Beyond Resilience: Facilitating Learning and Well-Being in the Refugee Language Classroom

An Enquiry-Based Study of ELT Provision for Refugees in a UK University

Presenting today:

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21st April 2023

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Palanac, A., Hunt, S., Rogerson-Revell, P., Cajkler, W., & Witthaus, G. (2023). Beyond resilience: Facilitating learning and wellbeing in the refugee language classroom. British Council. Available online: doi.org/10.57884/6SN8-AF69

(publication web page: https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/publications/case-studies-insights-and-research/beyond-resilience-facilitating-learning-and-well)
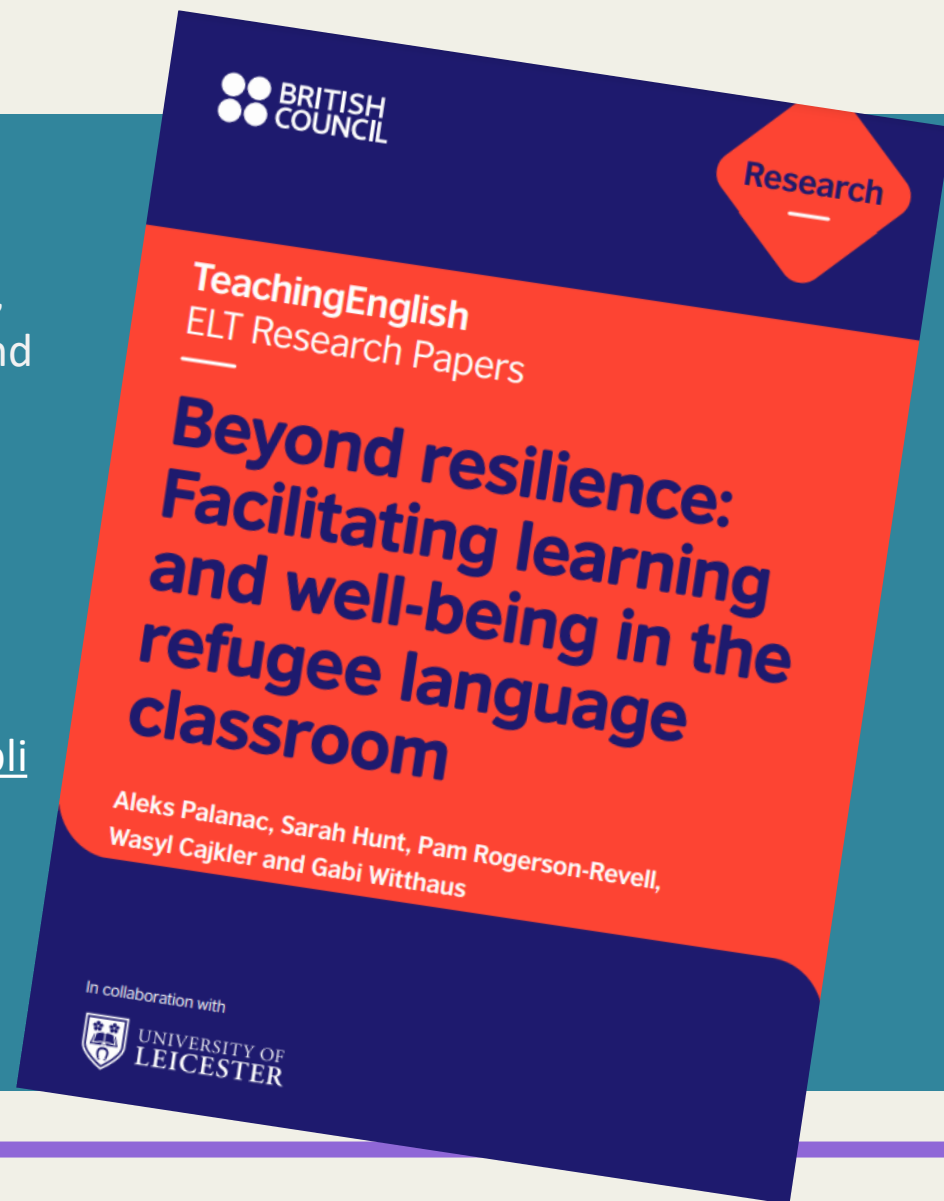
Outline

