for success in further or higher education and employment opportunities, through the development of awareness of Irish culture, speaking, reading, and writing and actively listening to make sense of a conversation or information received. In the next section a further discussion on the learners attending these classes and their overall identity.

**2.5 Persistence in Learning:**

In this section, persistence in learning will be discussed from the literature and why it is an important issue not only for students attending ESOL classes but facilitators of those classes, enabling those that attend to use the service to engage with education and reach their educational goals and in particular their English language goals. Committing to education can be difficult for anyone, especially if you are faced with learning a new language in an unfamiliar land (Gilmartin, 2008). Responsibilities like looking for employment, enrolling children in school, helping them develop in school, making health appointments and accessing services are all difficult tasks when a language is unfamiliar to you. The initial

shock of completing these tasks can intensify when you do not understand a language. Explorations in andragogy show that some groups of adult learner's experience difficulties in engaging and persisting in adult education (Comings, 2007; Crowther et al., 2010; McGivney, 2001).

As Plumb (2014) considers the impacts of human emotions from the writing of Nussbaum, adult learners must gain an understanding of the "intelligent responses" our minds and body makes in the form of our emotions and continue learning without opposition from our intrinsic emotions as they are not deemed to hinder or inspire our learning.  The extrinsic factors that often deter learners from their full potential can be used in harmony as a motivator to reach their full learning potential. Persistence can be a disputed theory, for ESOL programs to be effective they must provide relevance to the learner attending to help them fit into and function as part of everyday society, to help and establish support to enable determination where possible for learners. Persistence in learning highlights these factors around adults attending classes for language attainment, situational, dispositional, institutional and pedagogic (Comings, 2007; Crowther et al., 2010; McGivney, 2001; Waksman, 2018). All of these barriers can be simultaneously happening at once. This has significant relevance to the learners attending ESOL classes, it informs the reader that persistence can be a contested concept, with many adult learners not successfully finishing an education program in its entirety. If institutes are accepting that a language learner's journey may have elevation and decline along the route of English language acquisition. This does not necessarily mean that they have not engaged with the learning process and developed skills while they did attend their journey ended due to life commitments or issues. The learners have come to seek asylum in Ireland with the majority engaging in education before living in Ireland. Their level of persistence may not always have been transparent. Possibly they were uprooted from their native country for reasons that could include torture,

persecution, or their own intrinsic desire to further educate themselves and to find sanctuary elsewhere. This has relevance to Maslow's Hierarch of Needs Theory (1943) as the needs and desires of the students will all come into play at different stages of their learning journey and life. This hinders the learning experience that contributes to the irregularity of the attendees in classes but many of these obstacles are out of the learner's control and can be a result of unemployment, homelessness, unstable lives, substance abuse, disability, or ill-health. Crowther et al. (2010) suggest that inconsistency of attendance does not necessarily, suggest non-persistent from an adult education organisation's view it may show irregularity but from the learner's perspective, this could be the challenges of life that cause hiccups in their lifelong learning journey. From the perspective of the literacy and language organisations, they may not understand why students are unable to attend although be it for a short period they assume they have dropped out of a course. Belzer (1998) findings on students who were identified as dropouts by adult education programs often saw themselves as "stop outs" they still were connected to the program but because of life, they were unable to attend. Comings (2007) exclaimed the term persistence, in adult learning from the point of view of the learner, with many adult students, learning both in and out of the program, until they achieve their goals, adults stay in programs for as long as the demands of life allow them to, persistence ends when the pupil chooses to stop learning. All learners in the Scottish literacy centres study of Crowther et al. (2010) were described as opportunistic showing enthusiasm in the research, when sharing their stories, the paper then went on to describe how over a third of the learners in the study remembered their schools' days as enjoyable with many achieving good academic results. This provides excellent results with some learners' lives just taking a different turn, with addiction, depression, or homelessness that turned their lives upside down they necessarily did not have a bad experience with education from their early years. This has prompted the research of this literature review to use this relevant theme around persistence

or time with education when completing the research with learners attending ESOL classes.
These papers focus on Adult Literacy and the experience held by adult learners attending an
adult literacy service. Comings (2007) stated persistence is

> a continuous learning process that lasts until an adult student meets his or her educational
>
> goals, and persistence could start through self-study before the first episode of
>
> participation in a program. Persistence ends when the student decides to stop learning
>
> (p. 24).

While the learners become engaged in the process of language acquisition they are engaged
or committed to studying or independent study goals, once they are participating and have
managed to overcome the demand of life to continue with education and learning their
ongoing dedication to self-improvement is spurring them on.


**2.6 The success of the student attending ESOL classes:**

In the year 2008 after the review of English language provision took place in Ireland a
change in how ESOL (NALA, 2014) was delivered to migrant learners across the island of
Ireland this has also been incorporated in the 10-year literacy strategy as implemented by
NALA, SOLAS and the Department of Education, (NALA, 2020a). As Ireland's migratory
population increases and the number attending English classes mirror an increase several
factors postpone success these can include barriers as mentioned above. Often an inner
conflict arises within the student, the desire to improve and wanting to learn English but an
attachment to the mother tongue, as they may not see themselves staying in Ireland for the
remainder of their lives and subconsciously erect barriers to developing proficiency in the
English language (Little, 2000). There are many elements to the curriculum of ESOL, that are
beneficial to the students, and this is significant if these students are to function in everyday
society outside of the classroom environment. The skills of learning a language like English

are developed naturally through the process of learning by doing (Gilmartin, 2008) where class topics are relevant to the student's lives outside the classroom. For example, role-play in a parent-teacher meeting, making a medical appointment with a doctor or using a bus timetable is part of day-to-day life in Ireland. Language skills are developed by doing these types of classroom activities that in turn benefit a student of ESOL in their everyday life outside of the classroom. When acquirers of the English language are not gaining benefits and are unhappy with their learning situation as if it was a burden on them and they are not effectively functioning with their community and society as they had envisaged their language learning journey is unlikely to progress very far (Little, 2000).

How is success measured, when learners attend ESOL classes it is imperative that what they learn within the classroom context is relevant to their life outside the classroom. Each migrant's story is different, but they are all faced with social and economic demands that are far easier to address if they understand the host country's language, both spoken and written (Gilmartin, 2008). Migrant learners are very clear about their language needs and the importance of acquiring the English language, as the primary language of the host community, it is seen to be inextricably linked to the learner's sense of well-being and autonomy as they settle in Ireland (Ćatibušić et al., 2019). But we as educators need to consider more than language and literacy skills here. As the students of ESOL progress within their language learning journey so do their confidence and desires to improve while creating a life in Ireland. This in turn leads to positive impacts that include host community integration (Gilmartin, 2008; Strang & Ager 2010) and enhancing migrants' access to employment opportunities (Cheung & Phillimore, 2016).

Much of the literature categorises barriers that many adult learners attending ESOL classes are faced with as they begin their learning journey in Ireland NWT Literacy Council, 2013). Learners attending ESOL classes are made up of individuals who previously had their own

experiences with learning, some positive moments with some not so positive. As an educator and fellow educators, it is of importance to note that the individuals sitting before us can have multiple obstacles which can obstruct the learning of a new language. Barriers that English language students are faced with daily could include any of the following situational, relating to family responsibility, childcare, attitudinal barriers which could stem from their relationship with learning in their native country and confidence. The theoretical framework of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory can be seen here as the development of humans is interconnected between their being and their environments. This theory was revised from his ecological theory to the bioecological model by Bronfenbrenner (1979) and is used as a guiding framework for this research. This theory looked at separating the concepts of environment, the person, the proximal process and the time as they interact with human development. In the bioecological model, development is defined as the phenomenon of continuity and change in the biopsychological characteristics of human beings, both as individuals and as groups (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007, p. 793).

As the child is enmeshed in various ecosystems from home life to school to society and culture all of these hold influence on human development.

Academic barriers relating to school or poor academic ability that was not encouraged, and pedagogic barriers that could include inappropriate teaching methods, assessment to a one size fits all approach (Ćatibušić et al., 2019) and no options for different learners and learning styles of individuals (Little, 2013).

**2.7 Teaching a Language:**

   Language teaching has advanced significantly in the last number of decades with the introduction of new pedagogies and instructional designs of curriculums and also the arrival of technology in the classroom. These changes are reflected by the change in the status of English as an internationally spoken language which has accelerated the demand for more effective approaches to language teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). How we as teachers effectively deliver lessons to serve the purpose of human interactions has changed and continues to do so with the arrival of new mediums like technology for learning. Language plays a vital role for the students of ESOL if they are to engage in training, employment or surviving in an unfamiliar environment (Gilmartin, 2008). The learner-centred approach requires development and implementation from both the learner and facilitator. A classroom environment may be a very unfamiliar place for the students, it can take time for learners to understand their roles, their teacher's roles and how they will work simultaneously together to achieve English language competency. Once this learner agreement has happened their competencies can be developed by regular reflection and target setting to enable and understand their progress and to also help create internal learning goals for themselves (Little, 2002). This in time will enable the learner to think and plan future learning goals autonomously. "Reflective intervention' is a key feature of the teaching-learning process", especially in a language learning context (Little, 2007, p. 24)

This reflection should intentionally open up dialogue and improve learner confidence to openly discuss the learning activities and pose questions to one another and the teacher. If language pedagogies are tailored to a practical communicative level that facilitates the learner to function in Irish society and develop autonomy outside the class. A move from traditional pedagogies to enable the learners of ESOL to explore questions, make suggestions and challenge others is significant if the learners are to develop a life in Ireland and progress in

education or employment opportunities (Little, 2007). A welcomed addition to the language classroom is the advancement of technology and how it now plays a pivotal role in delivering lessons not just in language learning but across a range of subjects.

### 2.7.1 Technology Enhanced Learning ESOL:

The use of technology has become an important if a not vital part of learning today not only in language learning but in much of the curriculum taught in Ireland within further and higher educational institutes. The term "digital divide" has been used for the last 30 years commonly defined as a gap between those that have access to computers and the Internet and those who do not (Dijk, 2006). The infiltration of technology has enabled language learning, bridging a gap for learners, and assisting them in the classroom, with real-life activities enabling them to lead functioning lives outside the classroom. It now defines the age we live in with children as young as two years old exposed to smart devices how could they not become highly competent with tech by their teenage years if exposed to it from early years? Ball (2011) discusses that "new technology provides both an opportunity and obligation for adult ESOL teachers" (p.12). During the Covid-19 pandemic, online learning was mandatory throughout Ireland this was a difficult time for many students and teachers alike, and especially difficult for the learners of ESOL and language trying to adapt to learning through technology. According to Becker (2000), the use of computers and tech is regarded as an important instructional tool within an ESOL class this can be dependent on the relationship both the teacher and student have with technology.

Technology can bring the real world into the language classroom with the added use of multimedia supports, for example, Google translate, C pen or interactive board all of these mediums are making connections between the English language and the needs of the learners (McClanahan, 2014). The added benefits and opportunities held by technology were brought

into sharp focus during this time of the Covid Pandemic, showcasing how they can improve the learning experience and add impact to a lesson, but this is dependent on the student's and teacher's affiliation with technology. As the government and the Department of Education continue with the digital adoption of momentum gained during that time in the adoption of digital technology in education and continue building and investing in the digital ecosystems of our Irish education systems (Department of Education, 2022). Digital Literacy has been at the focus of the Irish educational system since 2000 with the implementation of different strategies over the years most recently in early 2022, The Department of Education published its IT strategy for all schools to the year 2027. This initiative aims to support the students and teachers to ensure they all have opportunities to gain ICT competency to ensure the development of digital skills from primary to higher education to lifelong learners with the intent of increasing digital capability in adults by 80% by the year 2030 (Department of Education, 2022). The digital divide also comes into light as access to IT can often be out of reach for some learners attending classes of ESOL. During the pandemic many institutes and ETBs provided students with loan laptops or smart devices to access the remote learning classes as they happened, this was suitable for learners that had Wi-Fi connections but not suitable for learners that did not have access to online methods. Clements and Sarama (2003) declare that the use of suitable technology can be useful for learners as for many of the students that attend ESOL the device of choice is their smartphones giving access to Google translate launched in 2006. This application allows learners to translate multiple forms of text, phrases, and media, enabling ESOL learners to access over 109 languages as of April 2021. Ball (2011) notes "New technology provides both an opportunity and an obligation for adult education ESOL teachers" (p. 12). Depending on the teacher's proficiency with IT will then establish how IT can be utilised within the ESOL classroom. In a common ESOL classroom, teachers will use interactive boards, and interactive pens and the students will also

collaborate and connect to these devices via their mobile phones or smart devices (Ball, 2011; McClanahan, 2014). The students can join teacher-led ESOL learning material via their mobile phones with an activation code, permitting individual and group learning to take place. This is implementing the use of the digital scaffolding technique within the ESOL classroom. Implementing multimodal applications during language learning applies UDL principles to the language learning process (Quirke & McCarthy, 2020). Some of these applications include Mentimeter, Slido, Kahoot, Google Classroom and Quizlet. Technology is a vital part of language learning and will pave the way for the future, enriching the curriculum for both the student and teacher.  It allows active engagement and maximises positive learning outcomes achieved through exposure to wider content (Ahmadi, 2018). Assistance with pronunciation and speaking ability, reading, and writing assistance through the use of a C Pen reader which supports independent reading of the text to better understand the meaning of words and develop vocabulary. The usefulness of technology is down to the competency of both the student and teacher and adequate training should be provided to enlist those skills if not possessed (Department of Education, 2022). In line with the new Digital Schools Strategy (Department of Education, 2022), this will focus on the enhancement of skills and boost the capabilities to support effective pedagogies and inclusive use of these technologies to improve learner quality, inclusivity and overall effective education, this strategy is centred from primary to higher education. Technology helps learners of ESOL develop thinking skills and promotes student-centred learning and autonomy ensuring learning and motivation to learn the English language are maximised (Ahmadi, 2018). Technology brings integration to the ESOL classroom, increases motivation, and expands opportunities for authentic interaction, while increasing learner contribution and engagement, it can also promote autonomous learning both in and out of the classroom (McClanahan,

2014). In conclusion this section, the final discussion will open by addressing the research questions and the current study.

**2.8 Influences:**

This study is strongly influenced by theorists and educators John Dewey (1859-1952) and Paulo Freire (1921 – 1997). Dewey's discovery and implementation of experiential learning, and how he advocated that individuals learn and develop from their surroundings, that experience is the basis for life learning, shaping how and what way we will learn in the future. This informs us of Dewey's theory, that learning happens both inside and outside the classroom as students that attend ESOL will express their experience of residing in Ireland and learning the English language. Dewey (as cited in Roberts, 2003) states that "I assume that amid all uncertainties there is one permanent frame of reference: namely, the organic connection between education and personal experience" (p. 7). The central theme behind Dewey's theory of experiential learning is the role of the teacher to enable suitable learning experiences for the students to become familiar with what they are learning and relate previous knowledge and apply it in the future (Roberts, 2003). Education and in particular language acquisition is a social process and in the theory of John Dewey, he advocates that all learning occurs within a social process as the ESOL learners experience daily within the classroom environment.

