

The Formation of Social Capital for Refugee Students: An Exploration of ESOL Settings in Two Further Education colleges

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Contextualisation

This study explores the role of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classrooms as social networks that provide its members, the refugee students, with social capital, which could be used to ease their integration into British society.

Abstract: *This paper reports the findings of a pilot study that explored the contribution of Further Education colleges to refugee integration, by analysing the processes of social capital formation for refugee students.*

The findings confirmed ESOL students' diversity in terms of ethnicity, educational background and professional experiences and indicated that colleges as educational institutions do not differentiate between refugee and migrant students. In addition, colleges participating in this study were cooperating with the local community in order to promote the quality of ESOL provision and enabled social capital formation for refugee students.

Whether this social capital has any value for refugees' integration depends on refugee students' willingness to use this resource and their acceptance by the wider social structure.

Introduction

The refugee integration strategy recognises the importance of the English language for the successful integration of refugees into British society and entitles all refugees to access free English language courses. In addition, ESOL providers recognise that English language on its own is not sufficient for this process and additionally aims to provide information about social practices and British culture and to enable students' progress to further or higher education and employment.

The first part of this paper identifies the problems associated with refugee settlement and ESOL provision, and analyses the concept of social capital. The second part presents and discusses the study's findings in relation to social capital theory.

Throughout this paper, the term 'refugee' is used to refer to asylum seekers, to those who are allowed to stay in the UK on humanitarian grounds and to those who have been recognised as refugees. Exceptions are made in cases where legal distinctions are necessary to describe refugee students' differential entitlements.

Refugee settlement and English language training

Britain experienced from the early 1990s onwards a rapid increase in asylum applications by refugees fleeing from oppressive regimes and war (Bloch 1997, 2001, Rutter 2001). The 1951 Geneva Convention outlines that a refugee is recognised by a host country, if he or she can prove a 'well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion' by a state (UNHCR 1951, §1.2). However, this definition¹ leaves freedom for interpretation to signatory states and is therefore not only ambiguous, but does not account for the needs of current refugee populations (Ramajan 2002).

Hence, British law has developed a hierarchy of immigration statuses² that determine the fate of those seeking humanitarian protection. One major effect of this hierarchy is that it determines refugees' access to welfare provision (Bloch 2001, Rutter 2001).

Responding to the Geneva Convention³ and to EU policies⁴, Britain introduced in 2000 the refugee integration strategy known as 'Full and Equal Citizens'. In this strategy the government aims to support the integration process by helping refugees to develop their potential and contribute to the cultural and economic life of the country as equal members of society. The strategy's key targets are housing, education, employment and health and there is an emphasis on the involvement of local communities (Home Office 2000).

Vital to the success of this strategy is the ability of refugees to speak the English language because English language proficiency is the main determining factor for refugees' labour market activity (Bloch 2002, Bloch 2003). Recognising this, the Government currently entitles all refugees to access free English language training in the form of ESOL⁵.

In turn, the main ESOL providers⁶ are Further Education Colleges (Griffiths 2003) and they accept refugees as ESOL students under the scheme of Widening Participation - an initiative

¹ The 1951 Convention was to a large extent reflecting the refugee movements of the WWII aftermath and Cold War division between East and West. Responding to the fact that in many developing countries - now former colonies- uprising against colonial rule, ethnic conflict and human rights abuse could not be ignored, the 1967 Protocol removed limitations of the Convention to include these new refugee movements (Zetter 1999).

² British immigration law recognises as *asylum seekers* those who have crossed international borders and seek refugee status in a third country. If asylum seekers can prove their fitness to the 1951 Convention criteria, they are granted *refugee status*. In exceptional circumstances, asylum seekers may also be granted *Discretionary Leave to Remain* under the discretion of the Home Secretary for humanitarian reasons. After four years of DLR, holders are entitled to apply for permanent settlement. On the other hand, refugees arriving in quotas (e.g. Bosnians) are *temporarily protected* by the host country and are either resettled or repatriated (Levy 1999, Bloch 2001, Rutter 2001, Home Office 2003).

³ The Geneva Convention outlines the integration in the first country of asylum as one durable solution for refugees (UNHCR 1951).