- the context, challenge and RQs of this study
- research design
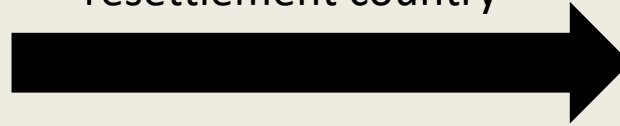- our findings and recommendations
- conclusions

1. Context, challenge and RQs of this study

Context

By the end of 2021, 90 million people worldwide had been forcibly displaced (UNHCR, 2022)

learning language of resettlement country →

functioning in daily life / 'integration' / navigating services

making friends / building networks

gaining employment

accessing FE/HE and training

The Challenge (in a nutshell)

refugees tend to have a **far greater mental health need** than the general population, with higher incidences of **depression, anxiety and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder** (Fazel et al, 2005)

↓

PTSD has a direct **detrimental effect** on refugee **language learning** (Furneaux, 2018)

↓

many English language teachers feel **unable to support** refugee-background students adequately (Capstick and Delaney, 2016)

↓

very little research and practitioner training exists with this focus (trauma-informed ELT for adult refugees – facilitating both learning AND well-being)

Research Questions

1. Can **English language provision** facilitate **Psychological Well-Being** in a University of Sanctuary setting, and, if so, **in what ways**?

2. What **skills, strategies and resources** do language teachers need in order to optimise the **psycho-social and linguistic experiences** of their refugee learners?

3. In relation to RQ2, what constitutes **good practice** in **ELT provision for refugees** in a University of Sanctuary context, both at present and in the future?

2. Research design

Research Design : What, who and when?

What?

- UoL's English language provision:
  - Leicester City of Sanctuary ESOL classes (non-formal, 1.5-3 hours per week)
  - UoL's pre-sessional (academic) English classes (formal, full time)

Who?

- 41 refugee-background students (including 6 case students)
  - 3:1 male:female
  - 1/3 refugee status, 1/3 claiming asylum, 1/3 LLR / Ankara Agreement / 'other'
  - under half were in UK for under a year
  - More than 2/3 had been studying English with us for under 6 months
  - Most were educated to university level in their country of origin
- 6 teachers of refugee-background students

When?

- Data collection – between Jan and Sept 2020
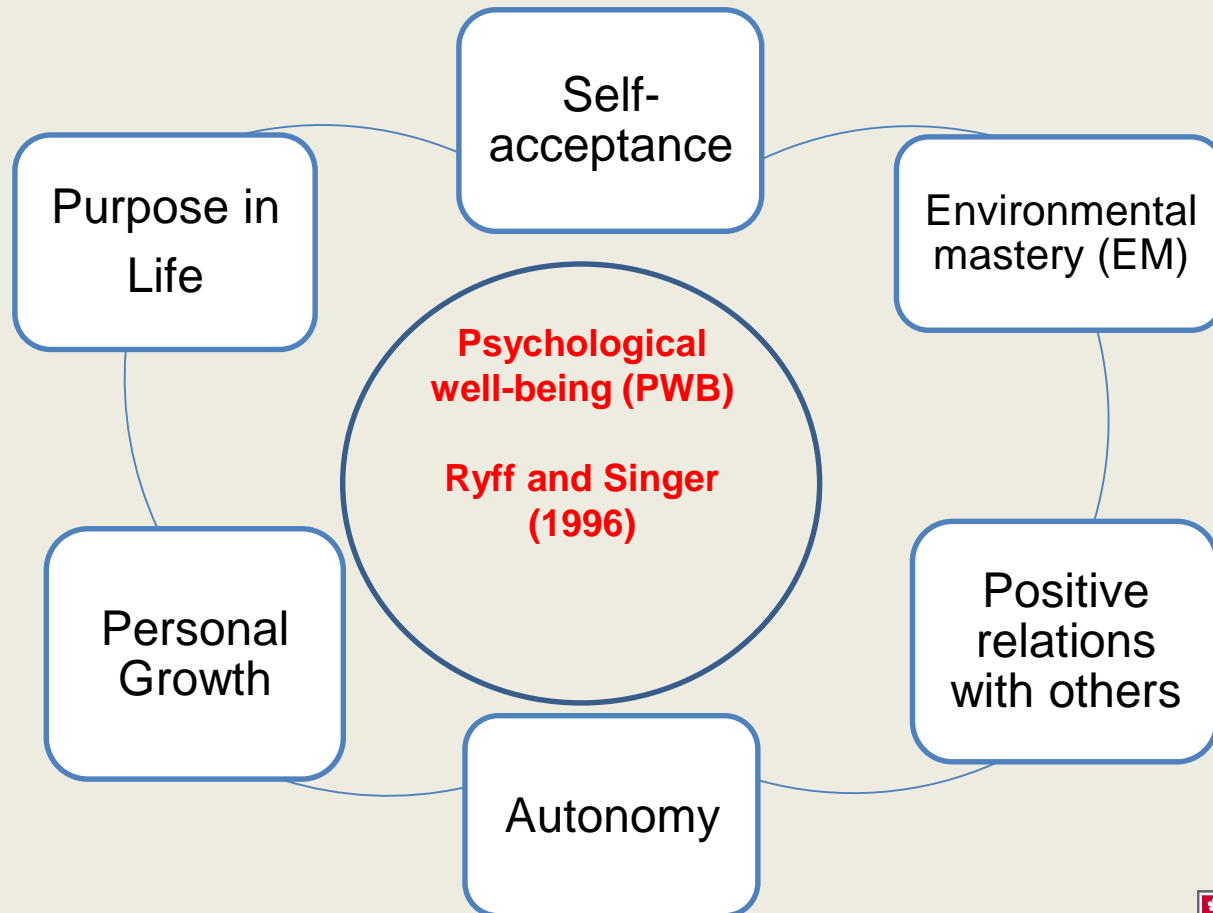- Analysis and write up – between Oct 2020 and Dec 2021