The second influential theorist that has relevance to this research and participants, is one of the most iconic figures in contemporary literature on education, Paulo Freire, known for his radical ideas on the nature of schooling, and his writings of Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970), have influenced this thesis and in my working role as an adult educator. As the students that attend ESOL classes will have often or are overcoming barriers and hurdles to either continue with education or join education where the learner of ESOL may have left

many years before coming to Ireland. The students will continue to work through these life obstacles in a host community where the language is unfamiliar. Freire perceived the world as one ingrained in the belief of oppression he defined it as "any situation in which 'A' objectively exploits 'B' or hinders his and her pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person" (Gomes, 2022) allowing the learner to become a more formed individual and develop from their difficulties of life and learning.

Freire's work enabled learners to devise a strategy for achieving freedom, as the learners progress within the English language of learning through ESOL classes. Freire had concerns about the humanistic value put on the pedagogy, education should merely not be a transmission of knowledge, and skills but should somehow be delivered is of utmost importance to the end product itself of the learning material (Mayo, 2009). Freire advocated the use of conversation and building upon the experience of students to enable a critical understanding of language and the world influenced by the participatory education movement. Both theorists symbolise and act as a metaphor for this study and for the students that attend ESOL, through the uncovering of the experience of what they have previously learnt to what they now put into practice while commencing an English class. Some learners will have a grasp of foundational English language and use this as a stepping stone to progress, with language attainment using prior knowledge to learner and develop the skills of writing, reading and talking in English. Many of these students will have or continue to fight oppression in some shape or from their previous lives, but as Freire uncovers it is about overcoming that oppression and navigating the best possible changes of life and education that you can achieve.

Educators and writers were greatly influenced by this movement (Auerbach, 1995; Cooke & Simpson, 2019). Language development has an important part to play in the process of resistance, social change, and transformation with an emphasis on dialogue (Mallows, 2014)

encourages participatory ESOL classes allowing for the problems and interests that affect the students daily to be the primary content of the curriculum enable the learners to use the skills learning in class in their everyday life.

**2.9 The future - a 10-year strategy:**

In the year 2015, the Irish Refugee program was set up due to a humanitarian crisis and a need for assistance in areas of conflict including the Middle East and Africa (The Department of Justice, 2015) since then the island of Ireland has become populated with many migrants from all over the world. Most recently the war in Ukraine has led to the mass relocation of civilians to European countries including Ireland which will, in turn, increase the demand for English language classes, to communicate functionally in Ireland (Government of Ireland, 2022). Since the global pandemic Covid-19 shone a light on the struggles of over half a million Irish adults faced during this time, by not being able to understand and access public health information, employment support, and key government messages that were delivered during this period (Ryan, 2020). This brought rise and implementation of a new 10-year strategy formed in partnership with NALA and the Irish government to try and improve these conditions for residents of Ireland (The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, 2021). This strategy brought about the publications Literacy for Life, Literacy Now, and Literacy Impact (Government of Ireland, 2021). This document summarised the cost of unmet literacy, numeracy and digital skills of the residents of this island and how with the assistance of key stakeholders NALA, SOLAS, and the Government of Ireland a framework for addressing these needs and outcomes envisaged. The strategy is envisaged to enable everyone to assist each citizen of Ireland to play their role in society and actively function and take part in their community. This plan is envisaged to build a more, equal, and resilient society (NALA,2020).

Migrant communities have chosen to come to Ireland and set up a home here, this can often be by choice or for reasons out of their control, these individuals enhance our overall culture and enrich the day-to-day lives of those they interact with (The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, 2021). As we continue to emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic, the continued conflict taking place in Ukraine and the arrival of many migrants, this strategy is happening at the right time in Ireland. Where it is anticipated to benefit individuals trying to learn or improve their English language ability and participate in Irish society.

In summary the literature exposes and suggests many positives and shortcomings of ESOL establishment and how it is delivered in the Irish context. It looks at the origins of ESOL and how changes and improvements have been made over the years. The learner's identity and how they come to live in Ireland navigating their way through life and English language acquisition. Changes in classroom lesson delivery and the collaborative nature of learning also are revealed with technology improvements making learning the English language more attainable for this cohort. In uncovering the wider literature very few look at the organic narrative voice of the students, that attend these English classes, how they too have a story to tell. A story worthy of writing and reading. For these reasons, coupled with the gap of the narrative voice of the students of ESOL, this study will look at the learning experiences and how these learners navigate life in Ireland.

## 2.10 Research Questions and Current Study

To date, there have been multiple stories of research conducted internationally within the context of uncovering the learners of ESOL and their experience, learning culture, curriculum and learning strategies (Comings, 2007; Crowther et al., 2010; McGivney, 2001; Waksman, 2018). Limited writings have been created from the perspective of hearing the voices of

students attending ESOL classes in Ireland as they embark on learning the English language in Ireland. As Ireland enters a new 10-year strategy with literacy, numeracy and digital literacy, change is on the way creating an avenue for the voice of students attending ESOL to be heard. This research will create pathways for further research in the area of English language provision showcasing how the learning experience can change lives and the significant "power of education" on learners attending ESOL language classes.

The following questions have been created around the literature:

**Research Question 1:** What are the educational experiences of students attending ESOL classes in a further education college in the North East of Ireland

**Research Question 2:** What are the key challenges that the learners of ESOL encounter while attending English language classes?

These questions will illuminate the experience of the learners as they attend ESOL classes. It will give them a voice which in turn will provide educators and language organisations with an understanding of the learner's personal experiences while they attend classes. The learner's plans for developing a brighter future and how they find the overall learning experience through the English language. As the learners discuss situational, institutional, and dispositional barriers as educators and language teachers it can further assist in finding solutions to these challenges.

**2.11 Conclusion**

This chapter portraits several different concerns in relevant literature to the research questions proposed. Of how the learners of ESOL experience attending ESOL and obstacles that learners can come across and conquer while on their English language learning journey. These various sections examined the origins of ESOL and English language classes since they have come into practice in our Irish Educational System, the reasons for persistence, the curriculum and new and old language pedagogies that are used. The next 10 years of learning in the Irish ESOL system and how changes are happening in line with our diverse population. All these topics impact the learners daily it is about educators and the Irish educational system supporting the entire learning journey to enable them to fully function as part of Irish society. In the next chapter, the methodology for this dissertation will be revealed.

**Chapter 3 Methodology:**

**3.1 Introduction:**

This chapter defines and explains the research methodology used to uncover the learning experiences of students attending ESOL classes. It is important to note that the interview questions posed to the students will focus on their overall life learning experience as they are now and their experience with education prior to residing in Ireland.

Firstly, in this chapter, I will explain the paradigmatic position upon which this research is based and how this strongly informs my narrative approach chosen. Next, I will discuss why narrative inquiry has been chosen and is deemed the most appropriate method for this qualitative study, which was discovering the experiences of ESOL students with learning or developing their language ability to functionally read and write in the English Language. Creswell (2013) defines narratives as "stories tell of individual experiences, and they may shed light on the identities of individuals and how they see themselves" (p. 71). In union with this methodology, the theoretical framework by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) the Ecological Systems Theory was used and discussed to support this study. As mentioned in the previous chapter influence is also held from the works of John Dewey (1859 – 1952) and Paulo Freire (1921 -1997). The interviews will take the form of semi-structured and open-ended questioning structures providing rich and detailed data from a variety of learner perspectives (Ahlin, 2019). Students were also asked to bring an artefact to the meeting that symbolises their journey with learning the English language through ESOL, not all the participants decided to present a learning artefact but those who have can be seen in Appendices. This methodology will then discuss participant selection, data collection and analysis, rigour and quality and the ethical considerations that I came across while completing this study, finally, my position within the research will also be addressed.

**3.2 Paradigmatic Positioning**

There are typically three known philosophical research paradigms that researchers use to guide research methods and analyses; positivism, interpretivism and critical theory. For the basis of this study, it was captured through the window of interpretivism. Guba & Lincoln describe "The central endeavour of the Interpretivist paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience" (as cited in Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017, p. 33). The rationale for the interpretivist lens is the organic nature of uncovering the individual learner's story via their interactions with others in their environment. We uncover new knowledge by exploring the stories delivered by the students of ESOL. Knowledge and truth are subjective, being based on an individual's experience and how they have come to understand it (Ryan, 2018). I am also of the belief that knowledge is subjective as each learner is unique, learning at a different, time or context. The students come to understand their learning journey and deliver their experience in the form of storied accounts of their experience with the English language, learning in Ireland and their homelands. This study investigates the experiences of the learner's relationship and learning with the English language it was felt that paradigm of interpretivism was the best fit for this research to interweave with the narrative approach methodology. Interpretivism elements are described by Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) as a need to understand the individual rather than the universal laws. Other writers of interpretivism composition that provided a reference for this dissertation include (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Farrow et al., 2020; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Scotland, 2012). Post-positivism paradigm was also a concept that was uncovered at the early stages of this dissertation. In the 20$^{\text{th}}$ century positivism then saw the emergence of post-positivism (Scotland, 2012). Positivists, uncover the world and happenings, with the researcher and the researched being independent entities (Scotland, 2012). Although the learning journey of the student of ESOL was their own the relationship between researcher

and the researched I believed worked in tandem to uncover this story of experience and this approach was not right. The notion of postpositivism does however reject the positivist approach that the researcher can be an impartial observer of the researched. The argument the postpositivists bring, is that ideas, and identity, of a researcher influence what they observe and therefore impacts upon what they come to find out (Scotland, 2012; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). It was felt this lens did not do justice to the uncovering of the learners of ESOL stories and the illumination of their voices and moved away from uncovering the true experiences held.

Krauss, (2005) explains "Epistemology is intimately related to ontology and methodology; as ontology involves the philosophy of reality, epistemology addresses how we come to know that reality while methodology identifies the particular practices used to attain knowledge of it" (p. 758). The ontological and epistemological underpinnings of this study are in keeping with the methodologies of narrative inquiry. Ontology refers to the study of being, how we experience the world and our beliefs around that. The ontological position of interpretivism as mentioned in the writings of Scotland (2012) is relativism (p.11). This is of the understanding that the reality a person experience is personal to each human being as it happens to them. Each learner of this study will be attending ESOL classes at a QQI Level 3 or 4 level but each person will have a varying experience of learning and their overall journey with the English language. To experience something, we have to participate within and encounter it. Subsequently this narrative interaction, we use the English language to make sense of these experiences by creating a story and delivering it in this research study (Lewis, 2014). This reflects the narrative inquiry of this research that there are multiple realities because of individuals' different experiences, cultural norms, community values, and worldviews in which they encounter (Krauss, 2005). The interpretive paradigm does not question beliefs; it acknowledges them (Scotland, 2012). This research is also guided by the

assumptions and beliefs of epistemology, put simply how we know the reality or truth. The research method chosen is essentially epistemologies – by following a certain process we support our claim to know about the thing(s) we have been researching. Epistemology is our belief about how we may come to know the world. Scotland (2012) reports epistemological assumptions are concerned with how knowledge can be created, acquired, and communicated, in other words, what it means to know something. The student's experience and how it is uncovered to unveil their story of learning the English language: Their knowledge is under their construction and is being created as they attend ESOL classes. As the researcher, it is my duty to uncover their stories of experience with learnings in life and their future plans. As I listen it will be analysed, theme-based and re-delivered in the best possible light to reflect on their journey prior to living in Ireland and now. The next section will provide an overview of the methodology of Narrative Inquiry.

**3.3 Research Rationale: Narrative Inquiry**

The methodological approach for the undertaking of this study was completed within a qualitative framework. It was felt that as I was trying to uncover the experience and expose the learner's "voices" this framework would generate meaningful insights into the opinions, beliefs and recommendations of all respondents (Clandinin, 2006). The research methods employed are conducted through the Narrative research methodology. It was decided that this research practice was the best fit for enabling the author to explore the phenomenon of experiences held by the learners, allowing for the subjective experience and reflection to be expressed. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) exclaim narrative research allows for understanding as if describing through the frame of the storyteller's experience, the story of how they make sense of their journey with the English language.

The study of narrative is therefore the study of how humans experience the world (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). There are numerous meanings of the word "narrative" but the one term that I feel is the best fit for describing this research is the word "story" (Reissman, 2008). Bleakley (2000) also refers that through the use of narrative conversations, people account for and give meaning or significance to their lives this is depicted by the learners attending ESOL classes. The researcher will become the interpreter of the individual learner's stories in the delivery of the research that has been uncovered (Riessman, 2005). This narrative inquiry allows the author to study issues in depth with data collection through the form of open-ended and semi-structured interview questions, relevant to the students learning journey before Ireland and as they currently study the English language, enabling them to open up about their past, present or future, (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This narrative exploration will involve five students who will deliver their stories in the format of conversation. The learners also have the option of showcasing an artefact that is relevant for t to their language learning journey, which will be discussed in the final set of questions. The

usage of the student artefact will act as a metaphor for the learner's journey with reading and writing, enhancing the strength of the methodology and allowing for a deeper understanding of the experience (Kingsley, 2009). Narrative research allows for humans to express their experiences, in this instance ESOL learners and their experience and the journey they encountered while re-engaging with education.

Daiute and Lightfoot's view of "Narrative research has many forms, uses a variety of analytic practices, and is rooted in different social and humanities disciplines" (as cited in Creswell, 2013, p.70). The works of Connelly and Clandinin (2000), and their use of narrative research as strongly influenced by John Dewey's experiential learning, and the notion that experience streams out of other experiences and leads to further knowledge being produced. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) state "Although narrative inquiry has a long intellectual history both in and out of education, it is increasingly used in studies of educational experience" (p. 2). This Narrative inquiry will take the form of a biographical writing approach, and open-ended and standardised interview questions being used in this process. This is to ensure each individual learner of ESOL, can use this informal conversation method to feel comfortable about delivering their experience (Butina, 2015). This research is completed to ethical standards and all participants will remain anonymous throughout the study giving each student a fictitious name throughout the research. The narrative research approach has its benefits and challenges. A broad range of research needs to be collected from the participants for the researcher to understand the context of the individual learner's experience to allow for themes to be showcased and data analysis to take place. Other methodologies explored included a phenomenological approach to the research. It was best felt that due to the nature of phenomenological research illustrating the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon. This would be a possible approach if learners lived through the same experience, but due to the nature of

learning through ESOL, no two individual learner stories would be the same and the researcher does not want to focus on the likeness of all participants although themes will be exposed. Creswell (2013) it was felt that a narrative storied approach worked best for this research as narrative researchers focus on stories of human experience. These narratives are the formation of what represents the human experience as it unfolds through time (Lewis, 2014).

