What kind of language services should public authorities provide to minority ethnic groups:

the case of Bangladeshis in London

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Contents

Page

Overview 2

Introduction 4

Background information 5

Acknowledgements 6

Methodology 6

Ethical approval & consent 6

Data analysis 6

Location 7

Sample – size & description 7

Part 1: Statistical analysis of ability in use of English in the Bangladeshi group 10

Part 2: Ability, use & motivation for learning English 16

Part 3: ESOL – usefulness, provision & access, ethnicity of students & teachers 22

Part 4: ESOL services – needs assessment, delivery of classes & cultural competency 25

Discussion 28

Conclusion 30

References 31

Appendix 1 – Participant interview schedule 32

Appendix 2 – ESOL teacher interview schedule 34

Appendix 3 – Participants/ESOL teacher information sheet 35

Appendix 4 – Consent form 36

Overview

A key objective of this report is to understand what the main motivations for minority ethnic groups are (in this case Bangladeshis in London) for learning English. This study investigates the levels of English attained pre-migration and explores the learning pathways of Bangladeshis in acquiring English after arrival in the UK. It also helps to identify whether ESOL services adequately meet local need and whether the learning requirements of this group are addressed in relation to range and type of provision, and in terms of culturally competent services needed for participation.

The evidence gathered from undertaking the statistical analysis on use of English in the Bangladeshi group found that:

- Surveys consistently show that – across the standard 2001 Census ethnic groups – the Bangladeshi group has the poorest skill level in spoken English, closely followed by the Pakistani group.
- In the Bangladeshi group fluency in English differs by age and gender. Across both genders, fluency tends to be higher in the younger age groups and declines with age. However, across all age groups, levels of fluency are markedly lower amongst women.
- Analysis undertaken by the Fourth National Survey showed that in the Bangladeshi group fluency in English declined as own group (ie Bangladeshi) density by ward increased. For example, in wards where own group density was less than 2%, 70% of respondents were fluent in English. In wards where own group density was 33% and over, just 37% of respondents were fluent in English.

The information collected from the interviews with the Bangladeshi participants indicated that:

- Pre-migration ability and use of English was heavily influenced by levels of educational achievement and schooling experience gained in Bangladesh. Women had 'below average' or 'poor' levels of English pre-migration which was due in part to the low levels of participation rates in education back home.
- Bangladeshi men reported to have a 'survival competency' in their current use and ability in English. The higher participation rates of men in education in Bangladesh increased their opportunity to learn English before migrating.
- Participants across both gender groups did not resist learning English – on the contrary, both men and women accepted and recognised learning English was important for practical and functional reasons. Bangladeshi men's motivations were for gaining employment and improving their employability prospects, whereas Bangladeshi women's motivations were partly for increasing future work opportunities, but primarily for accessing statutory services, healthcare provision and for supporting their children's educational progress.
- The men and women cited similar factors that prevented them from regularly attending ESOL classes; the barriers cited by the women included constraints on their time, childcare and family responsibilities, and the domestic duties of running a household; and the barriers cited by the men included overstretched time commitments, family responsibilities and work duties.
- The introduction of the citizenship test did not impact significantly on the motivations for learning English.
- Bangladeshi women had a growing concern that was borne out of a lack of English, alluding to a discourse around social cohesion and integration; the women were fearful of becoming isolated and dependent, and becoming increasing distant from their children due to a potential cultural gap between themselves and their offspring.
- The women stated that ESOL classes provided them with an opportunity to meet and socialise with students from a diverse range of backgrounds, which they felt helped close the cultural gap between themselves and students from other ethnic groups.
- Provision and access to ESOL varied greatly across all four boroughs. Tower Hamlets was cited as having the greatest range and availability of ESOL classes from basic to advanced courses that were accessible at local outreach centres or at the further education college.
- Other boroughs reported having fewer provisions available locally, classes had shut down due to the lack of funding or a change in funding arrangements had drastically impacted upon participation levels.
- It was important to the women that ESOL classes were held close to their homes or within their local neighbourhood, so enabling them to make childcare arrangements and attend classes.
- The men and women did not state a preference for an ethnically-matched teacher or peer-group; in fact some of the participants preferred a non-Bengali/Sylheti speaking teacher and peers from a diverse range of backgrounds. These social dynamics would deter them from switching into Bengali/Sylheti during classes.

The interviews conducted with the ESOL teachers focused upon identifying need, delivery of classes and demonstrating cultural competency. The analysis of this data set indicated that:

- The teachers worked closely with the Bangladeshi students and understood their discrete learning requirements; learning and teaching resources were continually redrafted and adapted to accord with the individual needs of the students. The *Skills for Life* materials did not adequately respond to students with poor levels of literacy and were used only as supplementary materials in class.
- There were mixed responses from the teachers about the availability and quality of teaching materials used in ESOL. Teachers felt it necessary to develop resources, which was often a lengthy process and time-consuming.
- The teachers used varying and creative ways to deliver their classes – using visual items and objects to help stimulate conversation in English. Role-play was a particularly effective method for encouraging discussion in class.
- Learning in an applied context was an effective way of attaining fluency in ability and use of English – both 'embedded' courses and 'enrichment' activities were regarded as useful mechanisms for developing such skills.
- The teachers endeavoured to understand the cultural and religious background of their students; they were careful to remain neutral and be sensitive to their students' cultural and religious needs.
- The proposed rationing of ESOL provision caused the teachers great worry and anxiety as the strategy threatened to reduce the availability of classes, which could have the greatest impact on women based in outreach centres.

Introduction

Central to this report is an exploration into the motivations of Bangladeshis who have previously learnt/are currently learning English, as well as an investigation into the current availability of provision of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) for Bangladeshis living in London, in order to determine whether services respond to their need. The acquisition of English for minority groups is an area of high priority in public policy (LSC, 2007; DIUS, 2009), and the current administration has viewed the provision of ESOL as a basis for encouraging skills training and acculturation. English language fluency is regarded as a route to integration for newly arriving groups including third country nationals, EU citizens from the new accession states, and refugees and asylum seekers. The Government has stated its commitment to ESOL provision in clear terms that minorities who have chosen to settle in the UK, "need to improve their skills and overcome language barriers to work"; furthermore, they concede that in their 'new approach' resources for ESOL will be prioritised to accord with policies of integration and community cohesion (DIUS, 2009: 6).

The decision to focus on the Bangladeshi community was based on their overall size and the high proportions of community members who cannot speak English. Gill et al. (2009) have recently estimated that there are 64,397 (males 23,569: females 40,828) Bangladeshis aged 16+ who speak little or no English. In terms of the sixteen 2001 Census ethnic categories, Bangladeshis represent the third largest group of speakers of little or no English. Moreover, with respect to the proportions who speak little or no English, these are much higher in the Bangladeshi group than the Indian group across both genders and within age bands (16-34, 54, and 55+). Bangladeshis alongside Pakistanis, share the position of being the most disadvantaged of the settled minority ethnic communities across a wide range of socio-economic measures. In addition, their frequent concentration in areas of high own-group ethnic density (for example, the Bangladeshi community is concentrated in Tower Hamlets and a group of inner London boroughs) acts as a disincentive to learn English, Modood et al. (1996) reporting an inverse statistical correlation between skills in English and own group ethnic density in Fourth National Survey (FNS) data.

Furthermore, the Bangladeshi community contains large numbers of recent migrants (notably spouses coming to the UK on the basis of their marriage to a British citizen or settled person) whose English skills are likely to be minimal. For example, in 2006 47,100 people were admitted to the UK as a spouse or fiancé(e) for a probationary period of two years. Of these, Bangladeshis comprised the third largest group (7.3%). At the end of this probationary period spouses are able to apply for settlement at which point they are required to demonstrate knowledge of the English language (a pre-entry English requirement for spouses arriving on marriage visas having also been consulted on).

The key questions that determined the study were: What kind of ESOL training do Bangladeshis require? What are the current barriers to accessing services? How can ESOL providers best configure training for Bangladeshi community members from their own and community perspectives?

To adequately address these questions, the research was segmented into three areas:

(i) To provide a statistical analysis/profile of ability in use of English in the Bangladeshi group using Government social surveys (Part 1).

(ii) To undertake an assessment of the need for ESOL in this community using a needs-based assessment approach (Parts 2 & 3). This focused on:

- Level of ability in the use of English acquired pre-migration (for migrants)
- Current ability in the use of English
- Motivation to acquire English language skills, both instrumental and integrational
- Factors affecting motivation
- Barriers to accessing services
- the culturally competent shape of services needed for participation

(ii) To undertake a mapping of ESOL services in the London Boroughs selected for analysis and to assess scale and cultural competency of provision from the perspective of the service providers, linking into a current pan-London project that is mapping language resources across the capital (the London Language Plan) (Part 4).

