'Beyond Being Nice': A model for supporting adult ESOL learners who have experienced trauma

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ABSTRACT

Forced migrants join ESOL classes to learn a language. The process of acquiring a new language can be negatively affected by psychological trauma intensified by forced migration stressors. To deepen understanding of the reality, via semi-structured interviews and online surveys, this mixed-methods study attempts to provide an insight into the experiences of ESOL teachers working with forced migrants in Wales who may have experienced trauma, and strategies that teachers employ to tackle the challenges. The study reveals that teaching ESOL is, at times, inextricable from mental health. However, the majority of the respondents are not trauma-trained and prioritise creating safety in the classroom by investing in good relationships and applying moral values. There is a space for trauma healing in the ESOL classroom whilst the evidence-based practices that could have facilitated it are not widely applied. The study recommends redesigning ESOL courses to be trauma-responsive using a co-production approach by involving those with lived experience.

Keywords: ESOL, Refugees, Trauma, ELT, Mental Health, English as a Second Language, Refugee Education, Asylum Seekers, Sanctuary

1. Introduction

Forced to leave their homelands to escape persecution, violence, wars, natural disasters or poverty, a great number of people arrive in the UK to

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seek sanctuary. On a local level, Wales has developed the Nation of Sanctuary Plan (Welsh Government, 2019) and the ESOL policy for Wales (Welsh Government, 2018) to support people seeking sanctuary in rebuilding their lives and their inclusion into the communities. Both documents identify the English language as an essential tool for integration, community cohesion and a condition of citizenship, as well as facilitating access to educational opportunities. Thus, adult migrants can enrol on mainstream funded English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses (colleges) or others provided in partnership with the Third Sector, which are held in community centres, church halls or at charitable organisations.

Despite these policies, many being traumatised at various points of their risky migration journey now start a new chapter in life dealing with post-migration stressors (Hollifield et al., 2018). They experience high prevalence rates of mental disorders and are often in need of help (Turrini et al., 2017). Yet, the lack of knowledge on local services, language barriers, stigma and concerns over unknown consequences often prevent them from seeking help (van der Boor and White, 2020). In some cases, for those who found their way to become ESOL learners, teachers become the main, and sometimes the only, connection to the host community and culture.

Forced migrants represent a unique and diverse group of ESOL learners. Despite the diversity in terms of native language, age, previous education or literacy level, immigration status, life circumstances and character (Durish, 2013), psychological trauma makes these learners different from the majority of ESOL learners (Callaghan et al., 2019). The study of language education provision to resettled refugees in Wales reveals that 'meeting the government guidelines for recommended ESOL provision is extraordinarily difficult given the complexity of the learner cohort' (Chick and Hannagan-Lewis, 2019, p.16). Prolonged and complex migrant trauma often affects the lives of these learners and becomes one of the multiple obstacles that prevents them from achieving higher levels of English language proficiency. In addition to good teaching skills and specialist knowledge, the emotional health needs associated with trauma can require ESOL teachers to deal with complexities beyond the normal scope of other language teachers.

Despite this, only a few studies have examined the impact of trauma in the adult ESOL classroom (Gordon, 2011; Horsman, 2000; Isserlis, 2000; Kerka, 2002; Stone, 1995). Taking into account the comparable contexts

from a range of international perspectives, we attempt to provide critical analysis of the situation based on fundamental work in the fields of second language learning, mental health and trauma therapy. This study focuses on the experiences of ESOL teachers and their responses to the effects of trauma in the classroom. It aims to understand more fully the approaches to teaching, challenges, and concerns that teachers may have when working with adult learners who fled their homes and experienced traumatic events. In understanding these apects of working with such learners, it allows teachers to further appreciate the joy, enrichment, and opportunities that working with displaced people can bring.

In accordance with Hayward (2017), it is important to emphasise that we do not advocate for ESOL teachers becoming therapists for their learners. We rather attempt to identify some tools and strategies that proved to be helpful in other settings, and teachers could use their discretion and apply them in the classroom if needed. As discussed later in this article, some ESOL teachers tend to avoid speaking about learners' families or homes as they consider these topic sensitive. However, the situations can arise when allowing such conversation happen can be necessary. At the same time, considering the variety of life experiences, we need to remember that anything can become a trigger in the ESOL classroom. This article will provide some recommendations on the ways ESOL teachers can respond to the symptoms of trauma and prevent re-traumatising without knowing the details of the trauma, initiating disclosure or addressing the roots of the trauma.

2. The Theoretical Context of the Study

2.1. Forced migration and trauma

The American Psychological Association (2020) defines trauma as 'a disturbing experience that results in significant fear and helplessness, intense enough to have a long-lasting effect and challenge an individual's view of the world as a just, safe, and predictable place'. It is a response to severe distress that exceeds one's ability to cope, alters beliefs about world safety and destroys the individual's adaption to life, sense of control, protection, safety, connection and meaning (Brunzel et al., 2015; Herman, 1998; Levine, 2015; van der Kolk, 2015). This appears to be more complex in the context of the forced migration.

The trauma is further exacerbated by factors connected to forced displacement, acculturative and traumatic stress in the process of resettlement (Adkins et al., 1999). Forced migrants can experience several pre-migration and in-transit stressors such as multiple bereavements, loss, months in refugee camps, separation from family and friends (Morrice et al., 2019; Wessels, 2014). Yet, the post-migration process presents linguistic (Simpson, 2019), legal (Snyder, 2011), social (Miles & Bailey-Mckenna, 2017; Stewart, 2012), emotional (Piętka-Nykaza, 2015), economic (Refugee Action, 2016), and employability (Morrice et al., 2019) challenges. The lack of practical information about life in the UK and social isolation limits interactions in the target language to predominantly service encounters (Court, 2017; Norton, 2013) which in turn can increase language anxiety and affect language learning. Thus, the trauma discussed in this project tends not to be an event or a locked memory but chronic traumatic stress, the contextual experience of persistent traumatic events, both past and continued, that is pervasive and inflamed in the mind (Lundy & Hilado, 2018) and might impede second language learning.