**3.4 Theoretical Framework:**

The theoretical framework that supports and guides this study alongside narrative inquiry of experiences of ESOL students is Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory which has continually been used in research over the past 20 years (Harkonen, 2007; Vélez-Agosto et al., 2017). As this dissertation focuses on the lived experience of students it was of utmost importance to have a framework that delved into the core of each student's experiences and allowed for the uniqueness of the learner's story to be explored. Urie Bronfenbrenner's theory was revitalised and adapted from its initial design of ecological theory 1979 was designed into the bio-ecological model. In 2006, Bronfenbrenner revised his original work by adapting it into the bioecological systems theory, "putting an emphasis on the active role of the individual in the development process" (Vest Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017, p. 2). Bronfenbrenner (1979) defined this as a study of human development as they interact with their environment (Vélez-Agosto, et al., 2017). The EST theory reached popularity in the 1980s after its formation in 1979 (Vélez-Agosto et al., 2017). It is important to implement a theoretical framework within this exploration of the experience of the students attending ESOL classes. To provide reference of how the learners, the proximal setting in which the learner interacts directly to the larger sphere which indirectly influences their journey and development with learning and living in Ireland.

The bio-ecological systems theory has five rotary levels, which include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and the macrosystems the fifth and final system added was the chronosystem on its revival. It was felt that Urie Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory on child development and environment interactions was most fitting for this research project as the student was the centre of this exploration. Härkönen (2007) notes "Bronfenbrenner maintains that because the child develops, the interaction with the

environments acquires a complex nature" (p.2). As the students progress in their learning journey with the English language their world here also becomes more complex as they now understand and can connect with the community and their surroundings better than before enabling an improved functioning life. This Bronfenbrenner model enables the narrative of the students and permitted the structural design of the interview questions.

This theoretical lens also fitted in with the narrative underpinnings as discussed in the previous section, with the storied events of the student's learning at the forefront of the exploration. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1989; 2005 Swanson et al., 2003).

The study of this ecological system looks at how all stages of the development of a child are interlinked with one another, in this study we will look at it from the perspective of the learners attending ESOL. In Figure 1.1 below we can see the different layers of the development of a learner as they interact with their surroundings.

**Figure 1:1** Bronfenbrenner Theoretical Framework as adapted by Nicholson & Dominguez-Pareto (2020).
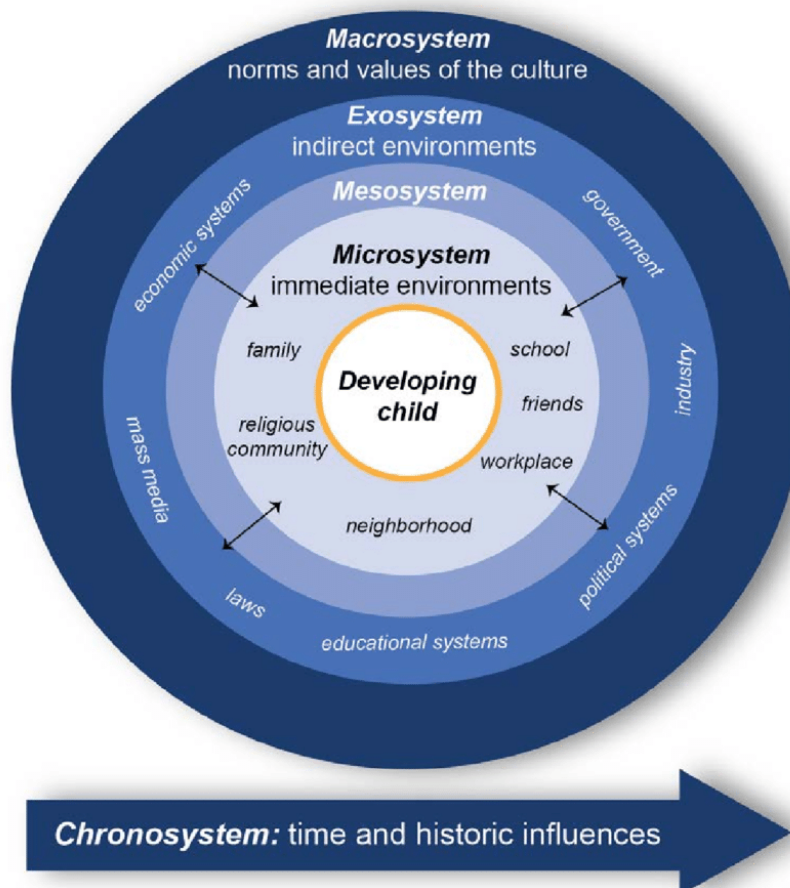


Bronfenbrenner looked at how there are multiple aspects of a child's development considering the wider sphere of factors that the individual contains within their lives, he noted them to be "layers" of an environment that all contributed to a child's development. The layers are bidirectional to one another instead of adhering to the hierarchy effect. Bronfenbrenner (1979) named the following structures the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem as interlinking aspects that steer and fuel a child's development. The sections are as follows, the microsystem is the closest layer to a child, and encompasses the relationships and interactions a child has with her immediate

surroundings (Paquette & Ryan, 2001). This is like the students attending ESOL classes in how they explain their important relationships with family, children and their locality. How they have become part of their towns and villages as they set up life in Ireland. At this initial stage, relationships have two directions both coming to and from the learners, their previous educational history and parents or guardians could also influence this group of learners and their behaviours and beliefs (Paquette & Ryan, 2001). Bronfenbrenner calls these bi-directional influences, and he shows how they occur among all levels of the environment (Paquette & Ryan, 2001). The mesosystem and second layer incorporate a student's journey with how they get along with tutors or teachers, and peer groups in their classes. How peers within classes communicate with their teachers and classmates these relationships are crucial when developing a language like English. Creating a class climate that encourages cultural differences and embeds cultural scaffolding within the delivery of ESOL lessons (Gay, 2001).

The next step is the exosystem, and it incorporates the social structures It incorporates which do not themselves contain the learner of ESOL, but indirectly influence them as they affect one of the microsystems. This could include a partner's friends and how the learners engage with health care providers, the Department of Social Protection and other state initiatives. Here we see there is not a direct connection between these, but the student is still affected by these relationships and in turn, affects the overall learning of the English Language. The macrosystem is the second to last step and looks at how attitudes, culture and socioeconomic status, wealth, poverty, and ethnicity all have a part to play in the development of a student attending ESOL classes. This step is uniquely affected by each learner's way as each is going through their life situation and has great relevance to the lives of students attending ESOL. All factors that contribute to this level can be mirrored with those of persistence and time. The fifth and final level of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is known as the chronosystem and relates to life changes that occur for

individuals getting a new job, family relationships major life impacts e.g., the removal from your homeland due to persecution or political unrest. Akin to the Ukrainian refugees who are currently fleeing their country in hope of a violent free zone. The level of chronosystem is conceptualised with time which has significant relevance to the learner's journey, changes that happen in the learner's society and culture are all impacted around this level. This system involves the environmental changes that occur over the lifetime which influence development, including major life transitions, and historical events. The use of this theoretical framework fits with the overall study and exploration of the learners of ESOL as they navigate their way through life, education and employment in Ireland. It aids the ecology of the learners attending ESOL classes and multiple levels.

**3.5 The Sample of Learners: Participants:**

Purposeful sampling was used to select participants for this research study. This technique is widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases (Patton, 2015). The criteria for inclusion within this research enlisted students attending ESOL classes ranging from QQI Level 3 – 4, it did not matter what stage of completion or repetition the student was at once they were attending class at either level. Level 3 is seen as the acceptable standard of functional competence of ESOL language ability (Horwath Consulting Ireland, 2008). These students range in age, educational attainment prior to living in Ireland, and economic, social and personal circumstances all learners would be welcomed. All learner's identities remained anonymous throughout with participants given a fictitious name to protect their identity. Narrative researchers collect data from a small sample of participants, this is to "obtain rich and free-ranging discourse" (Farrow et al., 2020, p.55). The small size of five participants was another indicator that narrative research would ensure the learners disclose their stories of experience with ESOL language learning

would be captured and retold in the best possible manner Clandinin (2006). The learners were contacted via email, and provided with information, in the form of a plain language statement with an attached short video overview of the research and how they would be of benefit to the overall study. This was carefully planned to ensure Universal Design for Learning Principle (Heelan & Tobin, 2021) enlisting the approach of video and plain language statements. This plain language information sheet was also peered reviewed by an experienced ESOL tutor, and the recommended changes were implemented before sending. Of all the thirty participants that were sent emails, the response came from eight of the five ESOL learners wanting to hear more and possibly be part of the research. Five learners were selected at random to attend one interview, scheduled around their existing ESOL class. Table 1.1 below enlist the various information on each student, including Pseudonym, Age, Module and the QQI Level in which they were completing. The learners within this research were between the ages of 23 – 45 years, this age demographic of the students permitted me to hear stories of learners attending ESOL all at different stages of life and educational journey. All the learners were at various stages within their English language journey and duration of residing in Ireland. Some had been repeating an ESOL module while obtaining a major QQI award and others were there solely to improve their English spoken language, and this was the only class in which they were completing. SOLAS and etbi (2018) have found that much longer teaching and delivery of programmes are required if learners are to achieve language competency, this is independent of each learner. Little (2000) and Gilmartin (2008) found in line with this that the starting level of each ESOL student depends on s variety of factors, including attachment to mother tongue, previous language learning experience and also own beliefs and desires about learning the English language. All the participants within this study are within a QQI Level 3 or 4 stages of progression this makes them similar but different and allows for some variance during analysis.

**Table 1.1:**

*Details of research participants.*

| Participant | Pseudonym | Age | Module/Course | QQI Level |
|:---:|:---:|:---:|:---:|:---:|
| 1 | Daisy | 39 | QQI Level 3 ESOL | Level 3 |
| 2 | Amal | 43 | QQI Level 1 Writing + Reading Repeating Level 3 ESOL low speaking level | Level 3 |
| 3 | Natasha | 41 | QQI Level 4 English (Excellent Speakers) | Level 4 |
| 4 | Daina | 37 | QQI Level 3 ESOL Very good speaker (Repeating) | Level 3 |
| 5 | Sahra | 23 | QQI Employment & General Learning L4 | Level 4 |

## 3.6 Data Collection Methods: Interviews

Opened-ended and semi-structured interviews were completed over a three-week period between the end of May and early June 2022. One pilot meeting took place a week earlier to determine how the questions sat with the learner and if further amendments were required in terms of sentence structure, interpretation and question sensitivity. Creswell (2013, p. 165) recommends a pilot test to help refine and develop research instruments, assess bias, frame questions, collect background information and adapt procedures. Implementing a pilot can provide a novice interviewer /researcher with greater confidence as they carry out the remaining interviews. Interviews involve the gathering of data and comparing and differing to look at ideas formed in the literature and expose themes throughout (Creswell, 2013). Other authors within the context of narrative inquiry deem semi-structured interviews, with open-ended questions, to be well suited to the narrative inquiry (Huber et al., 2016: Clandinin, 2006). This type of questioning method what intended to ensure the participant

was relaxed. In consideration of covid-19 restrictions beginning to ease permitted for the interviews to take part in person. This was something I was most pleased about having felt it gave extra authenticity to the interviews allowing face-to-face interaction. Conducting these interviews online via Microsoft Teams could have possibly caused challenges as I could not assume all the learners had Wi-Fi within their house plus other distractions could arise during the interviews taking place. The interviews took a biographical approach (Creswell, 2013; Crowther et al., 2010) where I actively listened to the experiences of the five learners while they attend ESOL and their overall learning journey. The interviews were completed during school hours, being mindful of the other classes that some participants are in while ensuring to work around their diaries. Interviews do pose both advantages and disadvantages for data collection. Interviews facilitate flexibility for the interviewers as several areas can be covered, non-verbal behaviours can be seen, and spontaneity of respondent answers, the drawbacks can include time-consuming, unanticipated participant reactions to certain questions that may cause sensitivity for the learner and sizeable amounts of data to dissect (Creswell , 2013; Bryman, 2012; Farrow et al., 2020). "Before interviewing anybody, an interviewer should be fully conversant with the schedule" (Bryman, 2012, p. 217), in this instance the interview was broken into five sections to assist in the digestion of questions for both the interviewee and interviewer. The questions were formed after the exploration of the literature took place, this took some fine-tuning and a series of amendments and further brainstorming to ensure quality and facilitate the telling of the learner's narrative story (Roulston, 2017). The questions included themes around learner experience, prior experiences, life before Ireland, inclusion and exclusion, re-engagement, success and opinions. As the questions were positioned into five sections the questions were formed from previous studies (Bunning, 2016; Crowther et al., 2010; Jack-Malik & Kuhnke, 2020; Gilmartin, 2008) but some were also organically produced from my own thoughts and

experiences from teaching. The five stages of the interview followed this outline: Starting

Out; The Insititute; English Language/Indpedenance; Future Plans and Portfolio/Class work.

The interviews took the style of everyday conversational mode as this was deemed the best fit

to gain an understanding but also built a rapport with the learners and enable them to open up

about their experiences (Roulston, 2012). This open conversational style interviewed

permitted students to discuss organic topics that arose from the meetings. This one-to-one

approach is important to enable the learners to feel comfortable with delivering their stories

and that they are not interrogated (Jack-Malik & Kuhnke, 2020). The students were asked to

bring an artefact or significant piece of work they have completed within their ESOL class, 3

of the learners brought along work they had completed that signified their journey with

learning and English language. After consideration, these artefacts did not add significance to

the overall study, nor did they add rich data collection. Instead after a discussion with my

thesis supervisor, the portfolio/classwork questions uncovered information and answers from

the student's work and what work or tasks they complete or find difficult. See (Appendix V)

for students' artefacts. The interviews were audio recorded with five participants using the

Microsoft Teams platform, to record, and transcribed shortly afterwards. Otter.ai and

MAXQDA software enabled me to transcribe and code these meetings as there was a sizable

amount of data. Answers were analysed through thematic analysis Braun and Clarke, (2006;

2022) this will be discussed further in the next section.

**3.7 Data Analysis: Braun and Clarke –**

The produced data was analysed using thematic analysis using Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2022) methods, this involved identifying organising and familiarising myself with the data to see what trends or themes emerged throughout. Alongside that constantly being mindful of the importance of the individual learner's story and its uniqueness of it with consultation using previous research and literature throughout. Figure 1.2 below shows each phase of the Six steps of thematic analysis method (Braun &Clarke, 2022). Narrative analysis as discussed through numerous writings from Clandinin, and Connelly (2000) is one form of qualitative data analysis that is often used in narrative inquiry. The notion of using Riessman (2008) also was a possibility as its structure aligns well with the overall objective of delving into the experience of learners attending ESOL classes.