This document reports upon data collected across the lifespan of the project from February 2008 to November 2009. The statistical data underpinned the sample selected for the in-depth interviews of Bangladeshis and provided preliminary evidence for the design of the study.

Background information

Over the last two years Government policy has shifted away from multiculturalism and towards a more traditionalist position of integration, manifested in pronouncements on such matters as citizenship tests and (in recent years) the costs of translation and interpretation. The debate about language has been presented in the simplistic terms of aggregate expenditures (translation being estimated in the public sector at £100 million[1]) and as an option between incurring current levels of spending on interpretation and translation or reducing these and shifting resources into English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). The debate in the BMJ illustrates this polarity[2]. However, the linkage between allocation of benefits and the need to speak English has raised the issue of the provision of and access to ESOL training. The Interim and Final Reports of the Commission for Integration and Cohesion (2007)[3] articulated the tensions between these different demands on funding and the Department of Communities and Local Government has conducted a review into language matters. Lack of English is a critical barrier to integration, communication, and social cohesion for new migrants and settled communities, frequently creating social distance. It hampers people's efforts to integrate economically, access the labour market, and develop a sense of belonging with others. It is clearly not the only barrier, others including racism and social class, but it is amenable to change. The most commonly identified barrier to "being English" in the Commission's polling was not speaking English. The acquisition of English language skills is, then, a major key to the advancement of social well-being. Beyond the expenditure debate, the Government has been mindful of the need to review the delivery mechanisms for ESOL teaching at a local level, including the building up of skills, consideration of the timing and length of courses, the provision of classes in the workplace, length of waiting lists, and improvements in the quality and focus of the training on offer.

The Bangladeshi community[4] is a strong candidate for research on ability in the use of English (Messant 1992) as it has the lowest levels of ability in the use of English of all 2001-Census defined ethnic categories, both overall and at different levels of "own group" density. Moreover, the group is strongly concentrated in Tower Hamlets and six other Inner London Boroughs north of the Thames (Baker & Eversley 2000) and may be expected to be less integrated than other communities with a more dispersed pattern of settlement. Further, all the indicators of disadvantage and deprivation show the Bangladeshi community to be the worst off. Acquisition of English language skills within the household would have a major impact on educational attainment levels, current penalties experienced in the labour market, and the ability of community members to access public services, once other structural disadvantage confounders are adjusted for. The literature on English language use by Bangladeshis in London is sparse, focusing upon second generation and frequently young people (Lawson & Sachdev 2004). There is very little research that has examined English language use and competency with the first generation (migrants). One of the few studies on English language use amongst adult members – Bangladeshi women in Birmingham (Blackledge 1999) – found that these women felt unable to support their children in their education due to their poor knowledge of English. They felt disempowered, embarrassed and uncomfortable about using translators, and unable to learn English for themselves, while recognising the benefits. There is some indicative evidence that the age and gender of the translators is crucial and one of the main reasons for not asking for English language assistance: one NHS study, for example, found that "many interpreters are young and women [which] was perceived to cause concern for older male patients" (White et al 2006). Other difficulties that have been identified include the time required for training and difficulties of accurately conveying meaning.

The evidence given in Table 4 (see Part 1) shows that Bangladeshis have the highest percentage of individuals with little or no English – with Bangladeshi women having much lower levels of English use and ability than men. Furthermore, the proportion of women with little or no English increases with age. The data would suggest that the needs of the Bangladeshi community have not been adequately addressed in terms of access to culturally competent ESOL training, that is, training that encompasses the integration and transformation of knowledge about individuals and groups into specific standards, policies, practices, and attitudes used in appropriate cultural settings to increase the quality of services, thereby producing better outcomes. The requirement for an evidence-based approach to assess how local provisions can best be developed to meet need was vital. In particular, this research was needed to explore how such training can be developed through co-ordinated, partnership arrangements with the Bangladeshi and other ethnic communities, and whether it would prove more useful if combined with other skills training.

1 Translation costing public £100 million. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/6174303.stm

2 Adams K. Should the NHS curb spending on translation services? BMJ 2007; 334: 398. Jones D. Should the NHS curb spending on translation services? BMJ 2007; 334: 399.

3 Migrants should learn English. http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/uk/6380867.stm

4 Philip Messant (1992) noted that 95% of Bangladeshis came to London from the poor rural Sylhet district of Bangladesh and first began to settle in Britain in the mid-1950s, their families arriving from the late 1960s.

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Methodology

For the quantitative component of the study, a list of government social and general purpose surveys that ask about language had been prepared from a search of questionnaires located on the ESDS Question Bank website (Aspinall 2007: table 1). Information on the language dimensions asked was extracted from papers and reports on these surveys (Labour Force Survey 2003; Health Survey for England, 1999 and 2004; PSI Fourth National Survey, 1994; Black and Minority Ethnic Groups in England: 2nd Health & Lifestyles Survey, 1994) or from secondary data analysis (Home Office Citizenship Survey 2007). This included languages spoken at home and how well English was spoken. No sources were identified that provided comprehensive information on the provision and utilisation of translation, interpreting, or ESOL services across London. A survey which had been scheduled by the London Language Plan did not take place.

For the qualitative component of the study, one-to-one interviews were undertaken with 30 Bangladeshi male (n=12) and female (n=18) respondents. Through snowballing, the participants were asked to take part on a voluntary basis – in an interview with a male or female researcher. The respondents were asked whether they had a preference for a specific gender-matched interviewer and this provision was organised on request. Some of the participants were also given a £10 voucher for taking part in the interview, which was offered to a few of the female participants to thank them for their time especially as they were the hardest to recruit. Other participants were happy to participate without the encouragement of a 'thank you' gift. The researchers used an interview schedule to guide the discussion, which gave the interviewers the flexibility to veer away from the questions if any relevant issues arose during the interview (see Appendix 1). All interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes in length.

One-to-one interviews were also undertaken with teachers of ESOL at a college in East London. In total, 10 participants were interviewed, and of these, two were male and eight were female, and were asked to volunteer by a senior member of ESOL staff, who acted as a key contact and gatekeeper. Similarly, an interview schedule was used to guide the discussion, which also provided the interviewers the opportunity to explore other relevant ideas in depth (see Appendix 2). All interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes in length.

Ethical approval & consent

Ethical approval was sought and obtained from the University of Kent's Research Ethics Committee from the outset of the project. The purpose of the project was explained to each participant in Bengali/Sylheti through a Bengali/Sylheti speaking interviewer and individual consent was acquired from each of the volunteers. They were informed that they had the right to stop the interview at anytime, could withdraw their statement at any point and that the interview would be recorded (see Appendix 3). The participants agreed to provide written consent on the appropriate consent documentation (see Appendix 4).

Similarly, consent was also obtained from the ESOL teachers and the same research protocols were followed and explanations provided in English to them (see Appendix 4).

Data analysis

Data was extracted from the government social and general purpose surveys or related reports to inform the statistical background to the study. This included the languages or first language spoken at home by Bangladeshi respondents, how well English was spoken, and the relationship of English fluency to 'own group' ethnic density. The findings on ethnic density informed the sampling design of the study, in which samples were drawn from electoral wards across four London boroughs stratified by density of the Bangladeshi population.

Interviews with the Bangladeshi respondents were recorded, translated and transcribed from Bengali/Sylheti to English. Similarly, the interviews with the ESOL teachers were recorded and transcribed. Data analysis of the interviews was undertaken by the lead researcher. As the number of interview transcripts totalled 45, it was more practical to code the data manually into Microsoft Excel than to use a qualitative software package.

Location

All of the qualitative interviews were conducted across the four London Boroughs of Tower Hamlets, Newham, Hackney and Waltham Forest. The location was selected using data available from the 2001 Census, Modood et al's (1997) analysis on fluency in English of minority groups in Britain (1997), and Baker & Eversley's (2000) analysis of pupil census data which showed that in the late 1990s 5% or more of school children in seven local education authorities[5] spoke Bengali/Sylheti, suggesting that levels of first language Bengali/Sylheti speakers were unexpectedly high among adults. The four London Boroughs selected in the sample had contrasting profiles of Bangladeshis living in the area that was evident at ward level.