2.2. Signs of trauma in the classroom

The neurological and psychological damage caused by trauma can have a detrimental effect on the education of the displaced. Teachers might expect 'a typical adult learner' to have a longer attention span, cognitive maturity and conceptual complexity (Dörnyei, 2009) or to be disciplined and cooperative (Ur, 2012), more committed to their education, more focused, and harder working (Day et al., 2011). However, in the ESOL classroom, teachers can witness general cognitive, emotional and behavioral signs that can, on occasions, be a manifestation of trauma. It is acknowledged that individuals will experience differing types and severity of trauma, as well as environmental factors relating to their displacement, however, the focus of the recommendations made in this article are in line with Hayward's (2017) strengths-based approach to creating a safe and inclusive environment for all learners. It is also important to acknowledge that many people who have worked with deisplaced learners have found them to be diligent, intelligent and motivated learners (Roberts, 2020).

Exposure to traumatic experiences can be associated with emotional maladjustment, periods of denial, numbing of feelings, withdrawal,

flashbacks and isolation (Corvo & Peterson, 2005). Trauma can negatively affect the capacity to focus and determine what stimuli to focus on and to sustain attention (Yehuda et al., 2015). This in turn can impede noticing and registering language input proposed as important aspects by the Noticing Hypothesis (Schmidt, 1990). The negative effect of trauma on both declarative and procedural forms of memory required for the storage of new material and its subsequent retrieval (Morgan-Short et al., 2014) can limit the acquisition of a new language, particularly its grammar and lexis (Perry, 2006).

An effect of trauma on the prefrontal lobe of the brain responsible for language and, in turn, for linguistic function can lead to a loss of words or ability to express one's thoughts (Milligan, 2018). Communicative ability might be altered or shut down altogether as the frontal lobe necessary for putting feelings into words shuts down when original sounds, sensations or images are traced by memory (Van Der Kolk, 2015), all of which can cause confusion or memory loss. Avoidance, re-experiencing, hyperarousal and hypoarousal are described as classic symptoms of traumatic stress (Cole et al., 2005). Hypoarousal is the response to significant stress or a perceived threat as a result of which a person feels a desire to withdraw, or shut down. The person might look disengaged, disconnected, emotionally numb and not motivated. They can experience brain fog, fatigue, dizziness, feel hopeless and unable to focus. Hyperarousal is another type of emotional dysregulation, that can be triggered when a person thinks about their traumatic experiences. Kicked into high alert, the person can encounter flashbacks, anxiety, panic, anger, guilt, irritability and lack of focus. The necessity of the autonomic nervous system to respond to potential threats (Williamson et al., 2014) result in shifting between hyperarousal, displaying fear, anger and guilt (Yehuda et al., 2015) or difficulties to focus on the task, or outbursts of laughter or crying (Perry, 2006), and hypoarousal, or lack of portrayed emotions, numbing (Yehuda et al., 2015), seeming emotionless or overly emotional and refusing to work with other learners (Perry, 2006) as trust might have been lost (Kerka, 2002).

Whilst it is not clearly understood how past traumatic experience may affect second language acquisition, Chiswick and Miller (2001) argue that forced migrants may have lower motivation to acquire language than voluntary migrants do. However, Iversen *et al. (*2014) suggest that those who had the experience of violent traumatic events have lower motivation for learning a language while those who experienced trauma

in the form of deprivation of medical care, food or shelter were more motivated. It is important to consider that learners might look exhausted due to the disturbed sleep pattern (Lies et al., 2019; McDonald, 2000). This symptom can be mistakenly considered as a lack of preparation or motivation rather than recognised as a protective strategy (Finn, 2010; Perry, 2006). They might find doing new things or risk-taking difficult, or experience fear of punishment or rejection for making mistakes (Kosa and Hansen, 2006; Schmidt, 2019).

Displaced people who have been traumatised are at higher risk of developing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Turrini et al., 2017). Exposure to traumatic events and limited language proficiency can limit their participation in acculturation activities which in turn would limit their language acquisition process (Clarke et al., 1993) forming a vicious cycle. Söndergaard and Theorell's (2004) longitudinal study reports that a second language is acquired at a slower rate by the refugees with more severe PTSD symptoms. Similarly, Emdad et al. (2005) state that duration and severity of trauma correspond with learning abilities. In their study of the relationship between host language acquisition, trauma and mental health in a sample of Bosnian refugees, Kartal et al. (2019) identify that trauma worsens second language acquisition which in turn affects mental health.

In contrast to the pejorative effects of trauma, serious life challenges can also lead to a positive psychological change, or post-traumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). This change does not happen to every person who has expeienced trauma. While going through distress, some people might challenge their belief system, struggle psychologically trying to understand the reasons behind their experiences and later see positive personal growth. The extent of such growth is determined by an individual's ability to deal with the aftermath of trauma (Wortman, 2004). Moreover, post-traumatic growth correlates with social support, the ability to grieve and accept trauma, perception of control over events (Tedeschi & Calhoum, 2004) and the development of narratives of trauma and survival (Neimeyer, 2016). This can result in greater appreciation of life, changed priorities, more intimate relationships, greater sense of personal strength, recognition of new possibilities and spiritual development (Tedeschi and Calhoum, 2004).

Sensitive teaching approaches where artful acts of instruction are therapeutic can play a role in trauma healing (Medley, 2012). Self-exploration, self-expression and exploration of social relationships can help students recover meaning in their lives. It is thus essential that

instructors working with forced migrants should have a basic awareness of how traumatic experience might influence learning a new language and, in turn, pedagogy (Finn, 2010).

2.3. Evidence-based practices and the Safety, Emotions, Loss, and Future (SELF) Model

Trauma continuously affects lives until properly addressed and processed (Schmidt, 2019). Research of past trauma effects on language acquisition emphasises that for 'successful foreign language acquisition to be achieved, the refugees must be given the opportunity to deal with their traumatic past while embarking on the acquisition of foreign language' (Iversen et al., 2014, p.59). Teachers can be in a position to support traumatised learners by employing strategies and measures for the detrimental effects of trauma to be counteracted (McDonald, 2000), 'exhibiting a level of attention according to individual's needs' (Isserlis, 2000, p.3) and integrating activities that give opportunities to safely deal with experiences of the past (Schmidt, 2019). To increase learning opportunities, an educational institution can decide on the use and level of a trauma-informed approach which be the most appropriate for their setting and students (Walker et al., 2021; ACE Hub Wales, 2022).