Research Design: Methodological Framework

Multi-disciplinary approach:

Education – Lesson Study (e.g. Cajkler et al, 2013)

Applied Linguistics - Oxford's (2011) Strategic Self-Regulation (S^2R) Model of Language Learning –

Psychology - Ryff and Singer's (1996) six dimensions of psychological well-being

Research Design: Mixes Methods

- **Phase 1: Quantitative (Jan/Feb 2020)**

  Student Questionnaires (f2f)

  - **Part 1: About You** – demographics, background, etc

  - **Part 2: In Your English Class** – information about RBSs' experiences/feelings in English classes
    - Oxford's (2011) Strategic Self-Regulation (S^2R) Model of Language Learning - framework of strategies and meta-strategies in the cognitive, affective and sociocultural-interactive dimensions
    - Harvard Trauma Questionnaire 5 Part IV

  - **Part 3: How do you feel about yourself now?** - self-report of changes in levels of functioning and psychological well-being (PWB) since leaving home country
    - Joseph et al's (2012) Psychological Wellbeing-Post-Traumatic Changes Questionnaire (PWB-PTCQ) – slightly adapted
    - Ryff and Singer's (1996) six dimensions of Psychological Well-Being.

Research Design: Mixed Methods

Phase 2: Qualitative (March 2020)

- **3 Lesson Study classroom observations (f2f)**
    - Input/training:
        - Trauma training workshops
        - Lesson Study orientation workshop
    - Research lesson planning meetings (3 tutor pairs)
    - Teaching/observation of research lesson
    - Lesson evaluation meetings (3 pairs of tutors)
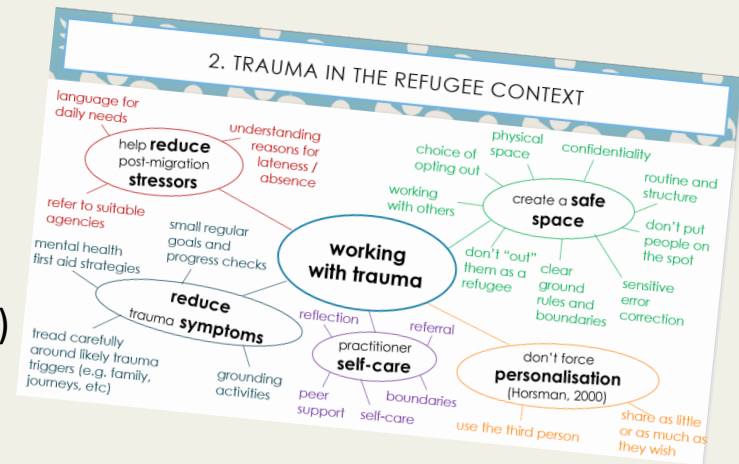
Phase 3: Qualitative (June-Sept 2020)

