

A Mixed-Method Study of Language-Learning Motivation and Intercultural Contact of Ukrainian Adult Refugees in Swansea:

A Mini Research Project Proposal

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Introduction

The entire world was shocked and shaken when more than two years ago, on 24th February 2022, the internationally-condemned Russian invasion of Ukraine began, dislocating hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian households and forcing them to flee from conflict. Wales was one of the first ‘Good Samaritan’ nations, with the help of generous UK funding plus a special Visa scheme, that offered safety and support for these desperate refugees in their most difficult times. According to the most recent Welsh government report, two years on as of February, 2024, more than 3289 Ukrainian refugees have arrived in Wales through the government scheme with a further 4162 arriving sponsored by Welsh individuals. Thousands more have received a visa but have yet arrived. In Swansea, a total of 346 visas were issued with 288 having arrived as of the beginning of 2024 (Moran and Thomas, 2024).

Among the support the Welsh government lashes out for the Ukrainians refugees—such as housing arrangements, GP access and welfare benefits—to help them settle, language support and its impact has received relatively little attention. For Ukrainian refugee children, they are fortunate to have ready access to EAL support at local schools, with their English/Welsh learning progress monitored and mediated by the relatively mature framework of the Welsh Government’s five stage model of language acquisition (stages A-E, corresponding to levels from new to English to fluent). However, less attention and support go to their parents. The provision of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) for adult Ukrainian refugees varies greatly across Welsh local authorities without a coherent policy. While a local council receives £10, 000 for each incoming Ukrainian refugee, the UK-wide Homes for Ukraine scheme does not legally require councils to spend it on provision for English classes. In reality, a varied face-to-face language programmes are hosted by local libraries, further education colleges, while the online STEP Programme, set up in 2023 and in partnership with the British councils provides free 10-week language classes. Since the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act, Wales has four cluster areas for ESOL provision targeting refugees in Cardiff, Swansea, Newport and Wrexham. As a result, Swansea has for the past few

decades seen great demand for ESOL. Currently the Gower College Swansea ESOL programme, funded by the Welsh government and Swansea Council, has provided the bulk of such language classes for adult Ukrainian refugees. It is complemented by many informal ‘drop-in’ sessions by local charity organizations run by volunteers, such as Sunflowers Wales.

ESOL support underpins the welcome message from local communities, equality of opportunities, and could hugely enrich the culture of society in the forward-looking Wales that proudly sees itself as a ‘nation of sanctuary’. But second language learning involves not only formal classes but also intercultural encounters, which also greatly influence how they acquire the new language and as a result their motivational behavior. Intercultural contact affects how much they are committed to learning the English language—in some communities the Welsh language—and to what extent they can make the best use of the opportunities that are available to them. Ideally when these adult refugees fully engage in contact situations in Wales, their knowledge with the target language culture and sensitivity can be enhanced, resulting in their improvement of English competence. However, from news reports and personal observation there are apparently many unfortunate and alarming cases of learner frustration. Overall, there is scant evidence or record of their contact experience, English learning attitudes and motivation changes.

Research Aim and Rationale

Bearing this in mind, this mini-proposal aims to fill this gap. By using a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, it strives to investigate how the intercultural contact experiences, language learning attitudes and motivation change of Ukrainian adult refugee learners of English in Swansea in a post-pandemic and post-Brexit Welsh context. On the one hand it explores the links of contact, both direct and indirect with native and non-native speakers, while on the other hand investigates longitudinal variations in English learning attitudes and motivated learning behaviours.

The goals are threefold. First, it sets out to and record and map the learning experience from the perspective of Ukrainian adult refugee L2 learners, to understand how they are using the contact opportunities and how motivated are they in learning a new language to fully integrate in their new found home Swansea. Second, by investigating the cultural contact, learning attitudes and motivation, it could provide evidence-based recommendations on how to administer better language support provision for language teachers and education policy makers. Third, by carrying out the research it wishes to draw attention from Welsh government and local councils, and petition them to allocate more language support fund and other resources.