To be trauma-responsive means to recognise how traumatic experiences can affect the lives of individuals, thoroughly incorporate that understanding and respond when required while providing services to accommodate the needs of trauma survivors and facilitate healing and recovery (Carello & Butler, 2014). Yet, at this level teachers do not directly address the root of trauma. The facilitation of trauma recovery rather than the avoidance of re-traumatisation becomes the primary aim (Fallot & Harris, 2009). Evidence-based research on interventions to improve learning and emotional regulation in the adult ESOL classroom after trauma is limited (Johnson, 2018). So, for this study, we chose the Sanctuary Model (Bloom, 1995) to get a better insight into trauma-responsive practices in the ESOL classroom. This is an evidence-based model that aims at creating a therapeutic community and culture that fosters growth and positive change in adults, minimising the risk and maximizing opportunities for improvement for those who have been traumatised. This approach has been successfully applied in various inpatient, residential, and educational settings. To apply the Sanctuary Model, one does not need to be a trauma expert rather, one needs to be

familiar with its implementation tool-SELF. This tool recognises that safety, emotions, loss, and future are the four main domains of disruption in the traumatised person's life (Bloom & Sreedhar, 2008).

2.3.1. Safety

Trauma changes the way the nervous system works and the perception of risk and safety (van der Kolk, 2014). For the traumatised, staying safe can be difficult as they might often feel in danger. Giving the person at least some experience of safety and reconstructing social disconnection are key elements on the way to recovery (Herman, 1998; Levine, 2015). Various strategies to establish a safe space for learning have been suggested. Bills (2003) highlights the importance of establishing all four domains of safety, namely physical, psychological, social, and moral. Isserlis (2000) and Khatri (2016) accentuate classroom configuration providing an example of feeling threat and helplessness in a cramped or confining classroom with only a few windows, tightly shut door or obstacles on the way to the exit. Carello and Butler (2015) offer previewing materials and assignments by scrutinising for appropriateness. Medley (2012) recommends a predictable routine, a daily agenda on the noticeboard, slow introduction of new tasks, choral practice, work in small groups to divert attention from individuals and provision of constructive but mindful feedback. Horsman (2000) suggests learners can make choices, take safe risks within a structure, opt-out of any activity and create a code of ethics.

At the institutional level, providing childcare or transportation costs, referral for counselling, institutional safety plans, absence of diagnostic testing (Kerka, 2002), providing more time assignments and considering low attendance (Khatri, 2016) can be among the practical actions. Opportunities to mingle with people from the community builds self-confidence and social support has been proven to be the most powerful protection against trauma (Van der Kolk, 2014). To create a truly safe space, it has to be considered that learners can have different views on sharing stories or feelings, as well as the possibility that learners might know each other outside the classroom (Horsman, 2000).

2.3.2. Emotions

The aftermath of trauma frequently associates with difficulties in managing emotions and the loss of emotional control. Learners who

require support with socio-emotional needs such as self-regulation or mental health would find prioritising language learning difficult (Miles & Bailey-McKenna, 2017). Monitoring and labelling emotions, learning about the brain, trauma, healing and the ability to change using content-based language instruction can help learners to understand that there is nothing wrong with them — it is rather their body and brain's normal reaction to abnormal circumstances (Bills, 2003; Bloom & Sreedhar, 2008; Medley, 2012). Inclusion of self-care modules and allowing learners to opt-out of any activity develops learners' responsibility for their well-being (Carello & Butler, 2015). Thus, ESOL learners who survived trauma would benefit from incorporating the elements that improve their emotional intelligence.

2.3.3. Loss

Trauma is deeply connected with loss. All the displaced people share a loss of home that creates a sense of insecurity and an unexplainable gap (Papadopoulos, 2002). Trapped in the nervous system, loss of safety, trust, sense of self, or self-worth or loss of a person can create damage for the body and mind (Levine, 2015). Avoiding traumatic memories and pretending trauma did not happen keeps the individual in a cycle of victimhood (Medley, 2012; Yoder, 2005). No empirical research has been published on the extent and effects of exposure and disclosure in the ESOL classroom (Carello & Butler, 2014), yet several studies (Barak & Leichtentritt, 2017; Pennebaker, 1997; Kacewicz et al., 2007; Thatcher, 2020) suggest elements of poetry, and creative and expressive writing increase self-awareness and help the traumatised make sense and meaning of their loss. Again, in line with Hayward (2017), we do not advocate for teachers to facilitate the disclosure of traumatic experiences in the classroom. Yet, we are aware that such disclosures can take place as any converstation can trigger this. At this point, it is important to remember that the ESOL classroom has the potential of being a safe place that accepts verbalising of loss, validates learners' expereinces, and facilitates healing as the ESOL classroom owns that unique reciprocity and comfort of shared experience and like-minded community (van der Kolk, 2015).

We are the stories we tell, and they enable us to change (Percy, 2008). Narrative or storytelling is a core therapeutic technique as well as a technique for meaning-making in adult education (Kerka, 2002; Gwozdziewycz & Mehl-Madrona, 2013). In contrast to trauma that

makes one lose the plot (van der Merwe & Gobodo-Madikizela, 2009), the power of telling the personal story within the supportive environment is in bringing structure and meaning back in life (Nicholas et al., 2011). When the traumatic experience happened in a first language, sharing experiences and reflections in a second language can be safer as the second language can give some distance from the emotions (Dewaele & Costa, 2013). Retelling the story is a stage in the recovery process (Herman, 1998). Therefore, ESOL teachers need to be vigilant about pacing, timing, cultural differences (Gordon, 2011). It is vital to respect learners' silences (Horsman, 2000; Iserlis, 2001), consider the possibility of listeners' discomfort (Waterhouse, 2016) and use creative assignments such as poetry (Iida, 2016) and performing that can be used with a minimum amount of a language.