⁴ In 1997 the European Commission began to address the socio-economic integration of refugees, by defining integration as "*a two-way process (whereby) immigrants change society at the same time as they integrate to it*" (ECRE 1998:13).

⁵ English language provision in the UK exists in two forms: i) *ESOL* (English for Speakers of Other Languages) and ii) *EFL* (English as a Foreign Language). The former is targeting ethnic minority populations living or intending to settle in Britain and the latter is targeting foreigners who learn English abroad or come for short visits to Britain (Barton and Pitt 2003).

⁶ Other ESOL providers are training and voluntary organisations (Griffiths 2003).

that enables the socially excluded to return to education⁷ (Smithers and Robinson 2000). However, evidence on ESOL provision has indicated that:

- Language provision offered by ESOL was found to be lower than the language skills required by educators and employers (Schellekens 2001).
- Refugee students were performing better than other ESOL students, but only a few reached an advanced level of English (Carr-Hill et al 1996).
- Younger and educated students had higher levels of proficiency, but were not prepared to lose their ethnic identity during the process of language learning (Khanna et al 1998).
- The cultural context of ESOL is influenced by competing ideologies of the liberal adult education and vocationally-oriented approach, under which the marginal status of ESOL is a reflection of the culture within adult education and subcultures within ESOL (such as literacy and basic skills instead of academic English) (Bellis 2000).

Furthermore, studies examining the settlement of refugees in Britain have highlighted the problems refugees face with English language learning. In particular, there is a difference between the quality of ESOL provision across levels, under which advanced ESOL courses improved the language skills of students and beginners' courses, which were insufficient to provide English for everyday living (Carey-Wood et al 1995, Duke 1996). Similarly, students experienced inadequate initial assessment procedures, while their progression depended on well-targeted language support, acquisition of study skills and knowledge of the educational system (McDonald 1995, 1998).

In addition, refugees regarded education as a vital step to gaining access to British society, (Preece and Walters 1999) and some students preferred teachers from their ethnic minority groups, while others saw ESOL courses as an opportunity for social interaction because of the absence of pre-existing ethnic social networks (Bloch 1997).

In an attempt to acknowledge the weaknesses of ESOL the government has set targets with regard to teacher training, funding and qualifications and introduced for the first time a curriculum⁸ that recognises the diversity of learners and emphasises communicative language teaching techniques (DfES 2000, BSA 2001). In addition, there is an emphasis on the cooperation between ESOL providers with Refugee Community Organisations⁹ (RCOs) and the wider community (Home Office 2000).

One of the latest developments that falls within the responsibilities of ESOL is the introduction of a citizenship test in English language, social history and culture for those who want to acquire British citizenship (Home Office 2002).

Despite that, Stein (1981) argues that when refugees enter the host society they primarily receive help by their ethnic communities in the first stages of settlement. In addition,

⁷ The refugee integration strategy applies only to DLR or Refugee Status holders. However, colleges as independent institutions from the Home Office, allow asylum seekers to study for free (Home Office 2000, Rutter 2001).

⁸ The Adult ESOL Core Curriculum was created after the recommendations of the report *Breaking the Language Barriers* (BSA 2001).

⁹ RCOs are usually established by refugees themselves or their pre-existing communities and their aim is to provide individuals with a collective voice by networking and cooperation with other agencies (Zetter and Pearl 2000).

refugees rely on their ethnic networks for employment (Carey-Wood et al 1995, Schellekens 2001), advocacy and opportunities for social interaction (Zetter and Pearl 2000, AET 2002).

Often, 'newcomers' to a country prefer to find employment within ethnic enclaves that are unavailable in the external labour market because of the bounded solidarity towards their co-ethnics (Portes 1995). This solidarity is also evident in refugees' preference for ESOL teachers from their own ethnic communities (Bloch 1997) and their preference to ESOL courses run by RCOs (AET 2002).

On the other hand, ESOL provision ideally aims to further the integration process and ESOL settings are the first 'British' institutional networks that accept refugees as equal members, irrespective of their immigration status. In addition, within the 'ESOL network' refugees have not only the opportunity to interact with other people, but also to learn about British culture and society.