- **tutor focus group (online – 90 minutes)**
    - 5 tutors' experience of participation in project (e.g. usefulness of training, impact on practice, etc)
    - Mix of open and closed questions
    - Qs based on – RQs, SQs, trauma training, themes/insights from LS data

- **student interviews (online)**
    - 6 students - 3 via Zoom (two with video and one with audio) + 3 via telephone
    - Interview guide approach (pre-specified topics + questions, re-worded if needed)
    - Qs based on – RQs, SQs, trauma training, themes/insights from LS data

3. Findings & Recommendations

RQ1 - Can English language provision facilitate Psychological Well-Being in a University of Sanctuary setting, and, if so, in what ways?
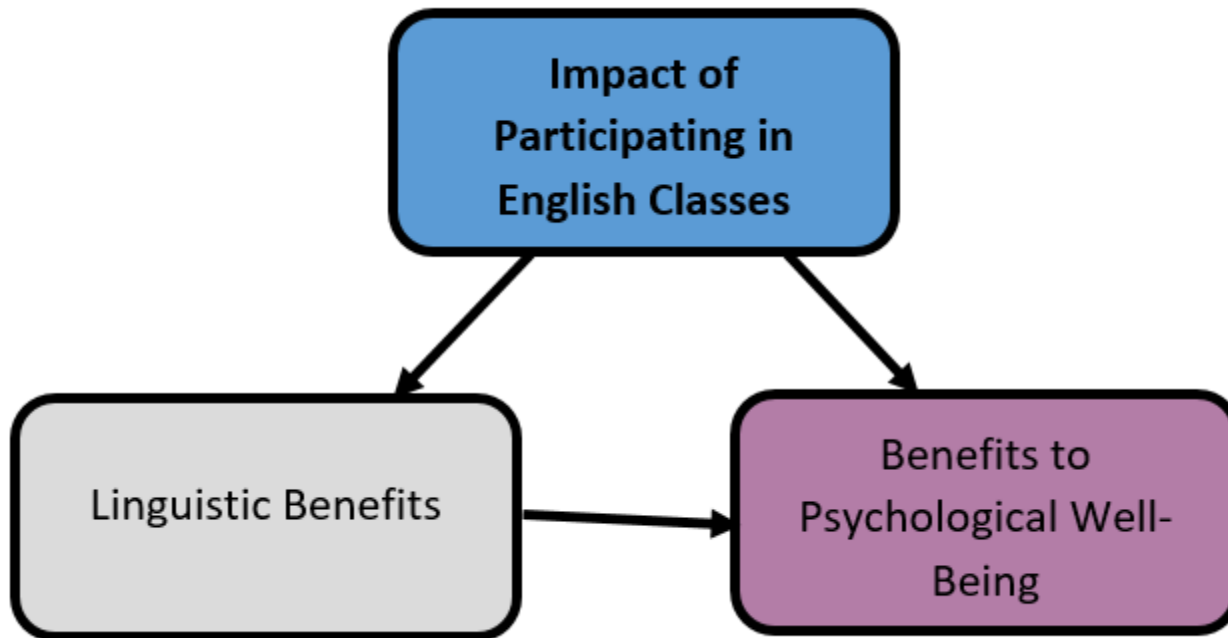
Findings: RQ1 – Linguistic benefits

General English

- proficiency improving
  - 80% always/often in SQs
  - all 6 case students – esp S,L,W

Academic English

- proficiency improving (all students on PSP)
- seen as offering an invaluable opportunity and progression route (as opposed to college ESOL classes)

"I feel that, and my family say that, your English improved in your class" (Omar)

"I learned how … can I communicate" (Jamal)