2.3.4. Future

Trauma deprives its victims of agency over their lives and the hopeful vision of the future (Herman, 1998). Though not a therapist, an ESOL teacher can help traumatised learners restore control over their lives in the present, develop aspirations or discover ambitions for the future. Although not aimed at facilitating trauma healing, the participatory approach (Auerbach, 1990; Bryers et al., 2014; Frye, 1999) based on Freirean theory (Freire, 1996) contributes to the reduction of trauma symptoms by helping ESOL learners deal with post-migration stressors in the hostile immigration environment, gain a critical awareness of the systems that may oppress or undervalue learners, reflect on their problems and act to effect change. In this case, a teacher is a co-learner, mentor and guide who provides materials and the language needed for learners to express themselves. The ESOL learners are co-producers who generate the themes for discussion and use their lived experience, initiative and resourcefulness. Posing the problem and exploring issues central to students gives an opportunity to articulate and validate their experiences, recognise their personal powers, create a space to speak about hopes and fears, provide peer support and care, and empower through learning (Frye, 1999). To explore the effectiveness of the participatory approach in the ESOL classroom, a London-based charity, English for Action carried out the project 'Whose Integration?'. The three stages of a lesson, the 'making meaning' stage, 'going deeper' stage and 'broadening out' stage take learners from generating their

own ideas and opinions about a topic, to in-depth discussions of serious and urgent issues and later to working with the texts from outside the classroom. This approach gave students a sense of ownership which can be affected by trauma. This project identified that the 'participatory ESOL class itself is an important part of students' lives and is not just a rehearsal for life outside the classroom' (Bryers et al, 2014, p.32).

Drawing upon learners' own experience and sharing their skills motivates socialising (Khatri, 2016), makes the language more authentic and personalised with learners' basic needs before academic needs and content goals (Schmidt, 2019; Wilbur, 2016). Dealing with the stressors critically and creatively is a way to transformation and regaining agency.

3. Methodology and Methods

This article aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the real-life experiences and practices of ESOL teachers working with forced migrants who suffered traumatic events. The article reports on findings on how well-equipped ESOL teachers are, what strategies these teachers use to address their learners' emotional and health needs, and what roles teachers believe they have in this educational context. Thus, the following research questions were posed.

1. *What do ESOL teachers know about working with forced migrants?*
2. *How might ESOL teachers apply the principles of the Sanctuary Model?*
3. *What do ESOL teachers believe their role to be when working with forced migrants?*

3.1. Conducting the Study

To gain the ESOL teachers' views on trauma-informed practices, a short online survey was designed. It contained fifteen questions divided into three sections. The first section related directly to background information including qualifications, years of experience in teaching ESOL, and trauma-related training experience. The second section gathered data on the manifestation of trauma in the classroom and the extent the teachers understood their learners' emotional needs. The participants could present their views on what could have helped them to

understand the learners better in a comment option. The last section prompted the respondents to check all trauma-informed techniques they used, to rate how strongly they agree with the statements about working with trauma and measure their level of confidence in understanding trauma. The last question was about respondents' thought on the survey with an opportunity to expand on the topic.

Semi-structured one-to-one interviews specifically explored teachers' perception of trauma-informed practices and the classroom experience, considering the multiple and different realities, adding depth and complexity to emerging findings from the survey (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Kumar, 2019). To ensure data triangulation, the interview questions were parallel to the questions and themes in the survey but in contrast to the survey, the majority of the questions were open-ended.

3.2. Context and participants

The participants of this study were ESOL teachers who had experience in working with forced migrants in Wales. The participants were invited via Twitter, a Facebook group for ESOL teachers in the local area and email invitations. Due to the scale and scope of the study, interview participants were restricted to the south Wales region. Yet, it was ensured that different sectors of ESOL provision were represented. It was possible but not compulsory that participants took part in both, the survey and the interview.

Of the study population, 62 subjects completed the survey. They were equally represented by teachers from FE colleges (23), Adult Education Providers (22) and the Third Sector (22). The survey participants had various length of experience in teaching ESOL. However, no relations between the experience and the data was observed through data analysis. The majority of participants held a CELTA/Trinity Certificate (n=43) or a PGCE (n=31).

A similar pattern was shown by the profiles of four teachers who have been interviewed. They all worked with different educational providers and have different working experiences in terms of their length of service. When the study was conducted, Ali had a PGCE (ESOL) and 12 years of experience in teaching ESOL in a FE college A. Louise had a CELTA and a PGCE, 4 years of experience and worked in FE college B. Nada gained a CELTA, an MA TESOL, a PGCE (ESOL) and 1.5 years of experience in a language school and some months of teaching ESOL.

Shabana had a PGCE (ESOL) and 5 years of experience working with an Adult education provider. Although the sample was relatively small, it allowed gaining insight into the perspectives of teachers with various educational and work experience. It is acknowledged that there is the possibility of the influence of bias caused by the interviewees'/teachers' attempt to create a positive impression when talking about the sensitive topic of trauma.

3.3. Ethical considerations

The highest ethical standards were maintained by respecting and reassuring dignity, privacy, voluntary participation and the anonymity of all involved participants, providing the right to withdraw at any time (BERA, 2018). The sensitivity of the topic of trauma (Appolis et al., 2015) could create some ethical issues. While teachers might not be direct victims of migration-related trauma, they could go through minor vicarious exposure to trauma when hearing the stories of traumatic events and emotions involved or reflecting on memories of less successful events of accommodating learners (Ahern, 2012; Guhan and Leibling-Kalifani, 2011). However, Carlson et al. (2003), Griffin et al. (2003) and Decker et al. (2011) argue that participants might benefit from such a disclosure in the research context and feel an emotional relief or a sense of sharing and being listened to. Appolis et al. (2015) reveal the favourability of the risk-benefit ratio when compared the benefits and regrets of adults who participated in research on sensitive topics. In light of these recommendations, no direct questions about learners' traumatic experiences had been asked. In case of slightest discomfort, participants were given options not to answer a question or withdraw from the study at any time. In case of emotional support required, the subjects were provided with contacts of the Education Support Partnership.

4. Findings

The findings from the study are grouped into three categories: 1) teachers' understanding of forced migrants in the ESOL classroom, 2) application of the Sanctuary Model principles, and 3) a teacher's role in this context.

4.1 Teachers' understanding of forced migrants in the ESOL classroom

The study identified that 95 percent of participants had not received any training in working with trauma survivors. With only some attending a trauma-related seminar or a workshop (n=9) or doing reading on the topic (n=15), almost half of the participating teachers sought colleagues' advice regarding a learner's trauma which would possibly be based on intuition.