However, the function of ESOL settings as social networks has not been investigated and the concept of social capital has the potential to explore this function, as well as to identify ways in which ESOL settings are furthering refugees' successful settlement in Britain.

Social capital theory

Generally, the concept of social capital turns its attention to the importance of social relationships and values that must be maintained in order to preserve social stability (Wall et al 1998, Schuller et al 2000).

It refers to the ability of individuals to secure benefits through the investment in their membership in social networks, under which equal emphasis is given to both, the social relationships that enable individuals to access resources or benefits, as well as to the quality of these resources (Portes 1998). This investment is twofold: firstly, through the strengthening of a social network's internal relationships, the members' collective identity and capacity for collective action is strengthened; secondly, through the strengthening of a social network's external relationships, both the network and its members gain access to information, power and identity (Adler and Kwon 2000).

Moreover as an idea, social capital has its roots in the works of Durkheim, Weber and Simmel, but as a contemporary theoretical concept, it has gone through a parallel development in European and North American sociology (Portes and Sensebrenner 1993, Wallet et al 1998).

Specifically, Bourdieu described social capital as the aggregate of resources that are linked to a network and are available to its members (Bourdieu 1986). Social capital emerged from his interest in social space as one type of non-economic capital among other forms of capital - human capital, cultural capital, symbolic capital, linguistic capital etc - and its instances at both the structural and individual level. Siisiainen (2000) argues that for Bourdieu, the quality of social capital depended on the strength of a social relationship, within which social capital becomes effective only if the differences between the members of a network are being transformed into symbolic differences.

Furthermore, Coleman explored the relations between social and human capital in order to make sociology coherent with rational choice theory. The concept of social capital provided him with an explanation for the relationship between educational achievement and social inequality. He described social capital as a set of resources that inhere in family relations and

in community organisation, which are useful for the cognitive or social development of a child or young person. He identified the allocation of (legal) rights to individuals and corporations as the cause of the creation or destruction of social capital, because structural changes shift rights from some social actors to others (Coleman 1988a, 1988b, Schuller et al 2000).

However, it was Putnam who entered the concept of social capital into mainstream political discourse. Putnam saw in social capital the level of civicness and associated it with the features of social life - networks, norms and trust - that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives. He measured social capital by voting patterns, newspaper readerships and participation in sports and cultural associations in order to link governmental performance to the degree to which social and political life approached the civic ideal. Although Putnam believed that social capital is incompatible with levels of inequality, he accepted that it might have negative consequences for the members of the network and society at large (Putnam 2000, Wall et al 1998, Schuller et al 2000).

Hence, social capital as a theoretical concept has been widely deployed in the social sciences. However, problems have surfaced. One problem is the weakness to develop a unique definition for the concept as there is a confusion regarding its focus and interpretation (Wall et al 1998, Schuller et al 2000).

A further problem is that the tendency to see social capital as a social asset prohibits the discovery of its negative effects (Portes and Landolt 1996), which have been identified by Portes (1998) as the following:

- A closed network with strong ties may exclude outsiders.
- The closure of a community may prevent the success of personal or business initiatives of its members.
- Solidarity in a closed network or community may restrict individual freedom because of its social control over individuals.
- Within a network that is in opposition to mainstream society, members are being kept together by downward levelling norms.

Therefore, caution is needed if attempts are being made to connect social capital with positive effects, because these effects could be spurious or could be explained by alternative theories (Portes 2000, Portes and Mooney 2002).

Nevertheless, Adler and Kwon (2000) refer to social capital as a 'collective good', due to its non-competitive use, and associate it with benefits, such as access to information at lower cost, the reduction of social control in closed networks with strong norms and the positive externalities for the network through information benefits. In addition, Sandefur and Laumann (1998) argue that the form of social capital is determined by a social relationship's structural form and content, under which one form of social capital can confer both, benefits and risks for different individuals. Also, Portes (1995) believes that the value of social capital lies in the fact that the resources available to members of a network are non-repayable gifts, which will be returned in a different form because of the expectation of reciprocity. Yet as a gift, social capital becomes a potentiality, because when it is exchanged, it changes form (Smart 1993).