Table I: Ethnic Density of Bangladeshis by borough and ward (based on 1997 and 2001 data)

	Bangladeshi ethnic group	
Own group density by ward	Fluency in English in FNS (%)	Own group density by ward, 2001 Census
BAND 1		
Less than 2%	70	18 wards in Waltham Forest
BAND 2		
2 <5%	54	18 wards in Hackney
BAND 3		
5 <10%	56	8 wards in Newham
10 <15%	41	3 wards in Newham
15 <25%	50	4 wards in Newham
BAND 4		
25 <33%	51	3 wards in Tower Hamlets
BAND 5		
33% & over	37	9 wards in Tower Hamlets

Source: Modood et al. Ethnic Minorities in Britain. London: Policy Studies Institute, 1997; 2001 Census, accessed via NOMIS.
Notes: Unweighted base in FNS for Bangladeshis: 584.

Table I shows that Tower Hamlets has some of the highest concentrations of Bangladeshis throughout London reaching over 33% in 9 wards. The neighbouring boroughs of Hackney and Waltham Forest have much lower levels of less than 5% or below. The Bangladeshi participants lived in one of the four boroughs and were selected from Bands 1 to 5 dependent upon the ethnic density of their particular ward.

Sample – size & description

The ratio of women (n=18) to men (n=12) was 1.5:1, with the number of women outweighing the number of men by two-thirds. The proportion of men to women interviewed provided an illustrative account into the lives of the participants – as there were far fewer men available for interview at the time, as they were engaged in paid work, whereas the women were usually based at home or near their home, and although they had family and childcare commitments, were still able to find the time to participate in an interview with the researchers. Furthermore, the above average levels of females to males recruited to the project is commensurate with other studies (Rockquemore & Brunsma 2002) – as typically – male volunteers on research projects are usually lower in comparison to the number of female volunteers.

The ages of the participants ranged from their mid-twenties up to their late fifties. All of the participants were first generation migrants; their reasons for coming to the UK ranged from marriage, family reunification and for further studies. Of the 30 Bangladeshi men and women, the majority came as adults or above the age of 16. Although two came as minors, their age on arrival (11 and 13) meant that they had no prior experience of learning fluent English in their formative years at primary school or had the opportunity to acquire English in an English-speaking environment. Even though both attended secondary school after their arrival to the UK, they needed additional English language support whilst attending school. Thus, their inclusion in the sample was equally as important and relevant in the study as the other participants. More details of the sample size and description are given in Table II.

5 The LEAs were: Camden, 12.67%; Islington, 5.67%; Hackney, 5.41%, Westminster, 11.84%; City of London, 56.4%; Tower Hamlets, 53.81%, and Newham, 10.97%. They comprise a group of contiguous central London LEAs north of the River Thames. The average for the whole of London was 4.51%.

Table II: Gender, age and borough distribution of participants

BAND	Gender			
	Male		Female	
	Age: 25-44	Age: 45-65	Age: 25-44	Age: 45-65
1 – Waltham Forest	0	1	2	1
2 – Hackney	2	1	1	1
3 – Newham	1	2	4	0
4 – Tower Hamlets (25<33%)	2	1	4	0
5 – Tower Hamlets (33% & over)	0	1	2	2
Tower Hamlets (out of scope)	1	0	1	0
SUB-TOTAL	MALES: 12		FEMALES: 18	

Participants living in Tower Hamlets – Band 5

Five of the Bangladeshi participants lived in wards across the London Borough of Tower Hamlets – an area that has some of the highest concentrations of Bangladeshis in the borough (over 33%) (NOMIS, February 2008) including Whitechapel, Bromley-by-Bow and St. Dunstan's and Stepney Green wards. Gender distribution was 1:4 male to females respectively. The male participant worked as a self-employed shop-owning tailor – a profession that is commonplace for Bangladeshis living in the 'Brick Lane' area. The main occupation of the female participants included working in mental health and as a clothing store manager, while the two other women were housewives; however, of these, one had taken retirement and had worked previously in salaried employment. The period of time spent in the UK since migration varied from 30 to 40 years to a shorter period of only 2 to 3 years. The impact of the length of stay on English acquisition will be discussed below.

Participants living in Tower Hamlets – Band 4

Seven of the participants interviewed lived in the Tower Hamlets area in wards that have the second highest concentrations of Bangladeshis in the borough (25% to below 33%) (NOMIS, February 2008) and lived across the three wards of East India and Lansbury, Limehouse and Mile End and Globe Town. The gender distribution was 3:4 males to females respectively. The male participants were engaged in employment in sectors that are traditionally occupied by Bangladeshis including working as a chef, a grocery shop owner and a care-taker/receptionist of a Bangladeshi community centre. Of the female participants, none of the Bangladeshi women were employed in any salaried work. Apart from one participant who had lived in the UK for 29 years, the period of time spend in the UK of the other participants was comparatively much shorter than the Bangladeshis living in Band 5. The period of time spent by these participants ranged from between five to 14 years in Britain.

Participants living in Tower Hamlets – out of scope

Although there were two participants (one male and one female) who were 'out of scope' from either Band 4 or Band 5, their interviews have been included in the analysis, as their views provide invaluable evidence about the usefulness of ESOL, motivations for learning English and help to highlight the barriers to English acquisition. These participants lived in the Bow West ward, which has some of the lowest levels of Bangladeshis in the borough (13.7%) (NOMIS, February 2008). Both participants were employed or were recently employed in salaried work – one for a South Eastern railway company in customer services, and the other for a Bangladeshi money exchange firm. Both were relatively recent migrants and had spent eight years living in the UK.

Participants living in Newham – Band 3

Seven of the participants lived in the London Borough of Newham in the three wards of Green Street East (15.4%), Forest Gate South (12.5%) and Beckton (7.9%) (NOMIS, February 2008). Within the whole borough, Bangladeshis are concentrated most heavily around the former two wards – and density ranged considerably across Newham from 5% to 16%. Of the seven participants, the gender distribution was 3:4 males to females respectively. The Bangladeshi participants in Newham were engaged in much higher skilled professions than their Bangladeshi counterparts in Tower Hamlets. All of the men and women were working or were recently engaged in regular salaried work. Unusually, two were elected councillors (one male and one female), and the other participants were involved in a diverse range of jobs including working as a travel agent, cashier, administrative and office assistant, in film and television and a community development centre co-ordinator. The period of time spend in the UK was much longer than those living in Tower Hamlets and they had spent from 17 to over 30 years in Britain.

Participants living in Hackney – Band 2

Five participants lived in the London Borough of Hackney in the three wards of Hackney Downs (3.3%), Queensbridge (3.0%) and Hoxton (2.0%) (NOMIS, February 2008). The Bangladeshi population is represented at much lower levels of ethnic density within these three wards, and within the whole borough density ranged from 1.8% to Haggerston (4.3%). Of the participants, the gender distribution was 3:2 males to females respectively. The male participants worked in the restaurant business, in a local taxi firm and in customer services. None of the female participants were engaged in any salaried employment. Apart from one recent migrant, the others had lived in the UK from between 12 to over 20 years.

Participants living in Waltham Forest – Band 1

Four participants lived in the London Borough of Waltham Forest in the two of wards of Leyton (2.6%) and Leytonstone (1.9%) (NOMIS, February 2008). In an area with a sparse representation of Bangladeshis, recruitment was more challenging, which meant that participants were recruited in one ward (Leyton) that had had above average levels of Bangladeshis living in the borough. The gender distribution was 1:3 male to females respectively. All of the participants were engaged in employment (however, not always regular employment); the range of work varied from machine-based sewing work, teaching, social work and catering. On average, all of the participants had lived in Britain for the longest period of time in comparison to the other participants in the neighbouring boroughs, with the shortest length of time spent in the UK of 21 years and the greatest for 25 years.

This document reports upon survey analysis and interview data collected between August 2008 and January 2010. The interviews conducted with the Bangladeshi participants were undertaken from August 2008 to October 2009, and with the ESOL teachers between May and June 2009.

Part 1: Statistical analysis of ability in use of English in the Bangladeshi group

i. What government social surveys tell us about the language skills of the Bangladeshi community

There is only limited official data on the language skills of the different minority communities. There has been no decennial census to date in Britain that has asked about first or home language (or languages spoken) and skills in the use of English (although such questions have now been agreed for the upcoming 2011 Census). Consequently, there is no comprehensive statistical baseline to plan interpreting and translation services and the need for ESOL training. The lack of such data is reflected in the wide estimates of the number of people in England who have difficulties in the English language, from around 400,000 (Department of Health 2003) to 1.7 million (EITI UK, 2002). In 2007 the government put its own estimate at around 1 million adults, that is, those believed to have a first language other than English (Department for Education & Skills & Learning & Skills Council 2007).