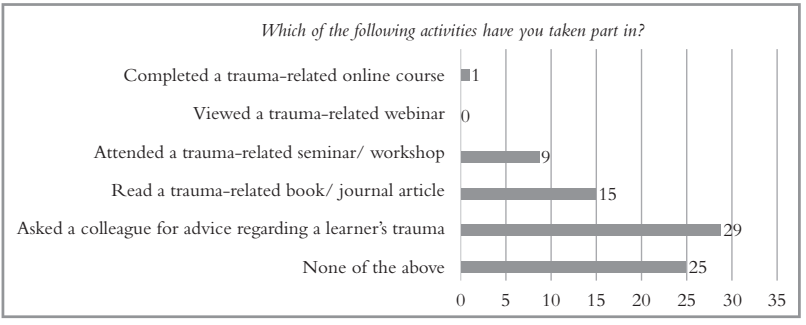
> *I have been asking for advice on how to practically support learners suffering from PTSD for a long time. (survey participant 3)*

The reason for the other 25 participants abstaining from any of these activities was not provided by the participants, but could be realted to any number of reasons such as lack of opportunity, time, interest or any other barriers to participation.

Despite the lack of the teachers' involvement in trauma-related activities, this issue remains relevant as 97 percent of survey participants expressed their interest in receiving training on a trauma-informed approach as a part of their CPD.

When talking about the displaced learners, the interviewees applied adjectives that could be related to traumatic experiences (*eg. anxious, emotional, silent, isolated, excluded, alone, quiet, depressed, unhappy, exhausted, restless, distracted, numbing, traumatised*). However, these learners were believed to be '*appreciative, grateful but often distracted*' (Ali) and contrary to the previous research (Chiswick and Miller, 2001; Iversen et al., 2014)

Figure 1. Participation in trauma-related activities (n=62).



having '*the higher rate of motivation and the urgency in learning English as it is required in daily lives*' (Nada).

The majority of respondents (97 percent) believed that some of their learners had been traumatised during their displacement and resettlement in their current host country. Teachers' awareness of this issue had been built through learners' voicing the hardship of migration journey and knowledge of conflict areas in the world.

In agreement with Stein's (1981) theory of social adjustment stages, special attention was given by Nada to those newly arrived in the UK:

> *…if I know that this student comes from Syria or Darfur, I know by default that they would be traumatised, and the same for, especially if the student has just arrived in the UK.*

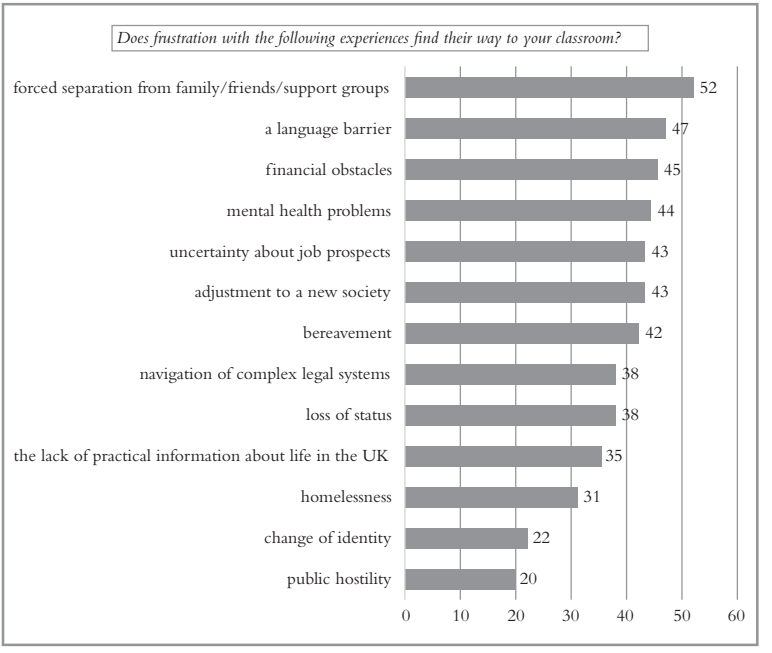
What stands out according to the results of the survey is that the majority of the teachers (85 percent) were approached by their learners to talk about their trauma. In the interview, Ali explained that learners had always been introduced to and encouraged to contact the counselling service on campus if they felt upset or unsafe. Interestingly, despite the availability of counselling services in colleges, 22 of 23 college teachers reported that learners would approach teachers for help. This echoes Gordon's (2011) study where ESOL teachers often experience disclosure as learners see them as the main safe link to their host country. This is echoed in the following comment from a survey respondent.

> *As a teacher, you are often the person that a student sees most. The trust built is incredible and disclosures can be frequent and the importance of a positive environment for wellbeing during this time is underestimated.*

The presence of trauma in the class manifests itself through discussions about frustrations. The optional responses to the question about frustrations were retrieved mostly from research in the migration context (Miles and Bailey-Mckenna, 2017; Morrice et al., 2019; Stewart, 2012; Wessels, 2014). The bar-graph below represents the list of issues, with forced separation from family and friends and a language barrier being the most discussed.

Responding to the question about chronic traumatic stress, two-thirds of participants (n=48) agreed that it affected second language learning.

Figure 2. Learners' frustrations (n=62).

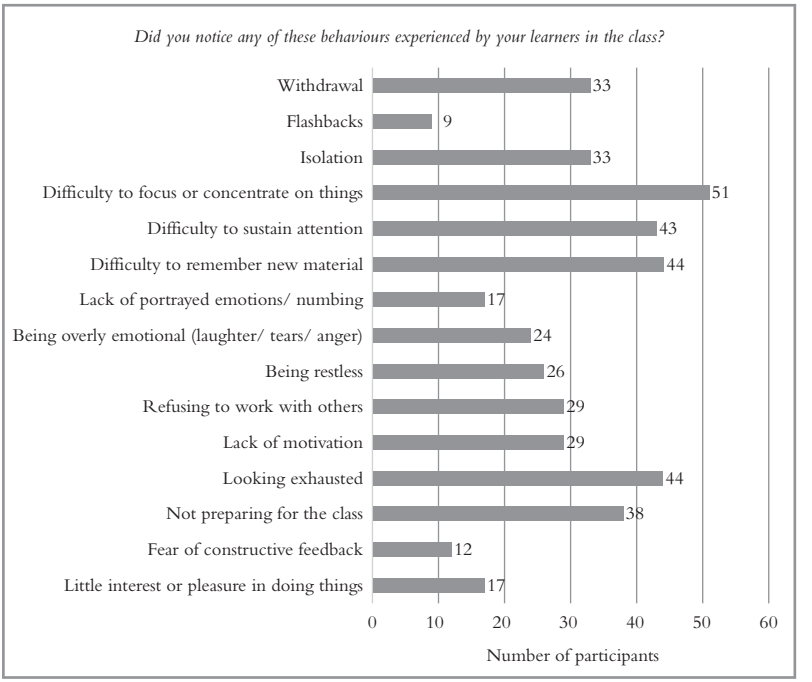


However, only one-third of participants (n=20) was confident in understanding the impact of trauma on the brain, which Finn (2010) and Gordon (2011) claim important when shaping a pedagogic approach. Moreover, one-third of the teachers (n=22) stated they were not confident in identifying a traumatised learner.