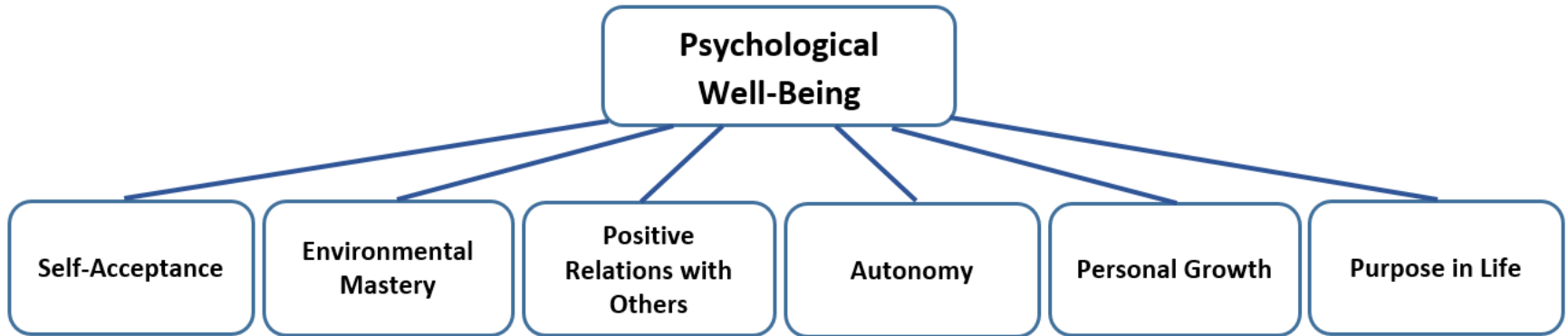"general English … help me … deal with life" (Fareed)

"it's really an excellent course … I do many course of English, but this one is more academic and well-prepare you to next step which is very good" (Munir)

Findings: RQ1 – Benefits to PWB

Psychological Well-Being Model (Ryff & Singer, 1996)

- Part 3 questionnaire data demonstrated:

  - both increases and decreases in PWB since leaving home country across the cohort for every item (with Environmental Mastery scoring low most often)

  - but increases significantly out-scored corresponding decreases overall

- Students attributed increases in PWB to their English classes in their interview responses

Findings: RQ1 – Benefits to PWB (self-acceptance)

- All 6 case students demonstrated positive attitudes towards themselves (Eng. level, confidence, independence, positivity)

- All could identify areas for improvement too

- A number of Ss expressed discomfort re thinking/talking about past lives in class

"I think I feel confidence, it's easy. I can speak now with anyone easily. I can write something without help, without my son help … It makes feel good for me" (Omar)

"it's not comfortable for me … about my personality, about my life, what I did, what I was in my country … there is no way, if you talk about my personal life, there is no way I can feel comfortable" (Omar)

Self-Acceptance:

holding positive attitudes towards oneself and one's past life, which is a central feature of good mental health as well as an important element of self-actualisation, optimal functioning and maturity

Findings: RQ1 – Benefits to PWB (environmental mastery)

- All 6 case students indicated their EM had increased in one or more respects due to attending classes

- Some (but not all) were also able to use various meta-strategies in lang. learning

- However, all 4 students on PSPs also emphasised importance of:

  - External factors facilitating access (e.g. fee waivers)

  - Knowledge of opportunities

  - Accessing help when needed

"When I was came to UK, I couldn't go to outside just myself ... Always I feel depend other person and I feel very bad myself. But now, I can go everywhere just alone ... just myself ... er ... I think it's better. I feel happy because I can do my jobs ... I can go market, supermarket, hospital, everywhere now" (Sumeyye)

"when we finished early on Friday we not go direct home, sometimes we go to University of Leicester, we met new students, we sit with them, we introduced ourselves, so (laughs) ... I made a lot of new friends there ..." (Munir)

Environmental Mastery:

an individual's ability to actively identify and take opportunities to "manipulate and control complex environments" through physical or mental activity in order to progress in the world

Findings: RQ1 – Benefits to PWB (positive relations with others)

Case students highly valued opps to:

- meet and communicate with others

- expand social networks

- Learn from peers (though one struggled with supporting others)

In SQ (Part 2 – In Your English Class), Socio-cultural-Interactive domain scored highest overall:

E.g. I feel welcome in my class (88% - always/often)

I am happy to work with other students in class (90% - always/often)

"In group, or as a pair, you can learn something from others … about their country, about their culture, about their religion, they can, they explain something in other way … this is a chance for learn something" (Fareed)

"If my friends level better than me, I like to work together because they help me. But if my friends level less than me, I feel very stressful because, er, I'm not sure about my information. Er, I think maybe I can say wrong things … The reason is, erm, my, erm, my uncomfortable feelings" (Sumeyye)

Positive Relations with Others:

the ability to form "warm, trusting interpersonal relations", to have the ability to feel empathy and affection for all human beings, and to exercise "generativity", which involves the "guidance and direction of others"