In the absence of such data use has to be made of a limited range of sources to estimate the home or first languages spoken by minority ethnic communities and their skills in English: (i) crude proxies of the number and geographical distribution of non-English speakers have been derived from data on ethnicity and country of birth in the 2001 Census (such as the language needs indicator in Figure 1); (ii) a small number of government social and general purpose surveys ask questions about language skills; (iii) there are various sources of local intelligence, such as the records of providers of interpreting and translation services. Survey sources can best provide some measure of main languages spoken and deficits in English language skills across the standard 2001 Census ethnic groupings and by country of birth and are the main source used here.

A recent audit of questions on a number of language dimensions in government social surveys (Aspinall 2007) revealed only limited coverage: Labour Force Survey (asked triennially); Citizenship Survey (asked biennially); Health Survey for England (especially important in 1999 and 2004, years of enhanced sampling of minority ethnic groups); the Millennium Cohort Study, Sweep One, 2001/02; and a number of occasional or one-off surveys, such as the Black and Minority Ethnic Groups in England 1st (1991/2) and 2nd (1994) Health & Lifestyles Surveys, the Policy Studies Institute's Fourth National Survey of Ethnic minorities, 1994 (FNS), the Family and Working Lives Survey, 1996, and the National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles, 2000. The recording of information on language is equally sparse in administrative data collections, though a question on first language is now asked in the Pupil Level Annual School Census. These surveys provide basic information on the languages regularly spoken by the different minority ethnic communities and in some cases their skills in English. In the case of the FNS additional analyses are available showing the relationship between own group ethnic density and fluency in English.

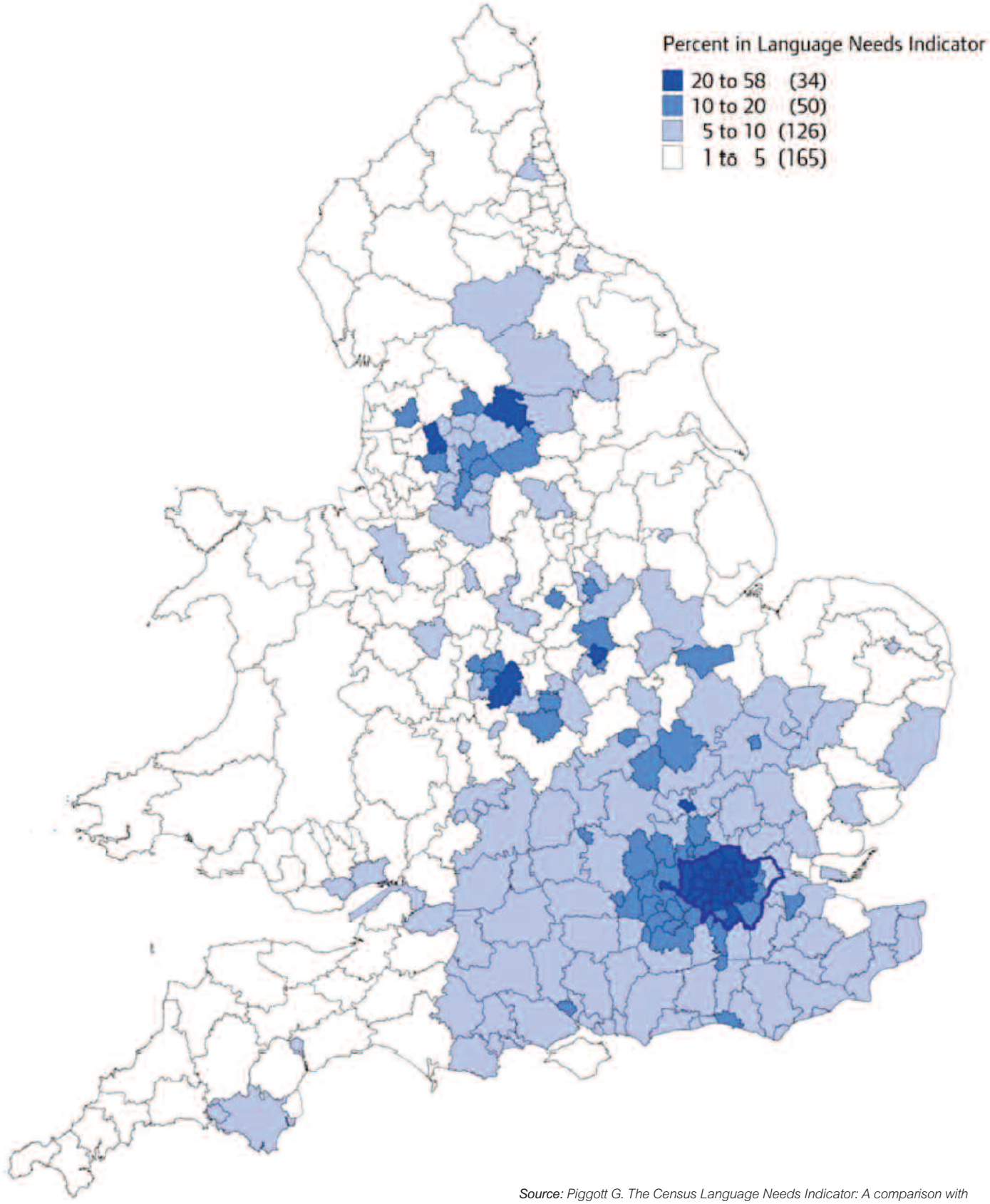
ii. The Bangladeshi community's skills in spoken English: the importance of age and gender

Government social and general purpose surveys consistently show that the Bangladeshi community has one of the highest rates of skill deficit in the use of English of any of the 2001 Census-defined 16 ethnic groups. How these deficits are defined in terms of the questions asked and response categories used varies significantly. While some surveys ask about ability to speak English, others include questions on how well spoken English is understood and how well English is read. Further, the overall proportions in different categories of skill level may vary with respect to fieldwork procedures, including the extent of collection of data on all household members, how respondents for interview are selected within the household, the selection criteria (such as age) for respondents, and the extent of use of interpreters. The relative position of Bangladeshis compared with other minority ethnic groups and relative differences across age/gender groups within the Bangladeshi community are more important than the actual proportions.

The 2007 Citizenship Survey asked a number of questions on language: whether a family member or friend is acting as a translator for the interview; which language the respondent speaks most often at home; and how good the respondent is 'at speaking English when you need to in daily life, for example to have a conversation on the telephone or talk to a professional such as a teacher or a doctor?'. Questions were also asked on reading and writing ability in English 'when you need to in daily life'. Respondents who indicated that English was not the language they spoke most often at home were asked the supplementary questions on speaking, reading and writing abilities.

There were 295 respondents identifying as Bangladeshi in the survey. As Table 1 shows, only 124 respondents (42%) mentioned English as the language most often spoken at home. 244 respondents (83%) mentioned Bengali. No other language accounted for more than 4% of the sample. In only 47 cases was the interview carried out in a language other than English, the languages being Punjabi (Urdu script), 1; Gujarati, 1; Bengali, 29; Urdu, 6; and Hindi, 10.

Fig. 1. Percentage of population in the 2001 Census Language Needs Indicator for districts in England and Wales



Source: Piggott G. The Census Language Needs Indicator: A comparison with Labour Force Survey data. DMAG Briefing 2006-31. London: Greater London Authority (Data Analysis and Management Group), 2006 (November). (based on 2001 Census, Commissioned Table C0488).

Table 1: Language Bangladeshis speak most often at home

Main Language	Not mentioned	Mentioned	Total
English	171	124	295
Welsh	293	2	295
Punjabi	293	2	295
Gujarati	294	1	295
Bengali	51	244	295
Urdu	292	3	295
Hindi	285	10	295
Somalian	292	3	295
Other	290	5	295

Source: *2007 Citizenship Survey.*
Note: *No mentions: Cantonese, Mandarin, Tamil, Arabic, French, Ghanaian, Spanish, Telugu, Malay, Kurdish, Philippino, Twi, Polish, Vietnamese, Russian. As responses sum to more than 295, some respondents mentioned more than one language.*

Table 2 shows that English was least frequently mentioned as the language most often spoken at home amongst South Asian males and females. Just 42% of Bangladeshi males spoke English as the main language, less than Pakistani (49%) and Indian (54%) males. Only Chinese males (52%) had similarly low levels of usage. Amongst Bangladeshi females, only 42% mentioned English as the language they spoke most often at home, below the levels for Pakistanis (54%) and Indians (52%). Amongst those who indicated that Bengali or another language other than English was the one most frequently spoken, the proportions indicating that their speaking ability in English was 'below average' or 'poor' differed markedly by gender. While 17% of Bangladeshi males selected these categories, twice the proportion of Bangladeshi females (34%) did so. The gender differential was similar amongst Pakistanis (17% vs. 33%) and also present in Indians (15 % vs. 25%) but reversed in the Chinese group (28% vs. 18%).