Learners displayed some behaviours that could be the natural response to trauma. Difficulty in concentrating, remembering, sustaining attention, looking exhausted and not preparing for classes were identified as the most frequent experiences in the adult ESOL classroom.

Refusal to work with others was reported by almost half of the teachers. Other signs of trauma reported and expanded upon by the teachers were isolation, a lack of engagement, volatility, heightened states of emotion and low levels of participation and engagement. According to the survey comment, awareness of practical ways to

Figure 3.Trauma-related behaviours in the classroom (n=62).



support students, particularly those suffering from PTSD would help, as one participant explains:

> *I have experienced students running out of the school building, as loud noises have reminded them of their school being bombed and have struggled with how to support them whilst teaching 20 other learners.*

4.2 Application of the Sanctuary Model principles of SELF

On no account expecting practitioners' awareness of Bloom's Sanctuary Model (1995), this part of the study sets out to discuss the possibility of integrating activities based on the concepts of the Sanctuary Model to safely deal with the aftermath of trauma.

4.2.1 Safety

Learners' perception of safety imposes some limitations on identifying how successful the attempts to create a safer place in the language classroom are. The responses revealed that only 26 teachers sought feedback on the learners' perception of a safe environment in the class. They also revealed, only 21 teachers practiced classroom management techniques designed to alleviate stress, such as Circle Discussions or less formal classroom layouts. Conversely, a relatively high number of participants (n=39) used diagnostic language tests, which Isserlis (2000) and Khatri (2016) argue might acutally hinder the learners' sense of safety in the classroom. Moreover, in the post-interview conversations, teachers acknowledged that they never thought about the impact classroom configuration can have on learners, for example, who experienced war or imprisonment. With respect to the materials, Louise believed that not all the language learning materials could be suitable for an ESOL classroom. Therefore, along with another 47 of the 62 survey respondents, she previewed materials for appropriateness. In general, 48 survey participants agreed that the classroom setting affected language learning outcomes. Finally, three survey respondents identified the classroom as a place to communicate without judgement, where everyone feels respected and any input valued and appreciated.

4.2.2 Emotions

18 participants reported inclusion of modules on self-care and well-being in their teaching. Yet, considering that some of those respondents can work in the same college, the overall result is even lower. As in the case of safety, teachers' life experience determined an approach to emotional education. Life Lesson Time was a practice shared by Ali who had been talking to her students about overcoming her issues and encouraging them to stay positive. On many occasions, learners expressed their gratitude for teaching them 'real-life' even long after they finished the course as they did not always have support around them. This practice can help with building an optimistic view of life, social support and spirituality required for recovery (Shishehgar et al., 2017) and post-traumatic growth (Tedeschi and Calhoum, 2004).

The cultural aspect is another highlight raised by a survey participant who suggests that having:

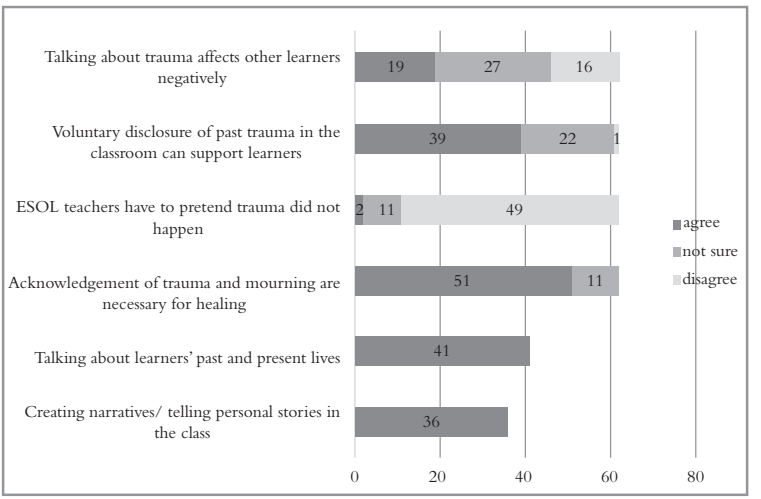
a framework for students to articulate their needs in a learning environment so I know how it might affect learning and what possible triggers may be. Non westernised learners are significantly less likely to articulate their mental health needs and issues using labels and terminology.

Teaching personal topics remained a concern for all the interviewees and 41 percent of survey respondents. Both Louise and Nada Louise referred to the beginning of their teaching practice when they did not know that some topics could be triggers. Nada found the topics about family, housing and jobs being sensitive as she believed revealing the information could be a reminder to them about the forced changes that took place in their lives. To prevent any discomfort, she previewed materials and gave learners a choice of opting out. Although optional participation was considered as a technique that developed learners' responsibility for their well-being, only 38 survey respondents reported they applied it in their practice.

4.2.3 Loss

There was not much unity in the perception of the concept of loss among those who participated in this study. Firstly, the majority of participants

Figure 4. Teachers' views on loss-related strategies (n=62).



believed that healing required acknowledgement of trauma and mourning. In agreement with it, almost the same number of respondents stated that ESOL teachers should not pretend that trauma did not happen. 16 teachers believed that talking about trauma did not have a negative effect on other learners.

Secondly, slightly more than half of the respondents stated that they talked about learners' past and present lives, created narratives or told personal stories in the class. Louise shared a good example of such a practice. She gave her learners a writing prompt, and they could discreetly decide how much they wanted to share. She gave them the option of inventing a story to practice new vocabulary or grammar. Moreover, Louise's students confirmed in their feedback that they felt better after expressing pain. Similarly, two-thirds of survey respondents agreed that voluntary disclosure might be beneficial. This confirms Kerka (2002) and Gwozdziewycz and Mehl-Madrona's (2013) findings that it is a core therapeutic technique for meaning-making if done voluntary (Horsman, 2000).