**Figure 1.2**

*Braun & Clarke, 2022 Thematic Analysis.*
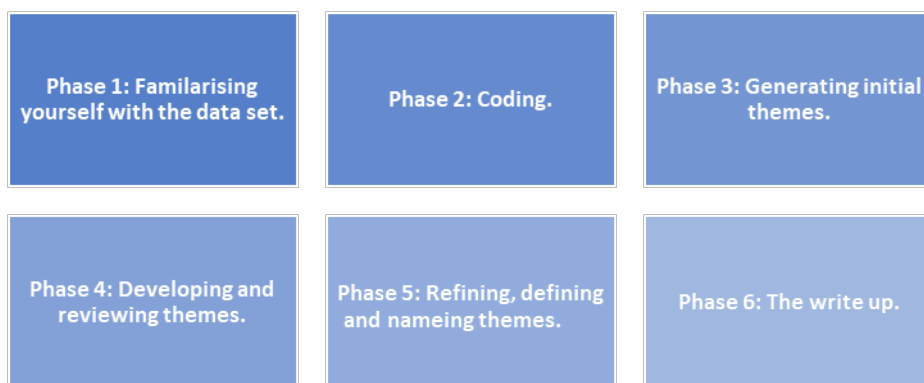


In the end, it was decided that Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2022) method would suit the overall structure and the end goal of uncovering the experience of the learners. From my perspective I found the six phases approach supported the overall study and each stage of my data collection and analysis process. It was digestible for a novice researcher like me. I

appreciated its linear structure but also the recommendations that if required steps backwards are acceptable and part of the process as it is reflective by nature (Braun & Clarke, 2022). For these reasons, thematic analysis was identified as the most feasible approach to analysing and coding the data set. The process involves a six-stage reflexive method.

The data analysis began while I listened back through the Teams recording numerous times, I found some discrepancies between the transcribing of interviews and the Otter.ai software. To mitigate any errors, I then printed out the transcript and corrected and amended the conversation. During this period some initial themes did come to thought but this changed upon reviewing the material. For the part of coding the themes, I used both traditional pen and paper and the software MAXQDA. It did take me some time to gain familiarity with the software but upon further use, I could begin to see its benefits. The creative coding tool enables me to create a visual image of the overall themes this benefited me greatly as I tend to gravitate towards imagery for learning and digestibility of data. (Appendix VII).

## 3.8 Ethical Considerations

The undertaking of the research to uncover the experiences of learners of ESOL was conducted with ethical care and consideration guided by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) and guidelines of the National College of Ireland's Ethical Guidelines and Procedures for Research involving Human Participants. It was my responsibility as a researcher to conduct the research under the guidelines below: Responsibility and a duty of care to the participants of this research, to ensure their well-being, they are aware that the FE college provides extra student supports should you wish to avail of them should the interviews uncover any previous distress they may have come into contact with. Students are made aware of their rights and ensured that their part taking in this research is voluntary and can withdraw at any stage of the process should they wish. Details

of the research being conducted were created in the Plain Language Statement (see Appendix III) and information leaflet) this was read by all participants, or by a trusted tutor to ensure that all students understood the context of the research and how they would be of benefit the Informed Consent Form (Appendix III) was signed and returned upon further discussion of the research. The acceptance of guidelines for conducting data research within NCI and my place of work (Farrow et al., 2020) also adhered to. Those conducting social and educational research have a duty of care towards the research participants and the participants' data. Pseudonyms were used in the study to ensure the anonymity of the interview participants.

The notion of power as discussed in (BERA, 2018) report describes the "importance of considerations of power within the researcher's practice, colleagues and students" alike (p.13). The concern of power dynamic was present as it was envisaged that I may have taught some of the potential learners, this was reported in the email/plain language statement and the video, that the students were not to feel pressured into participating due to previous educational classes being attended. Out of all the participants involved in the study, only one student was previously known to me.

The storage of data files was kept in a password-protected folder in the NCI Cloud network in agreement to comply with NCI's Information/Data Retention Policy. computer. All transcript information that could identify a participant was removed. Once this audio has been transcribed, coded, and analysed it will then be deleted by the researcher. Microsoft Teams audio recordings have a built-in automatic deletion of recordings if the expiry date is not amended to store and save so this has been implemented for a date after final submission. Ethical considerations are required and also ensure the quality and rigour of research conducted as outlined in the next section.

**3.9 Trustworthiness / Quality Rigour**

To obtain beneficial results from a study of research quality and rigour are essential to creating meaningful trustworthy study. There are numerous strategies to promote the validity and reliability of a qualitative study that researchers can utilise. Creswell (2013) recommends that researchers utilise at least two strategies in any study to remain dependable, as cited by Butina (2015) and discussed below. The trustworthiness suggests the notion of how the author of a study convinces the readers that the results and findings are worthy.

The validity of this study can be acknowledged by ensuring quality in the plain English questions by member checking the interview questions before and after the pilot interview stage with an experienced ESOL teacher. This proved very useful and in turn, almost all the interview questions were easily digestible for the students with google translate assisted one participant. Member-checking involved communication with participants to ensure I interpreted their answers correctly if anything was misunderstood on my part. The validity or trustworthiness of the research will be enhanced using participants' own 'voice' to gather research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure the "transcription was a powerful act of representation" (Oliver et al., 2005, p. 1) both concepts of naturalized and denaturalized were implemented this was important to include the unfiltered voices of the learners and to ensure the validity of results.

Keeping the reader in mind was also important to ensure the readability of the work, so I attempted to mediate this by using insertion and omissions where necessary. Considering narrative inquiry, I felt it was important to include the unfiltered voices of your participants. However, with the reader in mind, it was also important to attend to the readability of the work, so you attempted to mediate this complexity by using some insertions and omissions where absolutely necessary – and that accompanied this with further explanation of the quotes. An audit trail was also produced and used to keep account

Of the steps taken in the research process. This reflective process worked well for me to retrace steps and inform my thinking. This strategy of producing an audit trail ensures reliability of the research. This helped me hold a clear focus on the research path, the design and collections decisions. Reliability was also adhered to in the transcription of raw interview data. The software MAXQDA posed to be very useful to create codes and allow for portions of data to be analysed under certain themes e.g., Mother Tongue, Time, Confidence, Native Educational Experience and Political Unrest. The use of a creative mind map also proved to provide traceability of codes and further creation of newer codes to be produced. The added use of a personal notebook throughout the entire process also provided useful at all stages of the research process, to recap and digest information. This reflective method also was useful when recapping previously read material.

## 3.10 My place in this story

When I embarked on this study and was in the position of a novice researcher it took me several weeks to identify exactly what positionality was and how it was outlined in the written dissertation as this was something unfamiliar to me in academic writing (Holmes, 2020). I was confronted with the question of my own personal experiences of learning and professional areas of education and employment. Research positionality refers to the view of the author of my own personal values, beliefs, and thoughts I have adopted over the years. All these components add up to how the research is conducted, its final outcomes and the interpretation of results from the narrative exploration. Holmes (2020) "positionality is normally identified by locating the researcher of three areas: (1) the subject under investigation, (2) the research participants, and (3) the research context and process" (p. 2). I have lived in Ireland all my life and my education from primary school right through to the third level has been here. Along the way, there have been some educators who have greatly

influenced me while others have not so much. These inspirations have affected choices I have made around the educational path I chose to take that have seen me reengage with education after a six-year gap. This dissertation is subconsciously influenced by how I view knowledge and what I believe to be a reality in line with my assumptions. I am in the early years of my new career as an educator, my desire and passion for education in particular adult education stems from my experiences of working in community employment and advocacy. My passion for the area of literacy and language emerged from assisting learners with literacy struggles and having a bird's eye view of people engaging with these services in my place of work and how they navigate through life each day. But I also believe my primary school years have left an imprint on the way I see education. In my infant years of school, I did struggle with reading and transcribing information from the "blackboard". I was fortunate that this was recognised in my early stages as I was surrounded by a good support network of people who cared. That extra school supports helped me pave my way through education, and a little helping hand went a long way. As I got the help and assistance, I needed all those years ago I am now in a place where I can offer help to someone who needs it as they now engage and come and learn or improve their abilities as an adult. I still retain the values, beliefs, and marks that my childhood education has presented me with right through to my third-level years of education.

Completing this research and hearing first-hand about the learners of ESOL experiences and studying the literature have all benefited me from my position as an educator and myself as a learner. By hearing about the curriculum, learning strategies and barriers that some of these students have encouraged along their path of education will help me in my approach and delivery of education. Opened my mind to the holistic approaches to learning addressing the cultural, emotional, and academic needs of the students, as they progress in English language acquisition. As I completed the interviews one by one, I began to thoroughly enjoy

the process of listening to the stories of the participants. Upon completion of each interview, I began to see where similarities or differences of learners lay, as the story began to unfold. This was again reviewed upon listening to the recording several days after all the interviews completed. This break from the interview collection allowed me to time to think and reflect on the stories that had been told, by the five learners of ESOL. Navigating through education in Ireland is challenging when you are a person who has lived here all their life, it is also another level of difficulty when you do not understand the language being spoken. The power of education is one of the most valuable assets anyone can possess I have been fortunate in my life to receive the choice of education and a good one at that. I am entering the position of an educator, while on this path I will hopefully inspire and support students on their learning journey.

## 3.11 Conclusion

This chapter details the methodology used in this study. The researcher strived to show the differences of each learner's experience with a common theme present while being mindful not to enforce similarity of experience. This section included the rationale for narrative inquiry, informed by (Bryman, 2012; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Data was collected in the form of open-ended/semi-structured to allow a natural flow of conversation between the learner and author. The analysis took place using Braun and Clarke (2006; 2022), while Bronfenbrenner's theoretical framework supported and guided this study throughout. Ethical considerations were adhered to and a duty of care was present at each step. Quality and rigour were also implemented throughout the entire process of design, creation and execution. In the next chapter the findings will be delivered.

**Chapter 4: Findings & Discussion**

**4.1 Introduction**

This chapter illuminates storied accounts of the participants attending ESOL classes and their experience with learning the English language while navigating their way through the Irish Further Education System. It follows the outline of the participants, demonstrating how their overall learning journey is similar or different. Barriers to learning effectively are uncovered and reasons for re-engaging with a programme. All the learner's voice, very positive experiences with some describing how they have overcome difficulties.

These stories were collected and analysed to answer the research questions that uncovered the student's experience with learning the English language and their experiences of education before coming to Ireland and how they differ. There have been numerous themes which enabled the coding process to begin, but three overarching themes were ultimately decided upon, and these are placed below. Some of these themes are interwoven with the literature in Chapter 2, but some have been organically uncovered from our conversations. This section provides the best view of the authentic autobiographical experiences of the learners as they explore their way through learning and developing the English language in Ireland. When words are assembled into stories, they have power and meaning, these stories from the learners of ESOL showcase the journeys they have been on and are currently en route to. It is commonplace for human beings to tell stories about their lived lives, in those stories meaning is created as well as getting help from others to help build those stories (Clandinin, 2006).

**4.2 Overview of Theme Structure:**

| Theme 1 | Theme 2 | Theme 3 |
|---|---|---|
| "A Language of Power" | "A Time and Place" | "You learn I learn" |

**Theme 1:**

This opening theme identifies how the five learners of ESOL are bringing back the power in their lives to enable them to live in Ireland. The words power and independence can work together with each other within these findings. The stories of the participants are uncovered to showcase their desire for progression within the English language but also to attend further education or gain professional employment. This theme was created organically from the findings and discussions that took place.

**Theme 2:**

This second theme uncovers the learner's position when it comes to "time" and delivery of classes. All five learners expressed a keen interest in attendance and ESOL lesson delivery but as many express, these barriers make it difficult for them to progress. This theme has also uncovered some of the learners are either repeating an ESOL module for certification or re-engaging with the curriculum for further language acquisition. The participants in this study all explain how they continuously dedicate time each week to complete their ESOL course and gain a better aptitude for the English language while discussing some of the challenges they encounter along the way.

**Theme 3:**

Within this final theme, the findings discuss the efficacy of different learner strategies implemented both inside and outside the ESOL classroom. The theme centres around how the students still learn and are continuously choosing to progress within the English language by adapting different learning techniques throughout their day to improve their English abilities.

## 4.3 Theme One: "A Language of Power"

In this initial theme, I will describe and discuss how all of the learners within this study are bringing back the power in their lives enabling their progression with the English language. The participants defined why they attended ESOL classes, and how it made them feel upon engagement with the language and with their peers in class. Throughout the interviews, the five learners presented several views about progressing to higher levels of education or possible employment prospects as they improve their English language skills and ability. Two of the five learners started their English language journey at level one courses and have since progressed to level 3 or 4 standards. The remaining learners had previously built up enough linguistic ability to commence at a QQI Level 3 stage, enabling them to live in Ireland functionally. Horwath Consulting Ireland (2008) states "English Language competence of A2/NFQ Level 3 equivalent should be the accepted standard at which the student has a 'functional competence' in the English Language, as set out in the CEFR" (p.6). These students like many of their fellow ESOL colleagues across Ireland want to do more the merely function in Irish society they want to build lives for themselves and their families. The findings from this theme "A Language of Power" all display the determination and drive that each learner of ESOL wants to progress and gain independence for themselves and their families as they build lives in Ireland. Language integration programmes like ESOL are crucial for migrant learners, these programmes should be adapted to the learner's needs and abilities thus giving them the power, knowledge, and skills to gain further education, employment, and purpose as part of Irish society (SOLAS & etbi, 2018).

First, in Natasha's story, she discusses her progression in navigating life in Ireland, over the past decade and her desire to progress her English language ability further to gain professional employment. Her spoken English is very good, and she engages in weekly ESOL classes. During Natasha's meeting, she mentions all her plans for the future and how

the English language has and will continue to open her prospects for further education and employment.

> (Natasha) To improve my quality of speaking more culturally. Yes, it's for the purpose of having … future good job. Because I'm in Ireland, I believe that God gave me this opportunity to use the English language. It means it's worldwide. So, I don't know. Maybe my purpose is related to English. So that's why I decided to come and make it better. Level up.

Learners will develop proficiency within the English language through independent learning, with emphasis not necessarily on learners doing things on their own but on realising that they are doing things for themselves and their benefit (Little, 2007).

Natasha is learning the English language at a QQI Level 4 standard to progress and further enable her to gain employment as a means of self-improvement. She mentions the global nature of the English Language and how this too could open doors. Her faith has given her this opportunity to use her English language ability to progress in life in Ireland she explains.