A spectrum of abilities in reading English and writing English was also reported for the 171 respondents who indicated that English was not their main language:

Table 3: How good Bangladeshi respondents were at reading and writing English for those who did not report English as their main language (n=171)

	How good at speaking English[1]	How good at reading English[2]	How good at writing English[3]
Very good	61	67	60
Fairly good	65	55	56
Below average	22	20	25
Poor	23	22	24
Cannot	-	7	6
TOTAL	**171**	**171**	**171**

Source: *2007 Citizenship Survey.*
Note: *1 How good are you at speaking English when you need to in daily life? For example: to have a conversation on the telephone or talk to a professional such as a teacher or a doctor? Would you say... (response categories: very good, fairly good, below average, poor); 2How good are you at reading English when you need to in daily life? For example: reading newspapers and magazines or instructions for medicine or recipes? Would you say... (response categories: very good, fairly good, below average, poor, cannot read English); 3 How good are you at writing English when you need to in daily life? For example: writing letters or notes or filling in official forms? Would you say... (response categories: very good, fairly good, below average, poor, cannot write English).*

Table 2. Main language English & how good at speaking English when main language not English, by ethnic group, England & Wales, 2007

Ethnic group	Main language English				How good at speaking English when main language not English					
	Male		Female		Male			Female		
	%	Total[1]	%	Total[1]	Very/fairly good (%)	Below av/poor (%)	Total	Very/fairly good (%)	Below av/poor (%)	Total
White British	99.6	3489	99.6	4569	100.0	0.0	15	84.2	15.8	19
White Irish	100.0	72	100.0	94	100.0	0.0	1	0.0	0.0	0
Any other White background	76.1	159	68.6	169	86.8	13.2	38	83.3	16.7	54
White & Black Caribbean	98.3	59	96.9	129	100.0	0.0	1	100.0	0.0	4
White & Black African	81.4	43	79.4	68	87.5	12.5	8	85.7	14.3	14
White & Asian	86.8	38	88.9	54	100.0	0.0	5	83.3	16.7	6
Any other mixed background	83.8	37	89.7	58	100.0	0.0	6	83.3	16.7	6
Indian	54.0	672	51.5	697	84.8	15.2	309	75.1	24.9	338
Pakistani	49.4	431	53.9	386	83.0	17.0	218	66.9	33.1	178
Bangladeshi	41.7	139	42.3	156	82.7	17.3	81	65.6	34.4	90
Any other Asian background	47.0	134	52.3	149	91.5	8.5	71	78.9	21.1	71
Caribbean	99.4	329	98.8	481	100.0	0.0	2	100.0	0.0	6
African	67.9	324	57.8	498	96.2	3.8	106	87.2	12.8	211
Any other Black background	85.7	14	78.1	32	100.0	0.0	2	100.0	0.0	7
Chinese	51.7	60	58.5	106	72.4	27.6	29	81.8	18.2	44
Any other ethnic group	54.4	215	54.0	226	82.7	17.3	98	71.4	28.6	105
TOTAL		**6215**		**7872**			**990**			**1153**

Source: 2007 Citizenship Survey. Accessed via ESDS. Questions: Main language English (valid cases 14,087; missing cases 8); How good are you at speaking English when you need to in daily life, for example, to have a conversation on the telephone or talk to a professional such as a teacher or a doctor? (valid cases 2,143). Accessed via ESDS. 1 Totals relate to the total of survey respondents in each ethnic group and not the number whose main language is English.

Similar findings have been reported in the analysis of other survey data. Gill et al. (2009) used pooled data from the 1999 and 2004 Health Survey for England to derive the proportion of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Chinese respondents who speak little or no English by age (16-34, 35-54, and 55+) and gender (table 4).

Table 4. Percentage of male and female Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Chinese individuals who speak little or no English & estimates of the number in England & number of annual GP consultations by age in 1999 & 2004

	% of individuals who speak little or no English	Estimated number in population	Estimated no. of GP consultations/year
Indian men			
16-34	2.9 (1.7-4.7)	4,998	14,993
35-54	6.0 (4.3-8.2)	8,823	50,293
55+	20.9 (16.6-25.8)	14,923	137,292
Indian women			
16-34	5.3 (3.7-7.2)	9,442	49,098
35-54	14.6 (12.1-17.4)	22,136	148,311
55+	45.2 (39.5-51.0)	32,721	458,090
Pakistani men			
16-34	9.8 (7.4-12.7)	12,957	24,618
35-54	15.1 (11.5-19.3)	10,020	66,131
55+	35.3 (27.5-43.8)	11,740	123,274
Pakistani women			
16-34	15.8 (13.0-18.8)	20,999	151,189
35-54	40.1 (35.0-45.5)	26,743	243,358
55+	67.8 (58.4-76.3)	18,817	319,893
Bangladeshi men			
16-34	14.8 (11.3-18.9)	7,573	22,718
35-54	36.2 (29.5-43.3)	7,748	66,635
55+	65.6 (56.5-73.8)	8,248	122,894
Bangladeshi women			
16-34	31.2 (27.1-35.6)	17,134	80,530
35-54	75.9 (68.9-82.0)	15,988	174,265
55+	91.1 (82.5-96.4)	7,706	77,060
Chinese men			
16-34	9.3 (5.5-14.5)	4,172	5,423
35-54	26.0 (19.8-33.0)	7,628	21,357
55+	57.1 (46.1-67.6)	6,457	32,933
Chinese women			
16-34	6.3 (3.1-11.0)	2,868	5,162
35-54	29.8 (24.4-35.6)	11,041	57,416
55+	61.2 (49.2-72.2)	7,550	67,952

Source: Gill PS, Shankar A, Quirke T, & Freemantle N. Access to interpreting services in England: secondary analysis of national data. BMC Public Health 2009, 9:12. The investigators' data is drawn from the 1999 and 2004 Health Survey for England.

In all the groups the proportions who speak little or no English increased with age and were higher amongst women than men (with the exception of Chinese men aged 16-34). The most disadvantage groups were Pakistanis and Bangladeshis. For example, while over a third (36.2%) of Bangladeshi men aged 35-54 spoke little or no English, this rose to 65.6% in males aged 55+. The respective percentages amongst Bangladeshi women were 75.9% and 91.1%. The Chinese group is more disadvantaged than the Indian group amongst both males and females and across all three age groups. The investigators estimated the numbers in the England population in these groups who were unable to converse in English (with the defined English language deficits) as almost 300,000 individuals.

iii. Fluency in English and "own group" residential density

In addition to the strong evidence from government surveys that the Bangladeshi group is consistently the most disadvantaged in terms of spoken English skills amongst the 16 ethnic groups and that such disadvantage is strongly structured by age and gender, a further important finding from the Fourth National Survey (FNS) informed the sampling design for the Nuffield Trust-funded study.

Table 5. Fluency in English, by residential density of own ethnic group (%s)

Own group ethnic density by ward	Indian	African Asian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi
Less than 2%	91	93	86	70
2 <5%	81	88	71	54
5 <10%	62	85	59	56
10 <15%	73	85	59	(41)1
15 <25%	74	83	54	50
25 <33%	69	80	56	(51)1
33% and over	60	85	51	37
Weighted count	1256	790	788	281
Unweighted count	1244	717	1074	584

Source: Modood T, Berthoud R, Lakey J, Nazroo J, Smith P, Virdee S, Beishon S. Ethnic Minorities in Britain: Diversity and Disadvantage. London: Policy Studies Institute, 1997. See table 3.4, p. 63. 1 Cell size less than 30.