Sometimes Ali started a conversation to encourage her learners to speak up. On the contrary, Shabana did it only if learners started talking about it themselves. It led to the creation of support circles among peers. Such contradicting results might be an indication of the ESOL classroom not employing the available resources to support learners' recovery through creativity and stories (Percy, 2008).

4.2.4 Future

Refugees' trauma is a complex process, complicated and intensified by other factors including post-migration stressors. The following set of survey questions was concerned with the application of evidence-based strategies that can support learners' taking agency over their lives. Reflecting on learners' current material conditions and giving learners a chance to initiate the topic could not only empower learners by providing them with life skills but increase the engagement in learning by using authentic and connected to learners' lives language (Schmidt, 2019; Wilbur, 2016). Yet, only 26 and 18 teachers respectively confirmed using these techniques. In her interview, Shabana stated that they were helpful strategies but could not be widely employed as teachers were dictated by the ESOL

curriculum or the body funding the language learning project in the community.

28 respondents invited people from the community to their lessons and took the students on field trips. Shabana highlighted the importance of meeting people from the community. She provided an example of her learners feeling stressed or nervous prior to educational-related visits of representatives of police or the Refugee Council, however, afterwards, they felt more confident and might use their facilities. This is in agreement with Khatri's (2016) who emphasises the importance of such events for providing opportunities to meet people from the community and, therefore, rebuild trust and community links.

Interestingly, the participating teachers showed their preference for sharing learners' skills (previous jobs, hobbies) (n=43), yet the majority (n=53) believed that it was better not to discuss the future in the ESOL classroom.

4.3 Teachers' role in the given context

The next section describes the role the teachers believed they had when working with forced migrants. Starting with identifying whose responsibility to facilitate trauma healing was, as little as 13 percent agreed that healing should be facilitated by Mental Health professionals only. Interestingly, slightly more than half of the respondents (55 percent) chose a neutral answer. As it was a survey question, it might be difficult to understand the reason for such a response. However, numerous survey comments suggested that some participants previously had not thought about teaching through a lens of trauma. However, only 24 percent of survey respondents stated they understood how to apply a trauma-informed approach.

Surprisingly, in contrast to the two previous results, only 10 teachers saw themselves just as language instructors, while 6 teachers chose other roles but not a language instructor. Others opted for the combined role of a mentor, a co-learner, or a guide. Yet, the positive was that the majority of teachers agreed that they should be able to provide a referral for counselling.

To play a role in trauma healing teachers have to take into account learners' emotional needs (Medley, 2012). In the same way, the participants, on the whole, demonstrated confidence in talking appropriately and sensitively to their learners.

In terms of understanding learners' emotional needs, almost all participants divided into two equal groups, those who understood quite well (45 percent), and those who were not sure (50 percent).

During interviews, it became clear that teachers often emphasized the importance of a teacher's personality. What was clear from gathering teachers' thoughts about how to be a good teacher was prioritising general morals (*empathy, tolerance, care*), creating safety, understanding learners and their situations, listening and acknowledging the pain. These results correspond with Medley's (2012) recommendations on building trust and creating a safe environment. Yet, the numerous usages of the word try (*try and encourage, try and create,* etc.) can be a sign of choosing strategies intuitively. To add to this, Ali mentioned a lack of time for a confidential, private chat and having many learners as another challenge.

5. Discussion

The topic of trauma is generally overlooked in language teaching education. The findings from this study suggest that ESOL teachers are likely to encounter the effects of trauma in the classroom, albeit the lack of trauma awareness may prevent them from best meeting the needs of the students who fled their homes and experienced traumatic events. In most cases, teachers have information regarding a learner's emotional state and therefore need to be aware of how to deal with it. The majority of ESOL teachers are often approached by learners regarding their trauma, despite specialist support being available.

Presented in the literature (Milligan, 2018; Morgan-Short et al., 2014; Perry, 2006; Van Der Kolk, 2015; Williamson et al., 2014; Yehuda et al., 2015), trauma-related signs exhibit themselves in the ESOL classroom. For example, mood swings, avoidance, lack of portrayed emotions, being overly emotional, refusing to work with others, difficulties to focus on tasks or memorise new lexical items can indicate that a learner is dealing with the aftermath of trauma. These behaviours can be mistakenly taken as 'bad' or as a lack of interest or preparation rather than a protective strategy (Kerka, 2002; Perry, 2006) in turn creating an additional obstacle that impedes the learning process (Medley, 2012). Although the possibility of an alternative answer explaining the causal factors for these

behaviours can be argued, the impact of trauma cannot be underestimated.

A strong relationship between successful language acquisition and a traumatic past has been reported in the literature (Iversen et al., 2014). Moreover, identifying and understanding learners' needs and characteristics is an essential step in delivering an efficient course. Recent research in ESOL (Peutrell and Cooke, 2019; Chick and Hannagan-Lewis, 2019) has emphasized the significance of engagement with learners' lived experience and real-life demands. The majority of the participants despite being qualified ESOL teachers find it challenging to identify trauma signs and its impact. Teachers can experience more difficulties with newly arrived learners and those with low language levels. Therefore, there is a need for a more flexible approach that more closely reflect learners' immediate needs and actual lives.

Having discussed all the gathered data in detail, it can be generalised that ESOL teachers apply some good practices that can be correlated with the concepts of the Sanctuary Model (Bloom, 1995). Some discrepancies in the results can occur because of the various educational settings teachers work in and different stances teachers take when working with ESOL learners. Some of those practices are chosen intuitively or based on teachers' personal life experiences. ESOL teachers invest in creating a safe environment in the classroom by relying on moral values and showing concerns about sensitive topics. Yet, some evidence-based practices have not been widely employed.