> The initial shock of trying to survive in an unfamiliar environment furthered by the challenge of attaining an understanding of language acquisition intensifies (Gilmartin, 2008) many learners are faced with the fear of the unknown. Moving to a new country miles away from what you know does pose a challenge. As Amal mentions in our dialogue,

> [when]I come first here. When I go doctor's or shop or anything? No, [I don't] speak English no. I want to start …here… right now I go [to the] doctor, myself. Yeah. Go shopping. Now I can? [get] what I need. When I can ask for help before shop, I can ask for help [now] but before [I] [do not] … speak English (Amal).

Amal has progressed and started to find her feet as she grasps command of the English language to enable a functioning life. She has the independence to now go places by herself with confidence and navigate her way through her Irish community.

Language learning is a lifelong process and should enable skills outside of the classroom and after the ESOL journey has finished (Gilmartin, 2008).

Since 2017 Amal, has engaged with ESOL and further learning, progressing from level 1 right up until level 3 today. She has persisted with the English language, wanting to improve for herself and her family to fully participate in her new environment. This demonstrates learner autonomy and "language proficiency are supporting one another mutually while also being integrated with each other" (Little, 2007, p. 15).

Amal's Level 3 journey is continuing as she completes it for a second time, showing her continuous commitment to her language learning journey. The commitment to learning English as an adult migrant or refugee (Waksman, 2018) is something that not everyone wants to give the time to do or has the time to do, among family life, health and trying to survive in a new country. For Amal, she was gaining a better understanding as she attended level 3 ESOL for a second time this is reaffirming what she has learned but also undertaking information missed from attending the initial level 3 class.

(Amal) "A little bit more. Yeah, I need more … "Because I need [to] help myself, and my son,". She mentions her experience of attending ESOL classes was "…, very, very, good" but this experience did differ from her native Egypt, where English was studied but as it was not a "big language" over their Arabic took precedence and remained dominate for Amal.

As she has remained committed to English language gain over the last number of years this can be evidently seen as she describes her experience of ESOL. Amal is benefitting from the authentic experience she is engaged in while learning the English language as she has to use this language each day to interact with her surroundings this too has developed her confidence (Bippis & Eslami, 2013). Her overall experience is positive but as further engagement is required from Amal this can add resentment to the overall learning of English and her journey.

Daina's story is also reflective of her ESOL colleagues above as she describes her reasons for engaging with ESOL classes and how her positive learner experience has helped her develop a life plan. "I think so because I'm coming back to work, I'm trying to go for better education" (Daina). With a better proficiency in the English language, it too can open doors to employment (NALA, 2021). Daina wants to progress within her career, previously she has worked in a local factory as she describes; Daina, "We come for money. So, in [those] times, they give me an opportunity to speak [English]. It's completely different from like a salary in ██████ ". As she describes that was only to aid her financial well-being and mix with Irish people to assist her with speaking and developing her English language ability. Her plans for the future have since evolved from her initial days in Ireland she describes in our conversation. As Daina is currently completing her ESOL course with plans of completing a leaving certificate that will enable her to get a spot in a PLC to further accomplish her desire to gain a job in the beauty industry. As she has been in Ireland for over a decade, she still feels her level of English is stopping her. This barrier she describes revolves around her confidence, in her language capabilities. Attending ESOL classes can then aid participation in other desired course areas to enable employment opportunities and increase confidence in English capabilities (NALA, 2021; Howard & Logan, 2012).

> Daina That's where I will see how I will be confident with myself about the English. [by completing the leaving certificate] Then probably, of course, I would like to go to ██████ because … [are] many courses like over there. Yeah. I'm not confident with myself and to go just yet and complete a hair or beauty course.

As Daina has a plan for the coming years that involves her overall learning journey and the plan of gaining a new career on the back of that education. To gain a place in a beauty or hair industry course, her confidence of speaking English is the main barrier, but she has developed

a plan to commit to education over the coming years and engage with ESOL and other course to gain competency in the English language.

As a learner's identity changes over time to become more positive, their confidence has led them to look into the future and other areas of their life that will enable progression (Tett & Maclachlan, 2007). An increase in self-confidence can be seen to stem from enhanced social and communicative abilities, developed through learning and working in Ireland and overall successful learning experiences that have occurred in a learner's life both now and prior to residing in Ireland (Tett & Maclachlan, 2007). Within the context of teaching, there is the need to go beyond mere survival English to obtain future desires with education and work and is required throughout the pedagogy of ESOL delivery (Ćatibušić et al., 2019). This can be reflected in the experiences of the participants above as Amal is repeating her level 3 to gain confidence and further language ability with Daina needing further language experience to become familiar with beauty or hair industry terminology.

As Daisy discusses her rationale for attending English classes, she wants to be able to do it by herself and bring back the independence that she once had while residing in her native country of China. She explains her motivations for attending ESOL classes below.

(Daisy) I think they are useful when you use English every day. Yeah. Everything like we [I] go to bank, doctors, by myself. So, I just wanted to do [it] by myself.  I think [for] my life, for my children, so I just wanted to learn more and more things, keep learning and in life here, we need English all the time. So, … speaking learning English, so you can get a normal life here. Because of everything I have to do [ I do] By myself.

Dörnyei (as cited in Phakiti et al., 2013) defines motivation as an individual's inner power to learn and become successful in what they do. Daisy comments that English is part of everything she interacts with in Ireland, from going to the bank, medical appointments or helping her family and children all part of "normal" life in Ireland. Her language

determination is stemming from both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. Continuing to keep

learning English to actively engage in Irish society and go about her daily life with ease.

Practising the English language outside of the classroom walls is essential to building a

confident language aptitude (SOLAS & etbi, 2018; Mallows, 2012). These reasons and

influences for Daisy wanting to progress with the English language are all supported by the

theoretical framework that Bronfenbrenner (1979) used to frame and guide this study.

 The areas mentioned from family to social support, health services and schools are all bi-

directional, and significant to one another. From the levels of the Microsystem through to the

Ecosystem all levels hold influence over Daisy's language learning development.

Inglis (2009) writes "power creates knowledge, understanding and ways of being" (p. 119);

the power exists within these individuals and this can be a great motivator for academic

success with the English language. Like her colleague Natasha, Daisy wants to actively

participate in her day and be independent as she builds her life in Ireland. The main function

of ESOL teaching at QQI Levels 3 & 4 is to facilitate the learner into speaking and active

listening skills so they can communicate successfully to function in work and society as they

build lives in Ireland (Telfer, 2014). But there is a strong need to facilitate lessons that just

cover functioning in Irish society as schedules and academic calendars all have a part to play

in the delivery of ESOL lessons. As these learners all have plans and further ambitions their

determination can be evidentially expressed but the content that is delivered by ESOL needs

to be more reflective of the entire sphere of the learner and not just to enable functionality in

Irish society. Daisy's statement has also strong links with the relevance of the curriculum

being taught and the theme of "Persistence & Time" within the learner's ESOL journey

(Comings, 2007; Crowther et al., 2010; McGivney, 2001; Waksman, 2018). Being competent

in the English language does equate to "Power" for the learners in this study and gives them

control of their own lives and families. These learners all share a common goal of wanting to

progress within education and career opportunities "the motivation to learn English "can be economic or something to do with work" (Waksman, 2018, p.25).

In Sahra's interview, she mirrors that of her colleagues as reasons why she has engaged with ESOL classes since 2018 and now is planning to move to further education science course.

(Sahra) it is helping me to understand English, and my experiences in Ireland. So, when I went to the first class in 2018. Yeah. Those like, were very scary.

When I go there, like, I got the confidence to speak in English. I know how to write in English and I'm reading English here too, but I didn't speak English before. But when I start ESOL, you understand the teacher, I got a lot, now I'm better.

Although in her native home of Somalia, Sahra had the ability to write and understand the English language, she had very limited speaking power until she started her classes with ESOL. The role of ESOL classes and learning is reshaping the identities of the students, as they make important contributions within their classroom and in Ireland (Crowther et al., 2010). Her plan is to engage in further education in a science discipline at QQI Level 5 stage. Like her fellow participant Daisy, Sahra mentions that English is a global language, another factor for developing her aptitude with the language.

(Sahra) The reason [ why I want to speak] that … English is an international language, and everyone needs [it] when they go on holiday or moving to another country? Especially as my parents speak some English, you have to speak English. Yeah, that motivation is [why]… I came here.

Sahra's experience has shaped her new identity she describes how her confidence has increased and plans to attend college in the near future.

All the five learners have strongly described their reasoning for engaging with the English

Language through attending ESOL classes and developing as part of their communities'

forming relationships and bonds. Their passion for education and self-improvement is clear in

the above findings and discussions with the participants. All their experiences are similar, but

many differences do present themselves. Some note the increase in self-confidence others

have discussed it has opened future educational and employment prospects as their

experience of ESOL has not only given them a voice but also a bright future. One common

denominator from their experiences of learning the English language is a requirement of

more than just survival English especially when learners are returning to repeat an ESOL

class for a second time some curriculum revival has to take place to ensure meaningful

learning. Although all five learners are unique and have all come from different countries and

continents with different academic backgrounds, these learners do possess some similarities

in the sense that they recognise "The Power of the English language" and where it can

possibly lead their lives.


## 4.4 Theme Two – "A Time and Place".

In this theme of "A time and place" I will discuss how the participants of this study take

the time to learn and actively engage with ESOL education. From the findings, I will then

explain that time is on their side they just are simply not getting enough of it when it comes

to the delivery of classes. This theme has been found relevant throughout the existing body of

literature (Crowther, et al., 2010; Comings, 2007; McGivney, 2004) and has strong

connections with learner persistence. Waksman (2018) discusses considerations around

"Persistence" or continued, intense study a common challenge for adults in ESOL programs

because of various institutional, situational, and dispositional factors (p. 3). All these issues

are part of everyday life for the learners of ESOL as they navigate their way in Irish society.

Amal illustrates her take on the English lessons and how she describes attending the QQI

Level 3 ESOL class and her continuous commitment and determination to develop her English Language ability.

> (Amal) I start [at] level one, level two, and level three. Since 2017 Yeah. She explains completing QQI Level three a second time. (Amal) So, the second time is a little bit. Yeah. I know more. A little bit more. She then goes on to note Yeah, I need more more. Because [it is] very difficult. I now [need to] start …again.

Amal has given the time and showed enthusiasm to engage with English language acquisition, she also attends other courses including a level 1 reading and writing in the same institute. Her determination and commitment can be evidentially seen. She wants to give her full-time commitment to progressing her language ability while aiming to be competently part of Irish society for herself and her family. Following on from that Sahra, Daina, Daisy and Natasha all echo the above thoughts on how long a class or term is. Sahra is the only learner engaging in a full-time programme along with English Support, but she feels it is not long enough her school day starts at 9.00 am – 2.30 pm she goes on to explain it could be longer. (Sahra) "Yeah, I think it's okay. I would like longer. Yeah, like four or five, yes. Because … [time goes] quickly when in the classroom". Sahra is the only participant that does not have children outside her other responsibilities, she is planning on going to college or university in the coming years and plans to complete a QQI Level 5 Biomedical Science. Therefore she explains she can solely focus on her education without life distractions. In opposition, some of the literature focusing on learner persistence and time (Comings, 2007; Crowther, et al., 2010) suggests students find difficulties engaging with adult education. The diverse nature of each adult learner in this research in terms of age, educational attainment, economic, social, and personal circumstances all result in various patterns of engagement with ESOL and learning in general (McGivney, 2004). This is individual, depending on the

learner and what they have to contend with in their lives. The "Time" and dedication can be evidently viewed and heard from the findings but is independent of each learner and their life. Daina's journey is explained, learning ESOL has been positive but filled with gaps, she feels some progress has been made with her language acquisition. While being exposed to the English language prior to living in Ireland most of her interactions with family, friends or colleagues remain in Latvian or Russian language. In light of the findings, she discusses the lack of time given to complete a course and the need for a longer absorption phase to understand a language that is unfamiliar and unrehearsed daily. Due to the lack of time to complete an ESOL course, she demonstrates her full potential and desired English language ability are hard to reach. In further or adult education courses ESOL classes normally operate for a period or semester coving 12 – 16 weeks. This is often due to limited teacher support, lack of funding in a particular area, centre room availability (SOLAS & etbi, 2018).          .
When Daina speaks about her progression with the English language as she engages with level 3 ESOL for a second time to obtain certification her thoughts are expressed within the theme "A Time and Place". She feels her aptitude for the English language is still the same as it was before she stopped attending level 3 last year. One class per week with little practice in between can add to the length of time taken to complete an ESOL course.

(Daina) More the same? Because two hours is nothing it's not enough. Two hours one day a week. And then one week is hard [to remember] from the next week because a lot of things happen between one week to the next.

Daina has been attending the level 3 ESOL class for the second time as she had to withdraw due to covid-19 in the academic year 2021. She has since come back to re-engage with QQI level 3 to obtain her certification. Persistence can be challenged by outside forces from, situational, or life events, if the intuitional providers come from a point of understanding it can be met with the achievement of short-term term or specific learning goals that can still be

achieved. Natasha describes how she is repeating her English to gain certification at QQI level 4 classes after a break in attendance from September 2021.

> (Natasha) I've missed seven classes. Yes. Well, maybe less. I have missed some of the Christmas time. I couldn't finish my portfolio. So I decided to do it, do it. Repeat … To start from [the] beginning and do it properly?

Natasha then goes on to discuss how she would like more classes of English to develop her speaking ability. "Three hours? I would like more classes". (Natasha)

Attendance from the learner may have been irregular or stopped for a time but this is just the demands of life, reengaging with the ESOL classes is what is important after a hiatus. Corresponding to what Crowther et al. (2010) suggest "inconsistent does necessarily mean non-persistent" (p. 3). If a learner has set unrealistic expectations on the length of time it takes to learn or progress within the English language it can mean training or employment goals are not obtained as quickly as they perceived becoming frustrated.

> Gilmartin (2008) explains the length of time needed to learn obviously depends on the starting level, the mother tongue, and previous language learning experience and literacy levels, in addition to factors such as the learner's own beliefs and feelings about learning English (p. 101).