In this study social capital refers to the resources that are available to refugee ESOL students through their participation in ESOL courses. Following the refugee integration strategy, an attempt has been made to view the ESOL setting as a hierarchical network that

works together with other networks towards the objective of integrating refugees into British society.

Emphasis was given to analysing the process of the social capital formation, assuming that social capital can be formed only if trustful relationships between individuals in a network are present and members follow the networks' norms. The process of English language learning is not investigated, as this is linguistic capital.

ESOL provision for refugees in two FE Colleges

The colleges selected for this study were chosen because of their long history of ESOL provision. Both, East and South East College, are located in predominantly working class London boroughs with a strong presence of ethnic minority as well as refugee populations.¹⁰

The study adopted a case study design, aiming to explore the ESOL setting through social capital theory. Data were collected through questionnaires, participant observation, in-depth interviews with teachers and group interviews with refugee and migrant students. While the findings presented in this study only reflect the participant colleges at a particular time, the value of this study is in its exploratory and tentative nature, which enables us to identify the ways in which ESOL settings contribute to refugee integration (Dimitriadou 2004).

The ESOL student in Further Education

Qualitative and quantitative findings indicated that colleges did not differentiate between refugee and migrant students' immigration statuses. A typical ESOL classroom consisted of refugee students and migrant students from Asia, Africa and Europe. The 78 students came from 28 different countries and the dominant ethnic groups were Vietnamese (17.6%) and Sri Lankan (11.8%) in South East College, and Somali (29.6%) and Bangladeshi (29.6%) in East College.

Out of the 78 students, 41 (52.6%) sought asylum on entry into Britain. 26.8% of those were still waiting for a decision on their applications, 36.6% were granted DLR, 22% were holding refugee status and 9.8% acquired the British citizenship. South East College had a higher proportion of students who sought asylum (64.7%) than East College (29.6%). On the contrary, the latter had a higher proportion of students who were British citizens (44.4%) than South East College (23.5%).

Turning now to students' educational background, the vast majority completed primary school (80.8%) and most completed secondary school (65.4%). In addition, less than half reported to have continued studying (39.7%), and one third held professional qualifications (32.1%). Also, the majority of students (51.3%) did not study English before coming to the UK, although about half spoke a second language. The vast majority believed that their English had improved since they started studying ESOL at the college.

Moreover, teachers interviewed for this study confirmed that legal differentiations on immigration statuses were not adopted by colleges:

¹⁰ Attention has been taken to protect the identity of participants in this study and therefore the names of institutions and students/teachers are not revealed throughout this paper

'They are already stigmatised by the Home Office or the media, but within the education system, you don't want to perpetuate that stigma. You want to do the opposite, you want to make them feel that they are people. They are here to learn, they can overcome their problems, need help and we are here to help them.'

Both colleges were providing ESOL for free. As teachers explained, usually a student has to reside for three years in the UK in order to be considered for free ESOL courses. Those who were in the UK for less than three years had to pay full overseas fees. However, an exception was usually made for asylum seekers. Also, European Union students were accepted at ESOL courses as well, as long as they could convince the college that they intended to stay in the UK.

Colleges were in a position to afford the provision of free ESOL courses to a high number of students, because ESOL students attracted higher funding than other students. Despite that, colleges encountered difficulties in recruiting students for higher-level ESOL courses, such as for academic English, because of low demand from students.

Trust, friendships and classroom rules

Although there was a positive working relationship between the students in all classrooms, there were some differences in student interaction between ESOL levels. In particular, at lower levels students tended to communicate more with their co-ethnics using their mother tongue. Although this was expected for those who had a poor command of English, even when a group was asked to practise 'speaking' during the lesson, many students had difficulties and continued to use their first language. In spite of that, a Chinese student reported that she used her first language during the lesson in order to translate or explain something to her co-ethnic friend. On the other hand, students from higher-level courses communicated almost entirely in English. At one instance, when a student spoke in Russian to her friend during the lesson, she translated the conversation to the group.