This mini proposal is informed in theory by long-conducted research on cultural contact and motivation studies in the field of SLA. Among factors affecting SLA, motivation,

“the desire to initiate L2 learning and the effort employed to sustain it” (Ortega, 2013, p. 168), is one of the most recognized variables that constrains learning experience and predicts learning outcome. It is, however, a complex phenomenon that cannot be directly observed and measured, being dynamic in a constant state of change. Nonetheless, through proxies of indirect indicators we can still probe into how it influences language learning. From studies in the field of psychology, Dörnyei *et al* (2006) propose the theory of a tripartite ‘learner’s self-concept’, consisting of the ‘Ideal L2 Self’, ‘Ought-to L2 Self’ and ‘L2 Learning Experience’, the last of which being an important predictor of learner outcome.

Intertwined with the learner motivation is studies on intercultural contact. For example, Contact Hypothesis (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006) argues that in language learning there is the contact-attitude relation, in that intercultural contact significantly changes learner attitudes and behaviours and as a result influence their further contact. Normally, familiarity with the new culture would lead to a positive attitude to it because it reduces learning anxiety. Van Dick *et al* (2004) posits that not only direct contact is responsible for changes in attitude, but so is indirect contact, such as media consumption in the target language. In the present proposal, it recognizes the fact that Ukrainian adult learners in Swansea in general have a high willingness to communicate initially, but their learning attitudes change after about a few months since their arrival. It would take more robust research to gain a fuller picture.

Complicating the intercultural contact and motivation studies is adult refugee students’ traumatized personal experience. Ukrainian adult learners in Wales are impacted by an ongoing war, rendering them constantly more susceptible to depression among other difficult circumstances (Dessoff, 2011). It is often reported that in Swansea refugee learners tend to have difficulties in starting their English language journey, due to a combined influence from cultural shock, confrontation in value and stressful acculturation and socialization. A trauma-informed perspective should be in place when we look into how their everyday contact influences their attitude and motivated behaviours.

Methods

With TEFL research having long been grappling with the tension between the positivist quantitative approach and a hermeneutic qualitative one, and the limitations of each approach laid bare by its critics, there has been a proliferation in recent decades of the mixed-method approach in response to the complex research needs of modern research (Punch, 2016; Robson and McCartan, 2016). The point is to make the qualitative method, with its strong hermeneutic power of interpretation rich in culturally-sensitive dimensions, and the quantitative research method, which lends researchers the confidence from data-driven statistical analysis, complement each other, working in tandem to best explore the inner layers of a research project.

However, this is not to say that the mixed-method is a panacea. Researchers have raised the alarm that the practice of the mixed-method approach is sometimes no more than superficial mingling of relatively independent quantitative and qualitative components (Creswell, 2023). With this in mind, my mini research project adopts a mixed-method approach to harness the strength of both approaches to accommodate my research needs through the adaption of the classic “questionnaires plus interviews” structure.

1. Participants

The proposed study is to be conducted with Ukrainians adult refugee learners enrolled in the Gower College Swansea ESOL programme. The goal of this programme is to facilitate refugee adult learners’ transition into confident English speakers. It is also free of charge. With an initial interview assessment, it is divided into five tiers of levels from Entry 1 (corresponding to A1 in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages), Entry 2 (A2), Entry 3 (B1), Level 1 (B2) and Level 2 (C1). Currently most Ukrainian adult refugee learners are enrolled in first two tiers. Each programme lasts one academic year (9 months) starting from September to June, often with a life skill and vocational focus. At the end of the academic year, students are assessed to determine whether they should progress to the next level.