> Learning targets for English language achievement are a topic that should be discussed when a learner starts an ESOL class. These should be aligned individually with the learner and teacher understanding them. Targets that could be discussed include the length of time language support will be required and how each learner has different abilities, individual learning goals and how reflective intervention on what has been learnt and how this was uncovered (Little, 2007). The participants in this study all explain how they continuously dedicate time each week to complete their ESOL course and gain a better aptitude for the English language. In the SOLAS and etbi (2018) report the increased demand for ESOL

classes was discussed with the provision of ESOL classes being increased by several providers across Ireland. Furthermore, the request for more intensive tuition has been welcome by learners at lower levels (SOLAS and etbi, 2018) but this does not match the increased flow of migrants into Ireland with the envisaged number of ESOL learners in the year 2019 being at over 17000 (NALA, 2020b). As the Irish government have estimated Ireland has taken 20,000 refugees fleeing from war in Ukraine the number of learners attending English provision is going to rise even further than the estimated figures for 2019 (Government of Ireland, 2022). On the 10th December 2021 (International Human Rights Day) the Irish government, the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, SOLAS and the ETBs of Ireland launched a new initiative for implementing new guidelines, toolkit and resources for learning and teaching within the English language and division of ESOL. This new initiative is intended to help language organisations, tutors, literacy departments and migrant learners to improve their English language skills and abilities as they start a new life in Ireland.

## 4.5 Theme Three: "You learn I learn"

The theme "You learn I learn" discusses the effectiveness of different learner strategies implemented in the ESOL classroom but also independently used by the students. This theme centres on the learners' stories of collaborative, independent and active learning strategies used by all the learners of ESOL. While helping others within their class and aiding themselves in the process of language learning in their daily life. All five learners in this study presented and explained different learning techniques that they found assisted them with their command of the English language. The area of English grammar acquisition was mirrored across the five participants as being the most difficult to grasp but this group are finding ways to overcome it. In English language education, effective learning takes place

when a student-centred approach is used within the environment (Little, 2007). This approach

of collaborative strategies is only possible when the teacher facilitates these strategies within

language learning. Sahra explains her experience of assisting a novice learners as they

become the "capable peer" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Attending the level 3 class for two years

permitted her to become more competent.

> (Sahra) but the next year, like I was helping my classmate… because every year come[s] a
>
> new student…My classmates would be [the] one… I was helping them… when you are
>
> like, a foreigner you will understand the [broken] English, I understand her and I can help
>
> her.

As Sahra took on the expert learner role she helped her fellow student understand the task

they were completing she put herself in her shoes to how she felt the year previous describing

herself as an "outsider" in doing so she is also learning. This use of the ZPD "as an activity to

enhance language acquisition and learning, mediation would increase the effectiveness of

ZPD" (Khaliliaqdam, 2014). This supplying of knowledge to the novice ESOL student will

enable her to gain confidence and move to their "potential developmental level"

(Khaliliaqdam, 2014, p. 891). The students display higher levels of cognitive achievement

than they would if they worked independently, this supportive dialogue is beneficial whether

it be teacher or peer-led (Bruner, 1979). In contrast, if students are equipped with the skills to

learn autonomously, English language acquisition can be very effective as displayed in the

findings as the students have adapted to Irish cultures outside of the classroom. In recent

years as an adult, pedagogies have developed to a more student-centred method, adopting a

social constructivist approach (Vygotsky, 1978; Dewey, 1938) which favours active group

participation and peer interactions among classes. Findings from the interviews show, that

working in groups or pairs can add benefit not only to language capacity but also to cultural

knowledge too.

But I learned many things about Ireland, you know. There are many different countries

people in the class. Different cultures like what we are doing in Latvia, what we are doing,

what they are doing in … Pakistan, you know many different countries [in] people's …

class. (Daina)

Culturally responsive teaching defined by Gay (2001) "uses cultural characteristics,

experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching" (p.106).

To be an active culturally responsive teacher within the field of language, this strategy must

be encouraged and applied by the educators themselves and implemented by policymakers

and departments of education. As Gay, (2001) writes "Teachers need to acquire a knowledge

base about ethnic and cultural diversity and convert it into culturally responsive curriculum

designs and instructional strategies" (p. 108).

Natasha also expressed her thoughts on group learning activities and the added benefit she

retains.

(Natasha) I love … the discussions [best]. The most interesting [when] the teacher has

some sort of games when we ask each other questions. Then we like we make groups. And

then we ask each other, and we give answers to each other. Then the teacher say[s], Okay,

do you remember what, what you have asked Natasha and what she actually replied, and

then the girl she has to say, Yes, I have asked her about this. And she said this, and we're

like, wow, how do you remember what she said? So that's kind of this is my favourite

game.

This type of learning also gives recognition to inclusive teaching methods, facilitating all

learners to fully participate in their learning environment to achieve their full potential.

 (Quirke & McCarthy, 2020) note "inclusive pedagogy is a pedagogical response to

individual differences among learners" as Natasha describes this type of learning English

allows for all of the ESOL class to get involved in both cognitive and verbal learning

(Natasha) "So, you, you learn … learn English, and you learn more about people. And more about because there might be lots of questions about cultures, different country cultures, It's amazing". This type of classroom interaction displayed enables the teacher to determine what ethnically diverse students know and can do and assists educators in uncovering what the ESOL learners are capable of knowing and doing through open communication practice (Gay, 2001). Emerging on from culturally responsive teaching and how it is displayed in an ESOL classroom, independent learning will be shown in the next section as it was uncovered in the findings and discussions.

Independent language learning happens every day, inside and outside classroom life as Daisy describes during our meeting. During our conversation, it is clear to see she makes a conscious effort to engage with Irish culture and correspondence while going about her day or on her way to work in the local Chinese Restaurant. This deliberate engagement happens through the interaction with Irish radio while in the car or digesting RTE news on her mobile application, adapting to Irish culture not only for her language acquisition but also for social gain. The OECD (2008) findings from the Economic Survey of Ireland revealed the impact of migration by stating "knowing the language is crucial for successful integration… key to social cohesion, active participation in society and key to understanding and accepting national culture" (p. 99). Daisy is successfully finding her way with the English language, discovering new words and digesting written articles on the RTE new app, increases cognitive language ability but also helps keep up to date with what is happening within Irish society and the world.

I need to drive into work about 10 minutes and always listening to Newstalk, thing is I

don't understand what are some words that used.

So yes, see, I can. I can read Yes, no problem. But Pronunciation? It's hard. To get one hundred per cent. And listen, maybe no problem, sometimes I don't know how to reply. It's not one hundred per cent right (Daisy)

From all the participants of this study, it is apparent that all the learners do make an intentional effort to take charge of their own learning (Little, 2007).

Learning a new language does come with its own set of problems it is important to acknowledge. Migrant learners may feel they are far removed from social and cultural customs that they have become accustomed to in their country of origin. This could also be fuelled by situational barriers and added stresses of limited accommodation access, financial worries or even hunger deprivation (NWT Literacy Council, 2013).  By integrating with the Irish society Daisy is helping her own language learning journey and continuing autonomous learning outside the classroom. Integration implies being able to participate as and how the person (learner) wants, in all elements of society without resigning from their own cultural identity (Strang & Ager 2010; Watt, 1999).

Within this theme of "You learn I learn", technology has its place, expressed by all of the learners how they actively use their mobile phones to access language translation while in the classroom, further promoting independent learning.  All the participants in this research have expressed the added benefit of using technology within their classroom and home learning environment, the chosen software mentioned by all five participants is Google Translate. Two of the learners used google translate while the interviews took place, they showed me how they used it and then the benefits of using it during class. Daisy describes how she uses it to translate words from Chinese to English and conversely. Daisy "I use Google sometimes we have to translate in class, I put something in Chinese here it [and it] put[s] [it] into Chinese". As Daisy gave me a walkthrough on how she uses the translate technology this aids learner autonomy and a sense of achievement on the part of the learners.

Natasha" discusses her take on using Google translate "translator in Google, is Awesome".

All the learners of this study expressed the positives of their tutor encouraging the use of

using their mobile to access the translation app in class. Implementing technology across the

area of language teaching can only have a positive outcome for the students. "Computer

technology is regarded by a lot of teachers to be a significant part of providing a high-quality

education" (Ahmadi, 2018, p.116), it provides unlimited options for language learners to

engage with online word games and cultural activities delivered during class time.

The implementation of the Digital Strategy for Schools was introduced in April 2022 by the

Department of Education to ensure students from primary to higher education have ample

opportunity to benefit from technology in their learning (Department of Education, 2022).

Amal notes on using technology in the classroom and outside of the classroom "Yes. Every

time all the time". Outside of the classroom to help her understand letters she has received

from her son's school, the college or hospital. Amal "When I pick up a letter from school or

hospital. I need for the letter? Yes, I know this is this but this I don't know letters. Like little

words like them". The translation technology helps Amal to navigate her way in life, from

being able to find meaning in important documents received to letters from her son's school.

Enabling her to practically function and participate in the Irish society, "Language skills are

developed naturally through a process of learning by doing" (Gilmartin, 2008, p. 100).

Sahra discusses how she helps a fellow English learner during the start of her ESOL journey.

> In the first year I was going to, the ESOL, I can't understand the teacher and the next like I
>
> am understanding the teachers and listening to[o] okay. Then like I was helping my
>
> classmate because every year … a new student come[s] (Sahra)

Sahra is describing how she had a difficult journey starting with the English language but

the following year this then changed she started to grasp the language further. She helped a fellow classmate that was in her position one day. "My English is not better like, but I understand her, and I can tell her, I felt like her one day" (Sahra)

The conscious ability of Sahra to engage with the new learner and assist them as she too felt like them the year previous (Little, 2007). This actively helps Sahra in the active learning process of English. Collaborative learning can be very useful in the development of language learning pedagogy and is widely used in higher education (Burress & Peters, 2015). Knowledge can be constructed, decoded, or reformed during a language learning experience. As the students of ESOL classes have all experienced education in their native lands, these foundational learning experiences have brought them back to the classroom. While supporting them and taking them to the forefront of learning, and the further development of language acquisition through collaborative techniques. In the next Chapter 5 a further discussion will appear on the answering of the questions aligned with the above findings.

**4.6 Conclusion**

To conclude this chapter presented the findings and discussion held by the five learners. Their individual stories of educational experience were told, empowering their voices to be heard. These stories were combined to create relevant themes and analysed upon creation. These three themes uncovered were "A Language of Power" "A Time and Place" and "You Learn I Learn". These themes revealed narratives about the learners of ESOL classes and their educational experience with the English language, challenges they encounter both in Ireland and prior to living here and finally their plans for a "bright" future. Overall, five learners displayed determination and passion throughout their stories as they continue with learning and come to understand the significant "Power of Education".

The final chapter will provide further evidence for the findings and discussion in light of this research dissertation.

**Chapter 5: Conclusion**

**5.1 Introduction**

This chapter concludes this exploration to uncover the experiences of students attending ESOL classes and permitting their voices to be heard through this narrative discovery. Clandinin and Connolly (1990) clarify "Voice suggests relationship: the individual's relationships to the meaning of her/his experience and hence, to language, and the individual's relationship to the other since understanding is a social process" (p. 4). Giving voice to the students uncovers diverse experiences and their linguistic identity through the English language.

The findings of this study on the student's ESOL learning journey and how it is filled with highs and lows along the way. The research examined the student's experience as they engaged with ESOL education at either a QQI Level 3 or 4 level. The five participants enlisted during this research described a variety of experiences they held and developing their English language ability. Some of these experiences are similar, but some expose the individuality of each learner's story and their place within this study. This research examined challenges that the students have and continue to encounter as they live in Ireland. These students have displayed how they overcome these obstacles as they simultaneously acquire English language competence.

**Aim:**

To discover the experiential learning journey of a student attending ESOL classes as they develop their English language ability.

**Objectives:**

- To uncover the learner's motivations for joining ESOL classes and returning to education as an adult in Ireland.

- To investigate key challenges that the learners encounter while attending ESOL classes and residing in Irish society.

- To explore the student's future plans with learning, education and work.

- To enable the learners to showcase the approaches they apply to learn English both inside and outside the classroom.

**5.2 Response to the research questions**

**Research Question 1:** What are the educational experiences of students attending ESOL classes in a further education college in Ireland?

To answer this question about learner experiences it was necessary to ask multiple questions to gain a panoramic answer from each participant (Appendix I). Some of the questions included subjects on motivation, confidence, and future plans. Motivation is a complex phenomenon that involves a wide range of emotional and attitudinal factors (Little, 2000), as displayed by all the learners in this study. Each learner has their own personal reason for engaging with ESOL learning and this can be seen in Chapter 4 findings. From the finding and discussion chapter, it was discovered that the group of five learners all attend ESOL classes for progression reasons, whether intrinsic or extrinsic motivators. Each of the participants in this narrative exploration has expressed their attitudes, motivations, and beliefs for engaging and continuing with ESOL education (Little, 2007).

These findings are supportive of the ecological systems theoretical framework used in this study by Bronfenbrenner (1979) as they show that all levels of the ecosystem affect the learner's linguistic ability. Not all levels concurrently affect one another but different life

stages come into play. It was discovered this group of learners were engaging with ESOL classes at level 1 or 2 or were competent enough in the English language to begin at a level 3 position with their English language acquisition. The authentic English language learning experience was noted among the participants, this has facilitated a boost in the learner's self-confidence both in and out of the classroom environment. They now can navigate their lives independently in Ireland while also building upon their new learner identity. These positive experiences have stemmed from a strong dedication to progress in Ireland in education and English language acquisition and employment prospects. The findings are linked with previous literature found (Bippis & Eslami, 2013; Crowther, et al., 2010; Tett & Maclachlan, 2007). All of these experiences held from attending ESOL classes have assisted learners in creating a future in Ireland that involved further education or professional employment.

Verbal communication and collaborative learning techniques were favourable among all the participants, and this established a positive learner experience while developing their English language ability. The participants not only believed it to be the best way to engage with the English language and develop the skills it also helped them support their individual and family learning needs outside of the classroom.

In class "our teacher every day she starts with introducing ourselves… And each of us …every time we have to introduce and talk about us ourselves. (Natasha)

They also discussed the verbal games that were part of the language learning process within the ESOL classes enabling confidence in speaking.  "And the teacher has some sort of games when we ask each other questions" … then we ask each other, and we give answers to each other" (Natasha). The students display higher levels of cognitive achievement during this question-answer session each class. In language, learning scaffolding is especially important "as negotiation of meaning and linguistic assistance are crucial to student's language development" (Kayi-Aydar, 2013, p. 324). The positive learner experience was also

discussed in using peer-led collaboration is also evident in the findings as Sahra and Daina both display these characteristics to enable a novice learner as they become the "capable peer" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Both students displayed how they used their language ability to help the student to progress with their language journey. Research from Bhooth et al. (2013) describes that enabling the learner to work effectively in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) with group or peer work, plays an important role in the production of language accomplishment especially when it is peer-led as displayed in the findings. Findings from this study revealed that all the learners had gained confidence when speaking in English and developed their abilities since starting ESOL classes. (Sahra) "so when was first in class in 2018…Those like, [were] very scary, when I go there now… I got the confidence to speak in English. I know…what is, right [to say]. Amal felt "strong" as her determination with English language classes paid off. Two learners however felt that they needed further progression to gain further confidence in speaking to progress onto further levels of education or professional employment and this can be linked to the theme "A time and place" as discussed below. If was found that more than survival English level of curriculum is required especially if a learner is repeating a class, the content has to match the learner's desire to improve and sit with the level they are competent in. All learners displayed progression goals in both education and employment this has to align with curriculum delivery.