Findings: RQ1 – Benefits to PWB (autonomy)

- All case students indicated increased sense of agency + independence

- Some Ss used of specific learning strats + meta-strats from Oxford's (2011) S2R model:
  - Seeking opps to practise English (SI)
  - Reframing challenges as opps (MA)
  - Actively generalising strategies (MC)

- But others needed ongoing support

- In SQ (Part 2 – In Your English Class), Cognitive domain scored lowest overall:

  E.g. I check my work for mistakes (61% - always/often)

  I plan how to improve my work next time (68% - always/often)

"we learning that you can plan in advance … so before you start anything you have to put your plan - one, two, three - and then you have to follow this step by step" (Munir)

"when I … make a target … maybe it's gonna be like a wrong decisions … When I be with … like, in a group … or with a teacher … like, by, by, er … their advice maybe I will choose … a good way to be … like to reach my goals as well or something like that" (Jamal)

Autonomy:

the qualities of self-determination, independence and the regulation of behaviour from within – evaluating oneself by personal standards without looking to others for approval, which includes a "resistance to enculturation"

Findings: RQ1 – Benefits to PWB (purpose in life)

4 case students – increased purpose + direction:

- keep occupied

- stave off depression

- progression pathway to university

- proximity to university community

- strong goal of HE study > higher motivation levels during pandemic

".. if it's not ELTU, maybe to be honest I be in depression because you know, er ... when I was asylum, it's very hard situation, to be honest. If we are doing nothing, like, without studying, without anything, it's gonna be like too hard …" (Jamal)

"Now, I feel confident, and, erm, feel … my life is going in the right direction, because you know ... the sanctuary classes, and, er ... you know, it's open your mind because you, and, er, you're near the, the, the high class of education … you see the teachers from university. You see the student going to study at university ... around those people, they can give you more hope" (Fareed)

Purpose in Life:

a clear subjective sense that one's life holds purpose and meaning, which leads to the formation of "goals, intentions and a sense of direction"

Findings: RQ1 – Benefits to PWB (personal growth)

Attending classes > development of elements of 'growth mindset' (Dweck, 2006):

- 3 ss saw challenge as a means to grow and learn

- 5 ss wished to improve themselves through learning from peers

However, different attitudes towards risks + mistakes in speaking:

- 2 ss felt comfortable speaking in class and receiving feedback

- 2 others overly fixated on correctness + felt stressed

"it was very challenge, but, I mean, if someone have objective to achieve, you have to challenge yourself" (Munir)

"Er, sometimes I can't find the true words. Er, sometimes I I couldn't feel myself, I couldn't feel myself, er, relax. Er, I mean, I'm usually feel myself in stressful. I want to speak fluently and correctly" (Sumeyye)

"normally I have obsessive behaviour. Therefore, … communication speaking very, very difficult for me, because all, all puzzle it must be same time ... speaking skills very difficult for me" (Mehmet)

Personal Growth:

continually striving to grow and expand as a person, to develop one's potential and move towards self-actualisation. This involves being open to new experiences and challenges, and "continually developing, rather than achieving a fixed state wherein all problems are solved"

Findings + Recommendations: RQ2

RQ2. What skills, strategies and resources do language teachers need in order to optimise the psycho-social and linguistic experience of their refugee learners?

- Supporting students to employ effective learning strategies

- Fostering supportive peer interaction

- Sensitivity and responsiveness to RBSs' needs

Findings + Recs: RQ2 (facilitating effective learning strategies)

Many Ss struggled to identify and employ effective learning strategies + asked for extra support with these (e.g. Horsman, 2004; van der Kolk, 2014)

⬇

- Explicitly teach useful strategies and meta-strategies for language learning in the cognitive, affective and socio-cultural-interactive domains (Oxford, 2011)

- Foster a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006), esp for students anxious about spoken accuracy and fluency

- Encourage peer support with metacognitive tasks (e.g. planning and goal-setting) – 'near-peer role models' (Murphey & Arao, 2001)

"If the teacher gives the key … to be a good student, then I will learn" (Jamal)

"Er, if everyone, er, study the same, er, topic maybe, it's better and I can
think everybody is studying. I have to study – maybe" (Sumeyye)

Findings & Recs: RQ2 (fostering supportive interaction)

Ss and Ts emphasized the importance of supportive relationships/interactions in class

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- Providing opportunities for speaking practice