Most teachers agreed that they encountered difficulties in persuading the students to communicate in English:

'The truth is you have to make an effort to get them to mix in the classroom (...). On the lower levels, there seem to be far more ethnic blocks (...), the tendency is to stay within [the ethnic blocks]. On the higher level courses (...) we have a larger mix [of ethnicities] and the students really like it I think, and it changes (...) how they interact and work together.'

Nevertheless, this observation varied slightly between the colleges. There were two dominant ethnic groups of students in East College, but in South East College the ethnicities in a classroom were more diverse. Hence, most students from the latter college had fewer opportunities to communicate in their language during the lesson. Instead, those with poor English relied on other means of communication. Interestingly, students saw the 'multinational' group as an opportunity for interaction. As one Afghani student explained:

We are happy because in a class, there are for example 19 students from different countries [and] we are happy to know each other and talking to each other about his country and about his culture (...), about all the world.'

Similarly, a Kosovan student believed that he was lucky:

'We can learn much more about culture and tradition (...), now we [can] have conversations as friends. It's a small class and we have more time to talk to each other, to know better each other and if you know better someone, you can trust him and you can call him as a friend.'

However, when students were asked if they had friends outside the classroom or the college, all agreed that it was difficult to establish friendships with other students from the college, except if these students were from their own ethnic groups or other ethnic minorities.

Teachers referred to practical difficulties they faced in encouraging student interaction. One difficulty was the lack of students' confidence to engage in a conversation in English due to the fact that most did not use English language outside the classroom or college. Another difficulty was to create group trust in a short period of time because of the ethnic and cultural differences of students. A teacher from South East College reported that he used humour in order to break down barriers and create trust. Interestingly, another teacher from East College compared trust with teacher authority and believed that it was the latter that enabled him to overcome the distrust of students.

'People do develop a certain degree of trust, but of course, how far does it go? I don't know. Sometimes people are reluctant to tell you what is going on in their lives.'

Yet, students had a different view:

'The teacher treats us in different way, not as students but as a friend and tries to teach us, not just to do his job.'

Similarly, a teacher from South East College reported that many students would approach him and seek advice about their personal problems during tutorials. He believed that this was an effect of trust:

'It's all to do of how, the rapport they have with the teacher; they trust you if they like you, if they like your methods (...) and they work together.'

Moreover students were aware of their obligations towards their group and the norms or rules that came with their ESOL placement.

The major classroom rule was the use of English during the lesson. Students were constantly reminded to speak English by posters hanging in the classrooms, by their teachers and on higher-level courses, by their fellow students. Thus, the higher the ESOL level, the higher was the students' perception of their obligation to use the English language. In addition, students were reminded by teachers that they were obliged to do their homework and to attend lessons regularly. During a discussion about attendance, a teacher explained that if there were high drop out rates, he could not meet the targets set by the college.

Furthermore, students felt that they had reciprocal obligations towards one another as friends. Thus, they wanted to help their fellow students by offering support or listening to the other's personal history. When a new student joined the group during one observation, all students attempted to communicate with him. One student said that it was important to know about the experience of the newcomer:

'I asked our new friend (...), I asked him about Iraq and when he came here. My question was, did he come now (...), when he was taken out (...), if he has been persecuted by Saddam's regime.'

Some teachers thought it was necessary to let these stories be heard in the classroom. Others decided to concentrate on students' lives in the UK. One teacher incorporated the students' personal stories in relation to current news in the lesson plan as a 'speaking' exercise and another teacher reflected during lessons on his own experience as a migrant and as a member of a cultural minority in the UK.

Institutional networks, information exchange and access to resources

Students at both colleges had different experiences in accessing an ESOL course. This was caused by the over subscription for certain ESOL courses, especially at beginners' level. For instance, some students reported that they waited a few weeks for a placement, while others waited for a whole year. Also, a few students were placed at ESOL classes of the colleges' community outreach centres before entering mainstream ESOL provision.

Furthermore both colleges were liaising with the local community. Whilst teachers from East College reported that they were aware of college staffs' liaison with ethnic minority groups, they did not know particular details. However, Griffiths (2003) highlighted that the college in question operated an outreach system through the network 'ESOL Community Forum', aiming to promote the quality of ESOL in the particular borough. Nevertheless the study pointed to the absence of RCOs in the particular area, consequently the college's direct cooperation with local refugee communities was not possible.