The findings show that these students all possessed a strong desire to act independently in their communities as they would have previously in their native lands. Their overall experiences with ESOL classes are positive but this is only the start of their journey of English language competency as they continue with further and higher education and also employment opportunities. The need for improvement for all of these learners stems from being able to provide for their children and family and ensure they are safely residing in Ireland.

Although the findings reported represent a small sample of learners attending ESOL classes these five learners have delivered a positive indication of their experiences of learning as they navigate their way through life in Ireland. Their requirement for English language accomplishment is the backing for their strong motivation to become independent in Ireland.

**Research Question 2:** What are the key challenges that the learners of ESOL encounter while attending English language classes?

Firstly, with regards to this question, some of the challenges stemmed from the learner experiences answered in question 1. Persistence is defined by Waksman (2018) as the "continued or intense study" (p.2), it is noted that triggers of learner persistence or lack thereof are stemming from situational, attitudinal, or institutional factors. The findings from the analysis show that attendance is high on the priorities of this group of five learners which is in contrast with previous research in relation to persistence and time (Comings, 2007; Crowther et al., 2010; McGivney, 2004; NWT Literacy Council, 2013). This persistence is aligned with their goals of progression in education and employment in the future.

This can be further linked to theme 2 "A time and place" how the learners were all in agreement that further hours of class were required for their confidence and language acquisition to increase. Findings from this theme suggest the ESOL classes may need to be adapted in terms of scheduling and the interest of the students as they are determined to progress. Four of the learners expressed the need for more hours of class to achieve language fulfilment and progress with their lives.

(Daina) "because two hours is nothing. It's not enough, two hours one day a week".

As these group of students have their minds firmly set on progression routes with education and employment, they are happy and want to attend more classes. This group of students can be seen to be an exception to much of the discussed literature where barriers for students

included situational or attitudinal (Comings, 2007; Crowther et al., 2010; Little, 2000; McGivney, 2004; NWT Literacy Council, 2013).

The prior learning experiences of students studying the English language do differ from what they experience while living and studying in Ireland today. All the learners were exposed marginally to the English language prior to studying it in Ireland. Some students, studied English in primary education but never verbally spoke it outside of the classroom they returned to their mother tongue to socially interact with family, friends, and their society others only were familiar with some terms and had to develop the language when they arrived in Ireland. Overall, the findings present a positive view of the learner's experience with attending ESOL and learning the English language in Ireland. Most importantly, participants confirmed they are gaining confidence in themselves and in speaking the English language. All these learners showed strong motivation to succeed and progress within the country of Ireland, each learner displayed their own individual goals and ambitions over the coming years. This can be aligned with persistence as the students are concerned with doing well and progressing in Ireland, they want more classes to attend. Contradictory the students expressed cultural differences in learning English in their native countries this had no contrasting advantage to their English language learning ability here. Four of the five students expressed an interest in education in their native homelands, but they simultaneously enjoyed education here also. These findings related to the challenges encountered have all shown that integrating in Ireland is a two-way process to the extent they take part in ESOL engagement and with society on a hole without having to relinquish their own cultural identity. Ultimately a common goal between all five learners is their distinct desire to improve their English language capabilities. All these learners possess the determination and drive to gain a high standard of English language attainment. English Language provision is not the

definitive answer to the challenges described by the learners, but it can significantly improve their overall economic welfare and the quality of life they lead.

## 5.3 Implications for Practice

This study gave voice and illuminated the learners attending ESOL classes and their stories of experience as they learn and live in Ireland. Narrative inquiry was achieved through uncovering rich experiences from the learners. This narrative inquiry permitted the author to be the interpreter of the learner's story and it was important it was completed with justice (Riessman, 2005). There are numerous books, reports, journals, and diaries on the writing of ESOL much discuss curriculum, learning strategies, and culture (Bunning, 2016; Crowther et al., 2010; Comings, 2007; Gilmartin, 2008; Jack-Malik & Kuhnke, 2020; Little, 2007; Waksman, 2018) but very few permit the student voice to be distributed into the literature, especially in the context of Irish education (Ćatibušić et al., 2019).
In the last number of years, writings and reports have increased in ESOL provision with writings from NALA, SOLAS and ETBI. All these collectively provided excellent teaching, training, and course delivery to migrant learners.

As with most educational and social science research, there are implications for policy and practice. Within this study the implications helped withing my own learning, at a personal and professional level. Uncovering the stories of learners of ESOL classes and all that they have completed before living in Ireland, to the journey that they now embark on as they create a new life here in Ireland. The findings inform practice not only for educators of ESOL but, literacy organisers and policy makers, showcasing that no two learners are alike, and that flexibility is required in terms of lesson delivery and implementation of ESOL classes. A one size fits all approach does not work and should not be implemented. As Irelands migrant population increases over the coming years it is envisaged that new policy and lesson reform

will help the students of ESOL pave their way in Irish society. From reviewing the literature and hearing the first-hand experiences of students how they all feel "time" of lesson delivery is not adequate for learners to advance at a quick pace. If more classes are available this could further assist with lesson retention and assist learners to reaching their goals and ambitions quicker. Finally, this research has brought about a critical reflection of my future practice as an educator and student and helped me to understand my own educational values and beliefs.

This study was captured and delivered by a novice researcher, ensuring care and attention was given to the choice of methodology, theoretical framework, analysis, findings, and questions that were posed to the participants, all of these ensure a credible and trustworthy research exploration. The student's experiences and challenges were uncovered, delving into both their academic and individual experiences with ESOL provision and learning.

## 5.4 Further Research and Recommendations

This narrative research has given voice to the cohort of students that are often seen and not heard not only does this appear in educational research but the sphere of Irish society.
This study, however, represents a small number of learners and by no means represents the experiences of learners attending ESOL classes on a national level. ESOL education has been studied in various settings and circumstances over the decades as provision increases each year. As Ireland now enters a new 10-year literacy, numeracy and digital literacy strategy can this be the start of further research and educational classes across the island? As Ireland is vastly becoming a multicultural nation it is time for further implementation for language providers and educational facilities to engage and further educate these learners. A change in the curriculum was voiced by the learners repeating the level 3 ESOL module they need to do more than function in society to achieve their academic and professional goals. By creating a

curriculum that is student centred and adapted accordingly to learners that sit in front of

ESOL, and by not permitting a one size fits all approach to deliver.

Ireland's future looks bright, ETBs, NALA and SOLAS and the Department of Education

have all worked diligently to rebuild and continue to do so in Ireland's need for ESOL

provision. Increasing the intensity of English language support provided to native speakers of

other languages and the overall number of learners receiving this support from 12,000 to

20,000 over the first half of the strategy's lifetime (Government of Ireland, 2021, p. 56). This

will enable each learner to have the necessary skills to fully engage and realise their full

potential to complete further education or employment.


**5.5 Limitation of the study**

   This study aimed to uncover and understand the experiences of the student as they attend

ESOL classes, permitting their voices to be heard to illuminate their life and learning journey.

It the importance for me for the research to become the vehicle for the student's journey,

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) "the place and voice of the researcher and teacher come less

defined by role" (p. 10).  To achieve this aim, it was envisaged that narrative inquiry would

be deemed the best fit for this study. The option for a phenomenological study was also

discussed and uncovered but as I did not want to reinforce the likeness or similarities of each

participant's journey it was deemed that the narrative approach permitted the overall aim in a

better light.

   The narrative approach allowed for in-depth exploration of the learner's experience and

enabled a small sample of five learners to obtain rich – free-ranging discourse (Farrow et al.,

2020). The small sample size did also pose a question to gain an insight into the lives of

students attending ESOL classes, regarding narrative inquiry a small sample and in-depth

questioning permit this approach. But as the questions covered five stages of the interview

questions following this outline: Starting Out; The Insititute; English Language/Indpedenance; Future Plans and Portfolio/Classwork.  All the learners in this cohort are of the female demographic which does put a gender imbalance. While the group were chosen for reasons not related to gender, it may have played a part in some of the learner's answers about family and supporting their children. Four of the learners were mothers this does also mean they have families to think of and their learning goals as well as their individual ambitions. I do acknowledge my own bias about working within the further educational institute. To eliminate these factors meetings with my college peers and a critical friend enabled a voice of reason, to ensure these were dampened down and not reflected through the study. There is also the nature of the power in my relationship with the students, this was eliminated as best possible. Out of the five participants, only one student was previously known to me. This did not reflect the overall process as I believe each interview was carried out with the same attention, care and active listening ear as the next. The students were informed throughout the entire process of their right to withdraw from the study without obligation. Within the plain language statement and video sent to students, it was mentioned throughout that if learners have previously been taught by the researcher, they were under no duty to commit to being part of the study and could opt out of taking part at any stage of the process.

## 5.6 Conclusion

This narrative inquiry uncovered the learning experiences of students that attended QQI level 3 or level 4 ESOL classes. These experiences focused on their education, residing in Ireland and their experiences of living here and attending education while navigating through life. Within this approach, open-ended and semi-structured interview questions were posed to the learners. These students shared their stories with me, and this was then organised to create

themes to achieve an overall outcome of permitting voice to their organic story. These stories were thematically analysed and discussed in Chapter 4. Although barriers and challenges were addressed it is important to note that uncovering the learner's experiences, and individual's story was of utmost significance to this area in research and to inform professional practice and organisation policy and procedures in line with ESOL education. As educators, it is important to remember the other elements of life that learners encounter while attending education ESOL language classes. This research will create pathways for further research in language learning, showcasing how the learning experience can change lives and the significant "Power of Education".

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# Appendices

## Appendix I: Interview Schedule:

### 1: Starting out

- Why are you learning English? /What motivates you to learn the English language? (family children education)
- Can you tell me about your experiences of attending ESOL/Business Eng/Intercultural Awareness classes?
- Tell me what works for you when learning English (discussions / written work/groups/pairs male/female)
- How has your journey of learning the English languages changed or developed since you started ESOL classes (shone a light on possibilities for the future)?
- What problems have you faced/overcome since you started learning the English language?
- Tell me about a time you have ever felt **excluded/included** from something due to your English knowledge?
- What is the difference between learning education in Ireland and in your native country? Educational experience in your native country and how it is different from Ireland.
- Could you describe your learning experience before you came to Ireland (primary and secondary education /degree college?
- Are your skills or qualifications recognised in Ireland?
- What was your job in your native country?

### 2: The Institute

- When did your ESOL class start and when does it finish?
- How many hours per week do you have classes?
- What is working well for you in ESOL classes? (learning material)
- How is your institute supporting your learning journey? (What could they do to improve if anything)
- Tell me about the positive support you have made to your ESOL class. How did that make you feel?
- Did you have a change from online to physical classroom learning (was it difficult to learn in that environment of online) change
- Do you find it difficult to attend English classes (juggle home life/family and if so, what are the reasons (family life, finances, childcare or institute)
- Do you think it is easy to participate in classes and the institution as a whole?
- Do you think the course content is relevant to your life in Ireland. Yes / No give examples.
- Is your institute recognising your learning journey and the length of time it takes or do you feel rushed?
- Can you describe the positive and the negative aspects of your learning journey?
- What advice would you give a learner that is starting to learn the English language through ESOL class.

## 3. The English Language / Independence

- Do you speak English every day?
- Have you found English a difficult language to learn?
- What is the most difficult thing about learning English?
- Would you say you are more confident in speaking English than before you came to English/ESOL classes?
- How did it affect you when you started to learn English?
- Do you ever feel misunderstood? Explain
- How often do you practice your English and what is your favourite way to practice your English?
- Do you use technology to help you understand English? If yes, what do you use?
- Do you find it easy to access employment/health services/education/financial etc is it easy for you to access them?
- Why do you want to learn/improve your English ability? (Progress in work, education, family, services)
- Have you found learning English has improved your ability to mix in your community?
- Do you feel part of your neighbourhood / Irish community/ Irish friends  (YES /NO) Why?
- Do you have children in the Irish school system? What is your experience of dealing with a school in Ireland?

## 4. Future Plans

- What are your plans when the course is finished? (Further/Higher Ed/Work)
- If you could imagine the ideal further educational college learning experience, what would it feel like can you describe it for me?
- How has learning or improving your English helped in your everyday life.
- What are your learning plans for the future?
- What would you like to achieve?

## 5. Portfolio Questions (Artefact/ Portfolio that represents your journey with learning).

- Why is this piece of work important to you?
- Why have you chosen this piece to demonstrate your learning?
- How has your classwork written or oral changed since you started the classes?
- Which piece are you most proud of?
- What has been the most meaningful thing you have learned?
- What do you find the best tool to assess your learning (portfolio, writing, oral conversations)

**Appendix II: Information: Email:**

Hi learner, my name is Majella Burns I am currently working within your college of study in BTEI as a Tutor. Some of you may already know me from working here over the past number of years or may have been a student in some of my classes. I am currently attending education myself and completing a master's in education at the National College of Ireland.

As part of my master's research, I am exploring **students' experiences of those attending ESOL classes**, and I am looking for students who attend ESOL classes to help me with this study.

If you're interested in finding out more, please see the information sheet below, the presentation slides or the video attached.

You are welcome to discuss the details of this study with your tutor or contact me if you have any questions, I am also available at my email address x19152370@student.ncirl.ie or by WhatsApp at █████████

If you are happy to consent to take part in this project, let me know.

Kind regards,

Majella Burns.

**Appendix III: Project Consent and Information Sheet for Participants**

**Participant Research Project Information Sheet (Plain Language Statement).**

**If you are interested in taking part, please read the information below or email me on the email address given above.**

1.      **Research Study Title:**

The voices of ESOL: A narrative discovery of "what the learning experiences of students attending ESOL classes in a further education college in the North East of Ireland"?

2.      **Why I am doing this research.**

It is very important that further and higher education teachers understand the experience of students attending ESOL classes. Ireland today is a multicultural society and with the number of students attending ESOL classes, it is of great importance to hear to voices of those students and their learning experience. There are also limited studies of students' attending ESOL and their experience in further education in Ireland. I am also interested in hearing about the intended learning journey with the English language and your plans for the future.

3.      **What will be explored.**

The research project focused on students and their experience with ESOL classes learning the English language in Ireland. Together we will look at your portfolio of works and you will use this to describe what you have learned and your plan for future study and how your overall learning experience was while attending ESOL.

4.      **Your role in this study.**

If you wish to take part in this study research.