The FNS investigators (Modood et al., 1997) measured the extent of fluency in English against the residential density of own ethnic group (at electoral ward level using 1991 Census figures) (table 5). What this analysis showed was that as the proportions of own group ethnic density rose, the less likely were the residents in those neighbourhoods to speak English fluently or fairly well. This pattern was observed across all four South Asian groups (Indian, African Asian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi), although the degree of drop between lowest and highest density levels varied. One could hypothesise that the degree of everyday exposure to one's own ethnic group was consequential as, at high levels, there would be less need to communicate in English. Modood et al. (1997: 62) concluded from the survey findings that: '… women of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin, aged between 45 and 64, who have been resident in the UK less than 25 years and live in communities where more than 10% of residents are from a similar background are the least likely of all ethnic minority groups to be fluent in English'. In the light of this finding the sample for in-depth interviews of Bangladeshis was based on a design that stratified by own group residential density.

iv. Other studies of language skills

A range of other studies – including two Health Education Authority-funded surveys – point to deficits in English language skills amongst the South Asian and Chinese groups similar to those identified in the Citizenship Survey and Health Survey for England. Johnson et al. (2000), for example, found that while nearly all Indian men and more than 90% of Pakistani and Bangladeshi men could speak English, only three-quarters of Pakistani women and less than three-fifths of Bangladeshi women could do so. Ability in English diminished markedly with age, especially for women: whilst nearly all Indian and Pakistani men and women aged 16-29 could speak English, only 85% of Bangladeshi women could do so. Amongst women aged 50-74, only just over half of Indian and Pakistani women could speak English, but just 17% of Bangladeshi women.

The Fourth National Survey (Modood et al., 1997), undertaken in the early 1990s, showed similar differentials. Amongst women aged 25-44, English spoken fluently or fairly well was at its lowest in the Bangladeshi group (27%), compared with significantly higher proportions in the Indian (73%), African Asian (92%), Pakistani (47%), and Chinese (82%) groups. In the group of 45-64 year old women, just 4% could speak English fluently or fairly well, compared with 28% of Pakistanis and 53% of Indians. Amongst those who came to live in Britain over age 25, 59% of Bangladeshi men could speak English fluently or fairly well but just 5% of Bangladeshi women.

More limited information on language is available in the Labour Force Survey: first language at home and any language difficulties experienced that have caused problems in finding/keeping a job or with education. Spence (2006) used data from the 2003 Labour Force Survey on first language in the home to profile Londoners by language. The majority of Bangladeshi (90%) and Pakistani (74%) Londoners used a language other than English in the home. The proportion was lower in the Indian population (63%) but this was still higher than other groups (62% in the 'Chinese and other groups', 43% in the 'Black African' group and 38% in the 'Other White' group).

Part 2: Ability, use & motivation for learning English

i. Level of ability pre-migration

The Bangladeshi men and women reported a varying range of abilities of spoken and written English pre-migration. Research protocol and ethical considerations meant that self-reported measures of language use and ability was the singular source of information used to gauge levels of English. There are many different measures of assessment of language use and ability used in survey data (see Aspinall 2007, table 1[6]). Surveys vary in the language dimensions they assess. They frequently ask about which languages the respondent speaks and sometimes also which the respondent considers to be their main language (eg Health Survey for England 2004). Others ask about the language the respondent speaks most often at home (2007 Citizenship Survey), first language at home (2006 Labour Force Survey), or language respondent regularly speaks in or spoken to by others (PSI Fourth National Survey, 1994).

The other dimension usually assessed is fluency in English. The Health Survey for England 2004 asked how well the respondent would say they spoke English (across the response categories of 'very well', 'fairly well', 'slightly', or 'not at all'). The 2007 Citizenship Survey asked how good the respondent was at speaking English 'when you need to in daily life, for example to have a conversation on the telephone or talk to a professional such as a teacher or doctor'. In the Fourth National Survey, the interviewer assessed whether the respondent 'speaks English fluently', 'fairly well', 'slightly', or 'not at all'. Other surveys (such as the Family and Working Lives Survey 1994) ask the respondent whether they understand spoken English across a range of response categories. Some research studies have used more complex constructs. One survey undertaken in the 1990s (Carr-Hill et al., 1996) used the concept of 'survival competence', as representing a level of written and spoken competence in English which provides for independent functioning, based on the use of 19 tasks to assess linguistic ability in the use of English.

Very few surveys use the concept of fluency in the question wording as it may not be understood by the respondent. Rather, some try to measure how well the respondent speaks English by contextualising the question, for example, 'need in everyday life', thereby providing a reference point for the respondent. Our research was interested in the range of competencies (with respect to different languages) and self-assessed levels of competency in language use (including how well English is spoken and how well it is understood). In operationalising the different measures, we selected appropriate definitions to refer to levels of ability: 'competent' language use and ability – refers to an individual whose English is comparable to a native speaker; 'survival competence' – (adopted from Carr-Hill et al, 1996) represents a level of written and spoken competence in English enabling independent functioning; and 'below average' 'poor' and 'weak' – refers to an individual whose English is basic with a minimal level of understanding and use.

All of the participants were asked about their levels of educational attainment before coming to the UK. This question on educational background and time spent in schooling in Bangladesh is important, as basic English is taught to every child attending state-funded primary school and continues to be compulsory up to the age of 18,[7] therefore any period of study or qualifications attained in Bangladesh provided a useful point of reference to ascertain the levels and amount of English acquired by the participants. The participants living in the highest concentrated wards in Tower Hamlets (Band 5) were all educated up to an equivalent standard to UK 'A-levels' (known in Bangladesh as Higher Secondary Certificate or HSC) or above. As all four of the Bangladeshi men and women in these wards had completed their education up to the age of 18,[8] they reported at least an understanding of basic English before coming to the UK.

Of these participants, two were graduates, and one had studied in English as an external student of a UK based university –

> *I completed my A-levels under the British curriculum. I graduated from Bhuyan Academy in Bangladesh, as an external candidate of ********** University*
>
> Bangladesh female, aged 25-44, Tower Hamlets (Band 5)

Although this participant had undertaken a substantial period of learning in English, she nonetheless stated that –

> *...When I first came here, I was not so fluent*
>
> Bangladesh female, aged 25-44, Tower Hamlets (Band 5)

Through further prompting, the participants were also asked to comment upon any 'informal' sources of exposure to English they had encountered before arriving in the UK. The participants discussed a variety of English language sources that were easily available. One woman spoke about watching cartoons in English as a child –

> *I used to watch cartoons like Tom and Jerry and other programmes...There was a programme perhaps called Incredible Man...*
>
> Female, aged 25-44, Newham

6 Aspinall PJ. Language ability: a neglected dimension in the profiling of populations and health service users. Health Education Journal 2007; 66(1): 90-106.

7 Please see Bangladeshi Government's website from the National Curriculum & Textbook Board (NCTB): http://www.nctb.gov.bd/article.php?cat=2&subcat=47

8 Please see Bangladeshi Government's website from the Ministry of Education: http://www.moedu.gov.bd/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=339&Itemid=354

Another participant spoke about how watching television enabled him to increase his understanding of English –

I watched many English movies in the cinema and TV. For example, Tarzan... on videos I watched some films such as Rambo-1, Rambo-2 Rambo-3 and Night Rider...[commentary on whether he understood]... Not very much, simple sentences or some words, not whole sentences

Male, aged 25-44, Tower Hamlets (Band 4)

The participants talked about reading English language newspapers and magazines, listening to the radio and going to the cinema to watch English language films. Although these activities enabled the participants to listen to English language sources, however, they were primarily 'passive' actions and certainly opportunities to practice spoken English were slim. Only one Bangladeshi male spoke about learning conversational English –

Yes, I did a course in English. One organisation named Talk Age conducted these courses and Mr Peter Shajahan led these. It helped many people in the Khasdbir area of Sylhet to learn English

Male, aged 24-44, Tower Hamlets (Band 4)

The comments on the levels of English exposure in Bangladesh would at first suggest that those who claimed to have prior knowledge of English, had a competent level of English, but knowledge of English did not indicate fluency and in fact there was a discrepancy between reading and speaking in English.

There were also contrasting levels of English pre-migration between men and women. In the other wards in Tower Hamlets (Band 4), in Newham, Hackney and Waltham Forest, nine out of the 18 women (50%) reported to have been educated up to 10 to 14 years of age, thus providing an indication that they had little or poor English before arriving in the UK –

I studied at my village primary school up to class five[9]

Female, aged 25-44, Tower Hamlets (Band 4)

I studied up to class eight. It is below O level[10]

Female, aged 25-44, Tower Hamlets (Band 4)

I didn't even sit for my Secondary School Certificate exams. I got married before then when I was in class eight[11]

Female, aged 45-64, Waltham Forest

There was a notable difference between English acquirement before arrival between the men and women, which was in part due to the discrepancy in educational background and experience of Bangladeshi women. Although these women had all attended at least primary school, they had not attained any specific educational qualifications, thus further highlighting the fact that levels of English acquired before arrival bear a strong correlation with educational attainment from home. It has been noted by Shields and Wheatley Price (2003) that English language acquisition is strongly affected by factors such as educational background, and this issue was borne out in the findings from this work.