Teachers from South East College reported the college's partnership with the local RCO and at least one local Christian charity. When the RCOs1 education advisor was invited to comment on the partnership with South East College, he explained that the RCO provided advice on immigration and welfare issues, as well as financial assistance in the form of travel cards to refugee students.

Despite that, the education advisor emphasised that the initial agreement of the partnership was the coordination of pre-entry ESOL classes as well as the provision of travel cards.

'We provided the clients, we also provided the venue; they [the college] provided the teacher staff, the resources; and they also provided the examinations.'

However, after two years the negotiations broke down, firstly because of the RCO's financial constraints and secondly because of the RCO's inability to secure ESOL placements for its clients at the South East College. As the education advisor explained:

'We have been discussing with [South East College] and they do operate [on] a first come - first serve [basis]. And anybody who wants to enrol in classes [has] to be registered; and then [the college] will invite the student for an interview on that basis. So, there is no way we can actually intervene, but we can actually inform the clients to seek help (...). We cannot influence that list to make priority our clients. So, when we send them to [South East] College, they will wait in that list until their names come up.'

Currently, the partnership between South East College and the local RCO changed its form. Specifically, the RCO has stopped the provision of pre-entry ESOL classes, but it still covers students' travel expenses. Because of financial constraints, the RCO now receives a grant from a local Christian charity for the expenses. The college determines the eligibility of students following the RCO's eligibility criteria. In addition, the college informs about and refers refugee students to the RCO if they need welfare or immigration advice.

Furthermore, students at both colleges could access information about educational issues and qualifications through the education advisor of the college and information and support about social problems from the student counsellor. Despite that, students who needed advice would approach their teacher, sometimes during the lesson. Teachers in turn referred the students to the relevant advisor in the college.

Information was also exchanged between the students in classrooms, for instance a student, a former lawyer from Kosovo, routinely informed other refugee students about changes in asylum and immigration law. Also, favourite subjects for discussion among the students were international news, their social problems, their teachers and the effectiveness of specific ESOL courses offered by the college.

Moreover, the college provided various resources to ESOL students: Firstly, students received learning resources, such as books, photocopies, folders and paper, and had also full access to the colleges' library and IT centre. Secondly, in some instances, the participation on ESOL enabled some students to access benefits. Thirdly, both colleges were providing specialist higher-level ESOL courses that were designed for professionals and emphasised employability skills.

South East College was running a one year 'Office Skills' ESOL class and targeted students who wanted to work in offices. Throughout the course, the college arranged for work placements in local business and organisations. Similarly, East College was running a six-month 'Fast Track ESOL Professional1 course, in which students were acquiring skills to increase their employability. For example, they learned how to read job advertisements, how to write CVs and fill out job applications and how to behave in job interviews. Students had to undergo work experience in the local community and were attached to a mentor from their placement, who was informing the teacher about a student's progress. Although most students in these courses aimed to find employment, some seriously considered continuing with further or higher education.

Finally, after completion of ESOL, students are able to provide prospective employers with references from their ESOL teachers. Lack of references is usually the most frequent reason for immigrants' or refugees' unemployment or employment in their ethnic communities (Bloch 2002). Thus, through their participation in ESOL courses many students are able to satisfy future employers, even if their English is not proficient.

The social capital of refugee ESOL students

Findings presented in this paper describe the process of social capital formation for refugee ESOL students in further education colleges.

A network can provide its members with social capital if the relationships between its members are based on trust. Indeed, in this study a positive and trustful relationship among ESOL students and their teachers was identified. Students regarded themselves as friends, but the teachers referred to the difficulties faced in attempts to create a trustful environment.

This might be the case because of the nature of refugee students. Hynes (2003) argues that upon arrival 'refugees mistrust everybody they encounter' (p7), but trust is reconstituted when the refugee is being incorporated into a new culture and society. However, the character of trust is reflexive, because trust building in a relationship depends on the emotional state and the perception of a collective social reality for the individuals involved, and relies on the information that is exchanged between individuals (Nuissl 2002). The ESOL teachers used personal histories of students, so that they could understand students' social reality and emotional state in order to move forward and concentrate on learning.