- Helping students build trusting relationships - crucial to effective language learning (Stone, 1995)

- Encouraging students to support each other's learning in and out of class (e.g. WhatsApp groups) - 'well-becoming through teaching / giving hypothesis' (Murphey, 2016)

> "my teachers, they're very ... er, I feel comfortable with, with them ... so that's why I like (laughs) to speak all the day ... they try to help you to think. And when you talk, they focus on what you, what you trying to say and it can help you. They, they let you feel confident and comfortable like that" (Fareed)

Need for awareness/sensitivity/responsiveness to Ss' needs – links to "super-disadvantage" (Lambrechts, 2020)

- Gain more in-depth understanding of RBSs' needs/ experiences + how to support them (NA, training, LS observations, etc)

- Importance of prompt flexibility/responsiveness to emergent situations/needs (safety + personalisation)

- BUT address needs with sensitivity (don't draw attention + don't overtly treat differently)

"I finish my shift at like six o'clock, and nine o'clock I have to come to class … So all the teachers they support me even they ask me if I need break I can take one whenever I need it, so this kind of thing really encourage someone to achieve" (Munir)

"I think I wouldn't prefer anything different … from other students and I think nobody prefer it, because it's, er, makes … maybe different, it make different you from others" (Omar)

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Findings & Recommendations: RQ3

RQ3. In relation to RQ2, what constitutes good practice in ELT provision for refugees in a University of Sanctuary context, both at present and in the future?

In addition to areas identified for RQ2 (which focused on pedagogy), the following areas focus on wider institutional systems and strategies:

- Supporting RBS teachers

- Optimising institutional-level systems and support

- Providing wider wrap-around support for RBSs before and during studies

Findings & Recs: RQ3 (supporting teachers)

Ts all found trauma training and Lesson Study process useful – knowledge/skills/strategies + peer support

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- more training in best practice in supporting RBSs (needs/identifying signs/strategies)

- lesson study process – focus on individuals' Ss + collaborative practice

- an ongoing tutor support network / community of practice (reducing pedagogical solitude – Shulman, 1993)

On trauma training: "I've learnt so much from that and I've also gained confidence" (T2)

"What I was particularly surprised about was how much I didn't see in the classroom; that was really quite enlightening for me" (T3)

Importance of English language provision being joined up, offering range, choice + progression opportunity

- Full range of levels - from beginner to advanced

- Both general and academic English

- Non-formal (flexible attendance) and formal

- Offering more speaking classes / opportunities

- But, info about range of opportunities available needs to be communicated clearly

"by give more classes … by make different time for classes …   So if it's be like a … more flexible, that mean more students they can … catch up … like, er, maybe sometimes they can't come on Thursday … but … they can come on Fridays and Monday" (Fareed)

Findings & Recs: RQ3 (wrap-around support before and during studies)

Need for additional support for RBSs to access provision and learn effectively

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- Provide resources to access classes
  - Fee waivers
  - Additional financial support (travel costs, stationery, etc)
  - During pandemic, further support needed

- Offer other practical support. E.g.
  - psychological support
  - guidance in defining goals / aspirations and finding pathways
  - accommodation
  - help with asylum claims
  - addressing safety concerns

- Build networks with and tap into:
  - wider university services (e.g. welfare and accommodation)
  - external partnerships (e.g. RefuAid and LCofS)

> "the good thing is it's free for refugee … if for money, I don't think one of refugee have that money to pay to study this course" (Munir)

> "I'm still, I'm in ... ELTU's accommodation … without them, I'm a homeless … and honestly ... they standing with me a lot, a lot about it, to be honest" (Jamal)

Conclusion

Refugee Background Students

Impact of English classes

improved English + PWB levels

Psycho-social needs

- safety
- trust
- agency
- purpose
- support
- hope
- feel valued
- unthreatened

Teachers of RBSs

Strategies (classroom + self study)

- lang. learning strats (C/A/SI)
- growth mindset
- peer/tutor support in/out of class (esp. w/ meta-cog tasks)
- speaking opps
- build trusting relationships
- don't force personalisation
- meeting safety needs
- don't single RBSs out as different
- reframing errors
- facilitate choice and agency