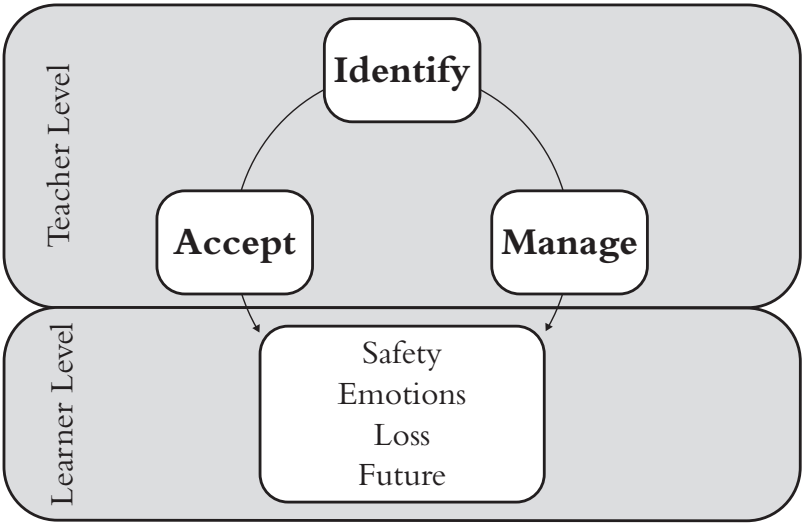
Considering the ESOL teachers' workload and stance, the 'prescribed' curriculum that many have to follow, and — for some — the voluntary nature of the job, an important question about the teachers' involvement arises. There are three important things to consider here.

- Creating a favourable/healthy learning environment would require a connection, trust, and bringing the whole selves to learning. Trauma victims can struggle with control, helplessness and simply not be able to learn due to various things in their way.
- Shared experience makes the ESOL classroom somewhat close to a like-minded community.
- There is no obligation for a teacher to have 'healing power' or turn the lessons into therapeutic sessions. It is quite possible to follow 'the

prescribed' curriculum without extra preparation time as long as the class is approached with traumatised learners in mind.

Introducing the elements of emotional literacy for learners and raising teachers' awareness of possible issues and the ways to tackle them can be beneficial in the ESOL classroom. It can be assumed that more could be done on creating narratives, poetry, or performing as these are needed for rehumanising and acknowledging the past. Not much attention is given to building a hopeful vision of the future, gaining critical awareness of the social system, meeting with community members, field trips and personalising learning according to learners' basic needs. Yet, for some, especially those who are newly arrived, the ESOL classroom can be that only place where the lost ability to dream, hope and take control can start being rebuilt. It is worth considering here how a participatory pedagogy (Bryers et al., 2014) can help learners to raise their voices about issues that are crucial for them, explore ideas, share experiences and plan actions while learning a language in a safe environment (Bryers et al., 2014).

Figure 5: A model for working with learners with trauma in the ESOL classroom



Lack of awareness about trauma-informed practices is perhaps the main issue at this stage. This research shows that there is interest in receiving training on trauma that would provide practical ways to support learners and additional information on integration.

In light of these findings, it is obvious that some displaced ESOL learners can undergo traumatic experiences that have a holistic effect. Lacking trust, knowledge and belief, these learners do not always seek mental health support. As such, teaching ESOL sometimes becomes inextricable from mental health. Moreover, as we cannot predict the impact of an event on a person, we also cannot predict the moment when 'the magic of healing' would start its work. For someone who has been traumatised, it is vital to re-connect with others, but most importantly to the self. Therefore, taking Bloom's Sanctuary Model (1995) as a basis, the authors of this article suggest the following trauma-responsive teaching model, 'I AM SELF':

Using this model, an ESOL teacher should be able to:

1. ***Identify*** the signs of trauma, its detrimental impact on the brain and second language learning.
2. ***Accept*** that some 'bad behaviours' can be symptoms of trauma. Integrate this into teaching practice to assist learners.
3. ***Manage*** the following concepts as central in planning a course and lessons through evidence-based strategies. Although this can require teachers' reflection and time, it can create a better learning environment and enhance learning not only for trauma survivors rather for all the learners.

- ***Safety*** (physical, psychological, social and moral) as a necessary condition for learning should be the primary goal of the ESOL classroom (e.g., setting the rules, boundaries, taking safe risks).
- ***Emotions*** To accommodate socio-emotional needs, teachers should work with emotions and feelings, talk about them, help learners understand how trauma affects the brain, how the body reacts and how to manage it. Helping learners to connect to their peers.
- ***Loss***. Appreciating the value of connection with others with a shared experience, designing learning activities to help create meaning, provide a space for stories and giving learners a voice. Make sure learners are represented. Consider boundaries and cultural aspects.
- ***Future***. Offer meaningful activities that can build/re-build the skills of

imagining the future/ building the vision of the future. Master the skills required in daily lives. Offer choices for participation and allowing learners to advocate for themselves. To reduce the sense of helplessness and re-gain agency over their own lives.

7. Conclusion

Resettlement can be a challenging and stressful process. Forced migration raises the possibilities of adult ESOL learners' experiences of psychological trauma intensified by post-migration stressors. Although not obliged, ESOL teachers could support these learners by introducing a trauma-responsive approach into their teaching practice. The study this article reports on provides an insight into the experiences of participating ESOL teachers working with learners who could have expereinced trauma, and a critical analysis of therapeutic aspects of the evidence-based strategies that could potentially be widely applied in the ESOL classroom. The research also points to a potential value of the I AM SELF model for creating a space for trauma healing and, as a result, better conditions for learning. Teachers are willing to support this process and for this purpose to develop professionally through training, workshops and sharing ideas.

This study suggests several courses for action. To create better conditions for second language acquisition, reflect learners' immediate needs and help learners regain control over their lives, the ESOL classroom needs to be trauma-responsive. Where possible, learners can be involved in co-producing the ESOL course content (eg. consultations) as equal participants with lived experience and real-life demands. There is an imperative for providing training on trauma to ESOL teachers as in-service teacher training, or as a part of teacher education in TESOL-related courses. This training should be tailored to the specifics of the adult ESOL classroom and possibly designed by specialists in both trauma therapy and teaching. It should provide teachers with the theory on how to understand their learners by recognising the signs of trauma and its impact on learning, and pedagogical suggestions on its implementation in the classroom. The elements of migrant studies would inform teachers on aspects of the integration process and specific to learners' cultural background information. A trauma-responsive ESOL classroom environment can benefit all learners, not only those who experienced trauma but also those impacted by their peers who have been

traumatized. Further research is needed to determine how adult ESOL learners can engage with trauma-informed pedagogies.

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