A larger proportion of male Bangladeshi participants had a self-reported level of English, referred to in this study as 'survival competence', which represented a level of written and spoken competency in English which enabled them to function independently (Carr-Hill et al, 1996) –

I studied English for my BA. I graduated in English Literature from a college in Comilla. It was a three year course and was taught completely in English

Male, aged 25-44, Hackney

I came here as a student. I had a good level of fluency in English. I passed my English test in Bangladesh and then I got visa... It was an integrated language course affiliated with Oxford University. I did TEFL as well...

Male, aged 25-44, Newham

The comments show that these two Bangladeshi males had the opportunity to continue their studies, and progress in their learning of English by attending university or going to English language school to participate in TEFL classes while still living in Bangladesh. Furthermore, the male respondents had achieved a higher level of educational attainment than the women. Out of the 12 men, at least seven had studied up to an 'A-level' standard, thus had learnt English up to the age of 18. Comparably, out of the 18 women, only 6 had completed school up to the age of 18. However, of these women, there was a high proportion of graduates (n=4). The evidence would suggest that as the Bangladeshi women in the study had much lower levels of educational attainment than the men – that this affected their chances of learning English pre-migration. On the other hand, the evidence would suggest that over half of the Bangladeshi males (n=7) had acquired 'survival competence' levels of English before arrival.

10 From aged 10 to 11

11 From aged 13 to 14

12 From aged 13 to 14

ii. Current ability in the use of English

The range of competencies in English was gauged using a self-assessed measure of levels of ability and use of English. The participants were asked, in the context of language use in general, which other language(s) they could understand and which language(s) they could converse in, apart from in their own mother tongue. More often than not, the majority of participants explained that they could understand and speak Hindi/Urdu competently (as an Indo-European language, Hindi/Urdu has a close language affiliation with Bengali).

In terms of English language competency, the range of ability was much wider across all boroughs, genders and age groups. The participants living in the Newham area reported the strongest levels of English ability in both men and women. Six out of seven of the participants claimed that they had above 'survival competency' levels of English; at further discussion these self-assessments seemed feasible given their employment status as elected councillors, in administration and customer services and social work.

In the Hackney and Waltham Forest areas, the variation in English language use was more apparent. Only two out of the nine participants stated that they were 'fluent' (one male and one female); two males and one female claimed that they had proficient levels that enabled them to understand and communicate on their own –

> *I can also speak English too. But not too much...*
>
> Male, aged 45-64, Hackney

> *I know how to speak English but I can't speak like those who were born and brought up here. However, even with this, I can manage my life*
>
> Female, aged 45-64, Waltham Forest

Three other women reported that their English was 'weak' – a word referred to by the participants themselves (the other female had not given an indication of her ability in English). These women spoke about knowing little or no English –

> *...Yes, I am weak in spoken English*
>
> Female, aged 25-44, Hackney

> *I also know it [English] a little. I don't know that much. What I know – I can understand*
>
> Female, aged 45-64, Hackney

Across both Bands 4 and 5, as well as in the out of scope wards in Tower Hamlets, three out of the five Bangladeshi men reported a 'survival competency' level of English, and these self-reported assessments seemed plausible given their occupation in customer services for a UK railway company, a grocery shop owner and a receptionist/caretaker.

Within Bands 4 and 5, as well as in the out of scope wards in Tower Hamlets, only two out of the nine women reported to have above a 'survival competency' level, and three out of the nine women spoke about how they could 'communicate on their own'. Four women in the Band 4 wards of Tower Hamlets described knowing a 'little bit' of English; they discussed the fact that they could understand their children speaking to them in English, but found it difficult to respond back to them using the same language –

> *They speak to me in English; I can understand their conversation, but I answer them in Bengali*
>
> Female, aged 25-44, Tower Hamlets (Band 4)

The women in the Band 4 wards appeared to have the least levels of competency. Exploring further into all four of their backgrounds provides an insight into the reasons for their lack of fluency in English. It was apparent that three of the four women had left Bangladesh after marriage to a UK national to join their husbands on a 'marriage visa' – without completing their education at secondary school. Moreover, perhaps the low-levels of educational attainment meant that none of these women had undertaken any salaried work since their arrival in the UK. Thus, the reasons to learn English for these women were substantially decreased and opportunities were further limited given their time commitments to childcare, domestic and family responsibilities.

iii. Motivation to learn English

The participants were asked why they had learnt English after arriving to the UK, or for those in the process of acquiring English, the reasons why they were learning English. Overall, there were no discernable differences in the reasons given by the participants living in the four boroughs of Tower Hamlets, Newham, Hackney and Waltham Forest. Nonetheless, there was a notable difference in the reasons given by the male and female participants. The men and women described reasons that were both instrumental as well as integrational – thus learning English enabled greater communication and access to employment and statutory social services. However, through these points of access to statutory services, the women in particular were able to engage in a dialogue with the wider English speaking community involved in social and welfare provision, and that their motivations for language acquisition were not only functional, but they in particular wanted to support their own children's future learning pathway.

Half of the Bangladeshi men (six out of 12) described the reasons they had learnt English/wanted to learn English, and their concerns were in the main, primarily for instrumental and functional reasons – that learning English was a pragmatic action that would enable them to successfully attain employment or improve their employability prospects –

…but English is also very important. In this country, we need to learn English for jobs, work and communication

Male, aged 25-44, Tower Hamlets (out of scope)

It is indeed very useful. I believe if you want to equip yourself for a job, you should learn English. It is also beneficial for the development of learning

Male, aged 25-44, Tower Hamlets (Band 5)

One male participant felt that his employment prospects had been substantially hampered by his level of spoken English –

I would say to all Bengalis and non-Bengali people who don't or can't speak English. It's good and very important to learn English. From my personal experience, I can say that I didn't get a good job because of my English. Maybe if I knew better English then it would have been so much more helpful for me. I thereby implore everyone to learn English

Male, aged 45-64, Hackney

Two out of the 18 women also acknowledged the importance of knowing English for improving their employment prospects, but their reasons, on the basis of increasing work opportunities, seemed less pressing than the men's. Learning English for attaining employment, was for the women, a future concern, when they had fewer dependents to care for –

Q. Why do you want to learn English?

A. For getting a job in the future.

Q. What type of job?

A. In child minding or childcare

Female, aged 25-44, Tower Hamlets (Band 4)

Although these women cited work as a key motivating factor, it was a concern tied up with their future plans – that in the event of their children leaving home, they would have the language skills to function independently without their children's help, and attain a degree of financial independence by earning an income. On the other hand, learning English for increasing employment opportunities was a much greater concern for the men.

The women's motivations for learning English were equally as important, for both instrumental and functional reasons –

I think in this country you need English everywhere. Like, when I take my children to school, when I go to my GP. You need to speak English. That's why I think English is very important

Female, aged 25-44, Newham

It is necessary to speak English when I go to the GP or to the hospital. When I go outside I feel English is very important

Female, aged 25-44, Tower Hamlets (Band 4)

Accessing statutory services, communicating with their children's teachers and being able to conduct their day-to-day lives outside of their homes, was cited by the majority of women as the main reasons for learning English. In particular, supporting their children's educational development was a strong motivating factor too –

…my younger boy does not speak Bengali. He is a delayed speaker. He has encountered problems in speaking English. Now he only speaks English with his brother and sister. I understand his English, as he speaks very simple English. Sometimes I speak to him in English

Female, aged 25-44, Tower Hamlets (Band 4)

The responsibilities of bringing up their families brought the women in contact with a range of social services that they had to contend with on their own; this encouraged them to take an active interest in attending ESOL classes to learn English.

iv. Motivating factors/Barriers to ESOL services

The motivating factors and barriers discussed here refer to specific issues that have had a direct impact on access to ESOL provision. The features taken into consideration move beyond issues explored earlier, such as participants' previous educational background, experience and existing levels and use of English. Rather the focus is on family and community structures that they talked about, which could facilitate or impede access to English acquisition.