Qualities / Skills

- sensitivity
- alertness + responsiveness
- flexibility
- empathy
- awareness / anticipation of needs
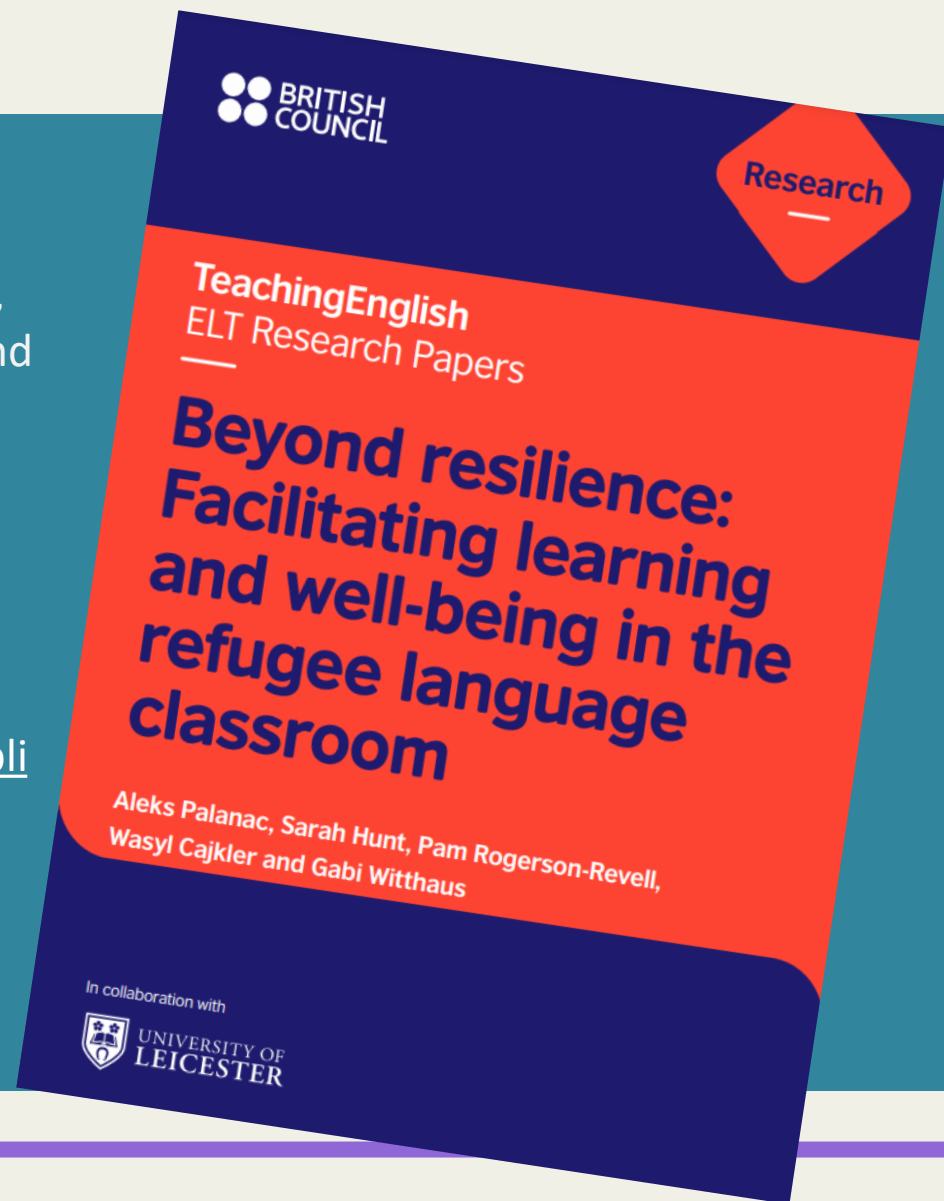- supportiveness
- warm + welcoming

Institutions

Resources / Systems

- providing RBSs' teachers with
  - CPD
  - Comm of Prac
- ascertaining needs (e.g. NA, Lesson Study obs)
- provision
  - joined up
  - formal / non-formal
  - GE + AcE
  - speaking opps
  - clear comms abt opps
- wrap around support (finance, travel, stationery, laptops, wifi, psych + careers support)

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We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who made this research study possible, and most of all to the refugee-background students who so generously shared their time and experiences with us for the benefit of future students

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Aleks Palanac, Sarah Hunt, Pam Rogerson-Revell, Wasyl Cajkler and Gabi Witthaus

In collaboration with

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Thank you
Any questions?

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