- There will be one meeting which will take about 40 minutes to 1-hour maximum.  I will ask you questions about your overall experience with attending and learning English classes, the institute, and the work you have completed in the class relevant to your life in Ireland.
- You are asked to bring your portfolio or an artefact that signifies your learning journey with the English Language this could include (a job application, a Letter to your homeland or an image.
- Our conversations will be recorded, and I will type our conversation after our meeting, and this will be shared with you it is a chance to review the questions and clarify any answers.

5. **Participant Consent – please complete the following by ticking ✓ the Yes or No box depending on your answer.**

| Question | Yes | No |
|---|---|---|
| I have read and understood the information sheet attached. | | |
| I know what the research project is about and how I am of benefit to this study? | | |
| Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study? | | |
| I understand that my name or personal details about me will not be used in this study, a fake name will be used. All efforts will be completed to make your identity anonymous in this study. | | |
| I understand what I have to do if I take part in this study. There will be 1 meeting in total with consent from you around the usage if any artefacts from your portfolio will be added to the final research study. | | |
| Do you agree to the meeting being audio recorded? | | |
| I am happy to take part in this project I know that I can refuse/withdraw from the study at any time. | | |
| I understand that the findings may be published in Journals and in the NCI library. | | |
| I understand that I can ask questions at any time during the study. | | |
| As the researcher it is my role to safeguard students within this study, please confirm that if you are aware the college provides extra student supports should you wish to avail of them. | | |

**6.** **Arrangements to protect the confidentiality of data**

Every effort will be made to respect your anonymity. The data collected will be analysed by the researcher (Majella Burns) alone and no one else will have access to or view this information.

Participants' actual names will be protected, and fake names will be used if direct references are required.

Interview recordings and transcripts will be stored on the personal PC of the researcher "Majella Burns" this will be protected by a password and is only accessed by the researcher it will be then uploaded to the NCI cloud storage.

**7.** **Signature**

I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researcher and should I have questions in the future I will discuss them with Majella Burns.

I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project.

Participant's Signature: _____

Name in Block Capitals: _____

Date:_____

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. If you do wish to take part, you can change your mind and leave the study at any time. If you want to find out more information about the project or have any questions you can email me at x19152370@student.ncirl.ie  or contact me on 0878961373.

Thank you for taking the time you read about my topic of research,

Kind regards,
Majella Burns

**Appendix IV: PowerPoint presentation to accompany video.**

3



4

**Appendix V:  Student Artefacts**
Natasha's letter

My mysterious mirror.

It was before Christmas, when I got myself a present.
For long time I was looking for a mirror in my living room to place it on top of the chimney.
Eventually one day I stept in another antique store and suddenly saw a beautiful mirror.
Honestly I had a very weird and strange feeling about that mirror, like the mirror founded me and called me to that store. I couldn't stop myself for not buying that mirror.
I will never forget that night as long a I live. When I had woked up that night, several times in shak from a very loud slap on the tile flores.
It was the loud sound of banging thing on the floor.
I jumped out of the bed, going around the house and looking for what was going on, and surprisingly and absolutely horrified I noticed that everything was still. I got more horrified when I asked my husband if he did hear the loud noise and he responded negatively. So in my mind was: "-The Mirror!" "
The mysterious mirror!

I went back, down to the mirror and spoke with it.

I said to the mirror that if it will hapened again, I will bring it back to the store in the morning, so we better be friends.

⊕ Since then, we are best friends and my beautiful, mistrious mirror is still decorating my beautiful, cosy, warm house.

**Daisy's Class Introduction**

## Let me introduce myself

- Hi, my name's ...███████...........................
- I'm from ........*china*..................... (country)
- I live in .......*Drogheda*.................. (city/town)
- My birthday is on ....███████...............
- I'm a .....*Cashier* *in Take away shop.*......... (job)
- There are ... people in my family.
- My hobby/hobbies is/are ....... *shopping* ~~badminton~~ ...... *watch T.V.* *Reading.*
- My favourite sport is .........*badminton*.......................
- In my free time, I also like ......*cooking*...................................
- I don't like .......*dog*............................................
- My favourite food is .......*seafood*........................
- My favourite drink is ........*mango Juice*..............
- The most beautiful place in my country is ......*great wall*............
- I am currently studying English because .....*I want improke English.*

| Jobs | | |
|---|---|---|
| teacher | policeman | doctor |
| nurse | builder | architect |
| engineer | social worker | |
| secretary | businessman | shop assistant |
| manager | firefighter | shopkeeper |
| cleaner | postman | waiter/waitress |
| housewife | househusband | |
| retired | unemployed | |

**Hobbies - Free time activities**
- reading, painting, drawing
- going out with friends
- surfing the Internet
- clubbing
- going to the cinema
- playing with my dog
- going to the park/beach/...
- listening to music
- shopping, singing, dancing
- travelling, camping, hiking
- knitting, cooking

1

## Amal's Restaurant Review

### A restaurant review

https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/skills/writing/intermediate-b1/a-restaurant-review

c. the restaurant was already full.

**3. The best thing was ...**

a. the service.

b. the side dish.

(c) the mains.

**4. The chips were ...**

a. delicious.

(b) overcooked and oily.

c. more than $10.

**5. They didn't leave a tip because the waiter was ...**

a. annoying.

b. slow.

(c) unhelpful

### Task 2 Put the words in the correct group

| | |
|---|---|
| P Amazing | fantastic P |
| P Impressive | N below average |
| N disappointing | N terrible/delicious P |
| N overcooked | |

| Positive | Negative |
|---|---|

### Task 3- Write your own review

Tips

- Use an informal or semi-formal style.
- In the title, give the main idea or opinion.
- Write about the important parts of the experience, not every detail.
- Organise your ideas into paragraphs.

### A restaurant review

https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/skills/writing/intermediate-b1/a-restaurant-review

- Write about the good and the bad.

( Cazanova restaurant )

Came for Dinner with my son and my husband.
The service was good.
We had Starters chips and falafel. We had drinks Coca-Cola.
we had for Main courses steak for my husband.
my son had chicken with cheese and chips
I had Cazanova chicken
The food was good.
The decoration

**Appendix VI:  Reflective Journal/Diary**

*[Top image — right page]*

✗ 12 gu middle

- Research Qs

Prior Experience was different
from Irish education.
most of the learners were exposed
to English in their native
country but the delivery + usefulness
of English in their land did
not require them to interact in
it.

Some of the previous school experien
only one of the learner
had express negative views on
attending education prior to
the engaged re bibl food.
All the r
in Ed.

- Positive learne experience. The
mistake time.
Was earlier

*[Bottom image — left page]*

How do ESOL students experience. ESOL
Class.

✗ Information Literacy. ￣
- Use a key concepts in defining ESOL
+ Literacy.  Break them up. distinguish.

E- Understanding the info literacy exp of ESL students
- Process.  Quality + Language + knowledge

There is currently a lack of research
about ESOL learners experience in
the Irish context.
This study provides an important contribution
to research about info literacy in
the cultural + educational contexts of
Ireland.

This research highlights the need for
flexible approach to language learning.
Tech + bilingual supports

*[Bottom image — right page]*

9/6/22

- ▮▮▮▮▮ speaks very good english she has
just gone to do back to level 3/4
as now her kids are older + she wants
a good job for herself.

10/6/22.

Paulo Freire.

- Teacher — Student
Pedagogy of the oppressed.
open to learning.
-

Removeing contradictorys — Scyodders
status ebc.

Freedom + equality for all.

- Literacy + Love freedom.
( 1921 - 1997.)

Bank system     Student passively
                taking in

- Progresives teacher.  L

freirian — initiating the dialogue )
Communication together.

Question

( Paulo Freire )   11/6/22

- Dialogue + reflection

Raising Question + relating to the
world around them.

Not to disempower students.

- Dialogue, Reflection - interaction
  understand their world

- Collaboration - from the teacher students

- Creating a stimulating environment.

-

13/6/22

Gilmartin pg 98. - Learning a
new language when there is a clear
need. Dr. "privacy".

Relevance of the Curriculum pg 100 - Gilmartin

Power of Education!

! Heba".
How having this conversation helped
them

6/6/22

( Research finding )

    liberian   ) or does

( - It as also would benefit
    similar
              Some )

( I also found of the behaviour
  this is something that )

( was what I was expecting )
   or not.

✳.

26/07/22   ✳ ✿

✳ Defining an experience ✳

  Rigour.
[ Validity - De-nature - see connor's email
  🖉 ]
      Chapter 5.
[ Contribution to the field.
  ↳ capture the voices of ESOL
Students.
Ample study of literacy +
      ESOL but/ limited studies
from the practice + giving voice
to the students.
      example of what for ESL.
Dawn Liddle.

There provided gave a birds eye
view of the participants + the
learning experience with ESOL but
also in Ireland.

Themes 16/12/24
Growth

( ▓▓▓ )

Conf. Clarity                    Power
Life
- Family Daughter        = Taking
                                    back the
Plans to do LC              power

- (D fe )                       - Confidence

    - Worked here.
                                - Tech.

                            Progression

                        - Ireland v far
                              for Away

( ▓▓▓ )

✓ Need to know   Large   to live in Ireland

School

Help Son

functions outside.

Independance
    ( Bulb + Life in Ireland )

(17/7)   ❀
    - Time -

---

( ▓▓▓ )

- Passion from teacher

[ Open future opportunities ] 2:11
    World wide language Global opps

- School Reserve experience. 2:40

= As child watch American tv.
    After soviet union broke

. political unrest.            (4:19)

[ Strange Story trying to express
                            myself

4:36 how to tell.
    Accept of students + participants

**Appendix VII - Codes generated using MAXQDA to then form themes.**
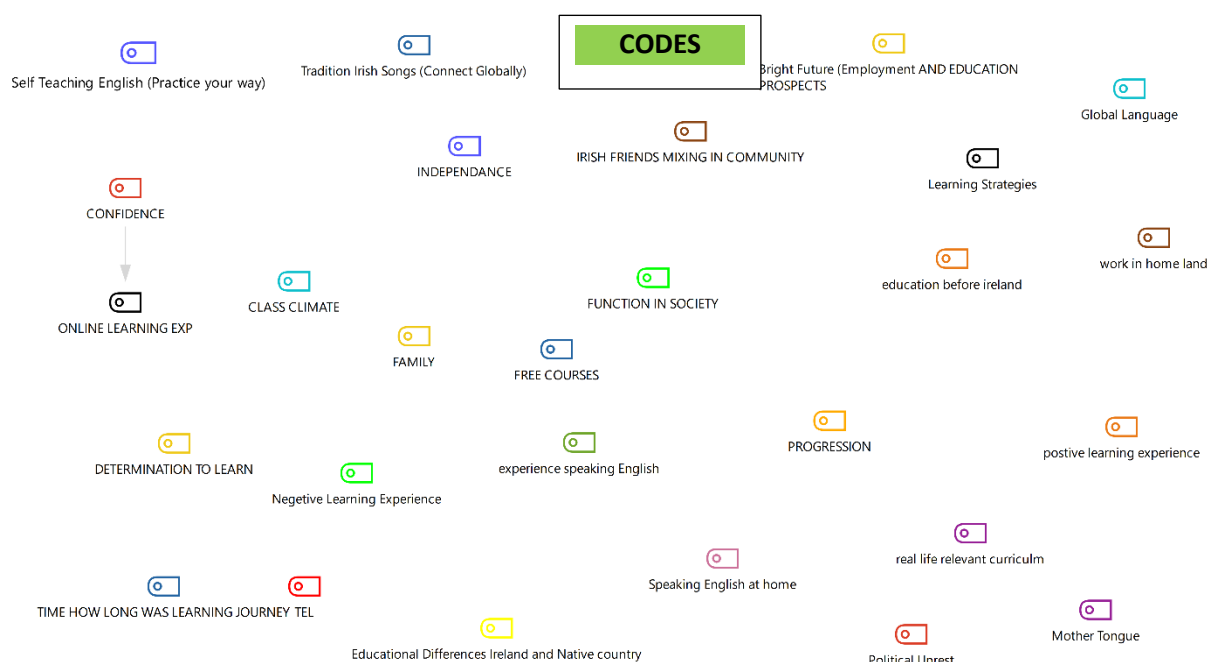


| Code System | Memo | Frequency |
|---|---|---|
| Code System | | 422 |
| 1.  FUNCTION IN SOCIETY✓ | | 24 |
| 2.  CONFIDENCE✓ | | 20 |
| 3.  IRISH FRIENDS MIXING IN COMMUNITY | | 14 |
| 4.  ONLINE LEARNING EXP | | 1 |
| 5.  DETERMINATION TO LEARN | | 17 |
| 6.  education before Ireland | | 7 |
| 7.  DIFFICULTIES | | 11 |
| 8.  PROGRESSION✓ | | 44 |
| 9.  FAMILY | | 8 |
| 10. INDEPENDANCE✓ | | 26 |
| 11. TEL | | 10 |
| 12. real life relevant curriculum | | 13 |
| 13. CLASS CLIMATE | | 10 |
| 14. FREE COURSES | | 7 |
| 15. TIME HOW LONG WAS LEARNING JOURNEY | Time and place | 21 |
| 16. work in homeland | | 1 |
| 17. Negative Learning Experience | | 6 |

| | |
|---|---|
| 18. Speaking English at home | 8 |
| 19. Educational Differences Ireland and Native country | 15 |
| **20. Learning Strategies** | 37 |
| **21. postive learning experience**       Teachers vibes etc | 36 |
| 22. Tradition Irish Songs (Connect Globally) | 11 |
| 23. Self Teaching English (Practice your way) | 15 |
| **24. experience speaking English** | 19 |
| 25. Political Unrest | 2 |
| 26. Mother Tongue | 7 |
| 27. Global Language | 3 |
| **28. Bright Future (Employment AND EDUCATION PROSPECTS** | 25 |
| 29. happy e.g | 4 |
| 30. Paraphrased Segments | 0 |

## Code System

- Code System
  - CLASS CLIMATE
  - CONFIDENCE
  - DETERMINATION TO LEARN
  - Educational Differences Ireland and Native country
  - Bright Future (Employment AND EDUCATION PROSPECTS
  - FAMILY
  - FREE COURSES
  - FUNCTION IN SOCIETY
  - Global Language
  - INDEPENDANCE
  - IRISH FRIENDS MIXING IN COMMUNITY
  - Learning Strategies
  - Mother Tongue
  - Negetive Learning Experience
  - PROGRESSION
  - Political Unrest
  - Self Teaching English (Practice your way)
  - Speaking English at home
  - TEL
  - TIME HOW LONG WAS LEARNING JOURNEY
  - Tradition Irish Songs (Connect Globally)
  - education before ireland
  - experience speaking English
  - postive learning experience
  - real life relevant curriculm
  - work in home land
  - DIFFICULTIES
  - RED
  - YELLOW
  - GREEN
  - MAGENTA