The questionnaire participants in the study will be 20 Entry 1 level students. All of them are from war-torn Ukraine with no or very little previous knowledge of English. Given the war situation that is still going on in Ukraine, the majority of them are middle or senior aged women, often with children in local schools. The interview participants are selected from a pool of volunteers from the same Entry 1 class who have not participated in the previous questionnaires. Moreover, two language instructors, preferably one female native speaker and one male non-native speaker will also be invited to participate in the interviews.

2. Instruments and Analysis

The questionnaire will be handed out three times at equal intervals—at beginning of programme around late September 2024, the middle of the programme (around middle February, 2025) and after the end of the programme (June/July, 2025). It consists of 50 items adapted from Dörnyei and Ushioda (2021), and designed to elicit learners’ views on their contact experience in Swansea in six broad areas: direct spoken contact, direct written contact, media contact, attitudes towards English learning, motivated learning behaviour and self-efficacy beliefs, each considered a main variable. These 50 items in the questionnaire also measure learners’ motivated behavior in L2, their learning attitudes, and self-efficacy beliefs. 45 of these items use a five-point Likert scale, except the last five open-ended items that ask respondents about their previous L2 learning experience and biographical details in Ukraine. The questionnaire is written in plain English and a prior piloting will be conducted on five learners in Entry 1 class. Through

the sample population's concurrent verbal reports, it ensures that the participants understand these 50 questions. Filling out the questionnaire should take the learners around 15 minutes. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) are used to analyse the data from computer-coded questionnaires, subject to factor analysis and multidimensional scaling.

The interviews, lasting approximately one hour each, are conducted on 10 learners after the end of the programme to gain insight into the recorded changes in the variables surveyed in the questionnaire and understand the reasons behind these changes. A qualitative data analysis is performed on the transcript data from interviews.

In order to triangulate data source, the Q methodology will also be used during interview sessions. Q methodology is a holistic approach to capture individual subjectivities within a group and is increasingly being applied in foreign language teaching research (Fraschini and Caruso, 2019). A total of 20 items derived from the same 50 questionnaire items are used during the interview to identify distinct perspectives existing within Ukrainian adult refugee L2 learners. Interviewees conduct the Q sorting sessions in the presence of the researcher, and they are asked to register their degree of agreement with the surveyed statements, and then clarify how they attribute their configuration. These configurations are statistically analysed using the PQMethod software.

Ethics

The research will first seek approval from supervisors and the Ethics committee, UWTSO for the ethical clearance. It will contact Gower College Swansea for permission to conduct the study on-site, and establish collaboration with its ESOL programme language instructors. They will help administer three questionnaires during the orientation session in the beginning of the programme, the mid-term discussion session and after-term feedback session. During interviews, only participants who are willing to share their learning experiences will be recruited. With their permission, all interviews are to be conducted in a quiet room, and will be video-taped and transcribed. Participation throughout the research is voluntary. All learners are to be anonymized.

The most challenging ethical concern is the manifest learner vulnerabilities. Most of learners in this research have experienced trauma in fleeing Ukraine, many of whom with family members back home still fighting the war. In light of their sensibilities, questionnaire items are carefully worded to mitigate its possible negative emotional impact. Wolpow *et al* (2009) lays out six principles in interacting with students who have experienced trauma. This research adapts them for use during the interview sessions, with a focus on empowering students; be sensitive for any mention of the ongoing war and their association with it; be sensitive to their family structure; and provide guided support in participation.

The research will be conducted in strict accordance with both the *BERA Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*, and the *Research Ethics and Integrity Code of Practice*, UWTSD.

A Tentative Timetable

Planned Development	Target Date
Literature Review	1st Jun – 1st Aug, 2024
Research Design	1st Aug – 31st Aug, 2024
Questionnaire and Interview Design	1st Sep 1st – 30th Sep, 2024
Data Collection	1st Oct 2024– 30th Jun, 2025
Data Analysis	1st July – 31st Aug, 2025
Workshop, Seminar and Conference	1st Sep – 30 Sep, 2025
Writing	1st Oct – 30 Oct, 2025

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