However, this group trust and consequently social capital can be broken by external factors, such as the change of law (Coleman 1988b). One of these factors identified in this study was the contradiction of immigration and welfare policies: Firstly, according to current immigration and asylum law (Home Office 2002), the government can disperse asylum-seekers throughout the UK or repatriate them on a short notice. Thus, students are being removed from classes without having the chance to complete their courses. Secondly, the job centre outlines that a job seeker cannot study over 16 hours per week, otherwise he or she cannot actively seek employment. Similarly, if the job centre finds employment for a person, he or she has to accept this job and consequently, has to stop the course. In both cases, if unemployed persons do not comply with these rules, their benefits will be withdrawn. Thus, there is the possibility that ESOL class sizes will get smaller during the duration of the course and this affects the friendships being formed in the classroom and subsequently, level of trust students have towards the college and the wider society.

Furthermore, the ESOL setting as a network enables the students to access resources, if they comply with the college's rules. In this study it was identified that the students from higher-level courses had a higher awareness of their obligations towards their teacher and the college than those from beginner's courses. The resource with the highest value for the job market was obviously the ESOL certificate, which was celebrated with a graduation ceremony - even though teachers and students stated that the main reasons for students' incapacity to follow the college's norms were their migration experience and their lives in exile.

Indeed, as refugees flee from war or persecution, they leave behind them everything: their relatives, their socio-economic status and their past social identity (Joly 1996, Summerfield 1999). Consequently, the experience of torture, loss, downward mobility and identity crisis is highly reflected in the rates of psychiatric disorder among refugee populations (Hein 1993, Murphy et al 2002). Some students in this study admitted that they could not concentrate on learning or working because of their psychological problems, inflicted during their flight and journey to the UK.

Similarly, the experience of exile is unique. The exiled person is trapped between the desire to return to the home country and the reality to settle in the country of asylum, and is therefore unable to commit to the future (De Santis 2001). In addition, this situation is reinforced when the structures of a host country does not tolerate ethnic minorities (Joly 1996). For example, the stereotypical representation of the refugee as 'bogus' by the British media (Kundnani 2001) is a prohibiting factor to refugees' settlement in Britain. Some students interviewed for this study confirmed that due to media representation and political interventions they have lost their confidence not only to reach their previous socio-economic status, but also to function as successful individuals in Britain.

Nevertheless, one factor that may positively change the refugees' psychological state is the granting of refugee status. Some students who were refugee status holders admitted that they were able now to look to the future. So, they saw the ESOL course as an opportunity given to them by the British state and wanted to enter the labour market as soon as possible. They were aware of the difficulties in practicing their former occupations in Britain and therefore, planned to enter further education or take on jobs for which they were overqualified.

Thus, the psychological state, asylum politics and the wider social structure of the host society influence to a large extent refugees' motivation to settle in the country of asylum. Yet, during the settlement process the ESOL setting can ease adjustment in the host society by enabling them to interact with other students and build friendships and by providing them with resources that are not available outside the ESOL environment.

It can be concluded from the above that ESOL settings as networks can facilitate the formation of social capital for refugee students. The social capital of the ESOL setting has the potential to enhance refugee students' employability and willingness to settle in British society. However, their successful social integration depends not only on refugees' willingness to access and use their social capital, but also on the wider society.

Conclusion

This study highlighted the process of social capital formation for refugee ESOL students by exploring ESOL settings in two further education colleges. It identified that colleges did not differentiate between immigration statuses or educational backgrounds of students. In addition, it found that resources were offered to students and colleges were cooperating with the wider local community in order to increase the quality of ESOL provision.

Further, there was a positive interaction between students in the classroom. In the lower level classes, friendships tended to be formed more frequently among students from the same ethnic minority, but on the higher-level courses there was more intense interaction among all students. Teachers referred to the difficulties they faced to create classroom trust in order to foster student interaction. Finally, although all students did not follow the main classroom rule, they understood their obligations towards the college, their teachers and their group. Thus, the findings indicate the potential of the ESOL classroom as a site of social capital formation for students.

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