All of the participants reported similar experiences regarding barriers to English acquisition, and there was not any discernible difference in opinion across each of the four boroughs. However, there were notable problems reported by the men and women that were prevalent within each gender. Again, although not reporting about her own personal circumstance, one woman believed that some other Bangladeshi women were not permitted to attend ESOL classes, because their husbands restricted their movement outside of the home –

In our community, women are held back and in many cases they are not allowed to go outside

Female, aged 25-44, Tower Hamlets (out of scope)

These incidences were not reported by any of the other women themselves and there is some level of doubt about the extent to which men, at present, prevent their wives from attending classes. This issue once was a factor that prevented women from learning English, but is no longer the case –

**** **** *collected Bengali women from their homes and she convinced their husbands to allow their wives to go to these classes*

Male, aged 45-64, Newham

It seems that husbands had once prohibited their spouses from learning English, which was a concern to organisations at the forefront of promoting women's English acquisition. This issue had previously affected women's attendance, but perhaps in recent years, has been addressed by ESOL providers through the provision of locally-based classes in adult education centre in outreach work

More often than not, the most widespread reason vocalised by the women, which prevented them from attending English classes was the issue of time and family commitments. Four of the female participants brought up this issue –

I attended a vocational course in English. It was a two year course, but I was only able to continue for a year. Then I got pregnant and dropped it

Female, aged 25-44, Newham

After I came to the UK I didn't really go anywhere to learn English, I was living with my husband's family, so I was with my in-laws and I didn't really get any time to do that. When my children grew up and they started to attend school, then I started taking English classes

Female, aged 25-44, Newham

The lack of time and having both childcare and family responsibilities is an issue that does affect all women regardless of ethnicity. Perhaps the case of Bangladeshi women is more acute, because they are more heavily reliant on state-funded childcare services, especially as the majority are unsalaried and dependent upon the availability of government provided childcare or childcare through their extended families.

Even the women who were attending ESOL classes stated that they were busy with domestic and childcare duties. One woman explained that she was constantly juggling her time to undertake both family responsibilities and find the time for learning –

Although my child is not going to school full-time, he is going part time. So I have been able to attend classes

Female, aged 25-44, Hackney

The men spoke equally about how work commitments impacted upon their time and they found it difficult to attend ESOL classes –

It's quite difficult to learn in a three month course, you have to take other courses as well. Sometimes you can't make it to the classes and you have to manage your family, so it gets quite difficult, and you can't be on Job Seekers allowance for too long

Male, aged 45-64, Hackney

...we who are involved with the curry business usually remain busy on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. There may be a suitable time that's manageable in the evening or at night

Male, aged 25-44, Hackney

Bangladeshi men neither had an opportunity to learn English as they were working or were tied to family commitments. Therefore, for both of the men and women, learning a new language was low on their priority. They were aware that in order to acquire English, they needed to set aside a substantial amount of their time to be able to do this, which they felt they could not yet commit to in this point in their lives.

Another barrier one participant spoke about was his embarrassment and lack of confidence –

As I started learning English quite late in age, I found that it was hard to catch up. My confidence levels were low

Male, aged 45-64, Tower Hamlets (Band 4)

On the other hand, one woman spoke about how much her confidence levels increased when she started learning English –

> *My confidence increased after attending the classes. I had the opportunity to meet many different kinds of people...*
>
> Female, aged 45-64, Waltham Forest

The issue of confidence and self-esteem certainly seem a major contributory factor in motivating or discouraging people to learn English. Nevertheless, the lack of confidence can be overcome through the continued support from teachers and the development of supportive peer-groups and friendships (discussed further below)

v. Integration, social cohesion & citizenship

The issues of integration, social cohesion and citizenship are concerns that are relevant to current government policy and were discussed directly with the participants. Only two out of the 18 females stated that their main reason to learn English was to pass the citizenship test and acquire British nationality; none of the 12 males spoke about this issue. One participant was embarrassed at admitting, during the course of the interview, that her main motivation was to pass the test, but she did confide in the researcher afterwards that this was one reason. Drawing from her statement, she seemed to be suggesting that she was really keen and had a great urgency to learn English –

> *I am very eager to learn English. I am willing to learn English as quick as possible*
>
> Female, aged 25-44, Tower Hamlets (Band 4)

Another woman discussed frankly that there were a combination of reasons she wanted to learn English, but one overriding factor was for obtaining citizenship –

> *It is absolutely necessary to speak English when I go outside. It will help me to get a job in the future. It will help me to get British citizenship*
>
> Female, aged 25-44, Tower Hamlets (Band 4)

The issue of the citizenship test was a motivating factor only for these two participants – and not discussed by any of the others. This would suggest that the introduction of the test has had only a limited impact on encouraging Bangladeshis to learn English.

Although not disclosed openly or candidly by the participants themselves in their own personal circumstances, two women did allude to a growing problem between mothers and their children that was borne out of low levels of English ability and use, where a gap was growing between mothers and their offspring that was having a worrying impact on social relations between two generations. One interviewee commented that the low levels of English was a having a direct bearing on the relationship between first generation Bangladeshi women and their children –

> *It seems important to me [to learn English], as in our community..especially ladies, are facing problems communicating with their children who cannot speak Bengali, they only speak English. So there remains a gap with their mother. A mother is the main carer for her children… Neither the children know Bengali nor do the mothers know English*
>
> Female, aged 25-44, Newham

Underpinning this comment on the low levels of English ability is a profound discourse concerning integration and social cohesion. This participant refers to a growing communication 'gap' between mothers and their children; not only does this comment draw attention to the gap in a literal sense – to the levels of language miscommunication between first and second generation Bangladeshis, but also the tensions in linguistic and cultural difference between the generations.

Not only did participants note a fracture in relation between parents and their children, but also due to their low levels of English, women in particular felt disempowered from accessing statutory social services –

> *I strongly feel that English is necessary in this country. Particularly, those who came here from our country, they need to know the system of this country… I think basic English is very helpful for us. In my experience… it is sometimes necessary for the survival of immigrant people. I know in particular that the language barrier has worsened mental problems*
>
> Female, aged 45-64, Tower Hamlets (Band 5)

This comment reflects that poor English language use has an immediate impact on entry into mental health service provision. Moreover, the participant states that the sense of frustration and isolation is heightened further, as individuals are unable to sufficiently vocalise their condition, and not knowing the 'system of this country', has the potential for increasing social tensions felt by Bangladeshis not feeling able to adequately receive help on the pathway to mental health.

Part 3: ESOL – usefulness, provision & access & ethnicity of teachers/students

i. Usefulness of ESOL provision

The participants were asked about whether they had or were attending English classes and whether they found these useful. There was a significant number of Bangladeshi men and women who stated that they had attended English classes or were at the time engaged in learning English; overall 21 participants acknowledged that they had been or were learning English, and of these, 15 of the women and six of the men stated that they had attended classes. Given the poor levels of English use and ability of women after arrival to the UK, the higher proportion of women to men is rather unsurprising. Of the men who had not attended ESOL, the reasons given further support the argument put forward previously, that after arrival to the UK, Bangladeshi men have higher levels of English use and ability –

Q. Don't you think you'd like to attend an English language course?

A. No. I feel that I have enough of a knowledge of English, so English language courses are not necessary for me

Male, aged 25-44, Tower Hamlets (out of scope)

Only half of the Bangladeshi men had learnt or were engaged in learning English, but of those who did attend ESOL, did acknowledge that the classes were of great help to them. The women stated with equal importance the value of attending English classes –

Yes, ESOL is very useful. It helped me to learn practical English

Female, aged 25-44, Waltham Forest

In my opinion ESOL classes are very useful for us. We are shown many practical examples... even those of us who are educated in Bengali sometimes did not know. It's about everyday lifestyles in England... how to get on a bus, where to stand for the bus, what we will say to the GP?

Female, aged 25-44, Tower Hamlets (out of scope)

All of the participants spoke about the positive experiences of attending ESOL; there were no negative experiences reported about the actual classes. The sense of gratitude and appreciation felt by the participants towards their teachers was evident –

My teacher is very helpful and she inspires us to speak in English

Female, aged 25-44, Tower Hamlets (Band 4)

Although none of the participants stated any negative comments, one did report problems she had encountered during ESOL classes –

I did attend classes but not for long. I had problems with listening and concentrating. So I left the class… Yes it was beneficial but I've forgotten mostly everything

Female, aged 45-64, Hackney

This Bangladeshi female talked about problems she had come across with her own individual learning needs, perhaps an issue separate from the teaching experience encountered in ESOL classes. It is difficult to gauge whether all of the experiences were positive, but drawing from the comments of the participants, there were very few criticisms to be found.

ii. Provision & access of ESOL

The participants reported mixed experiences in accessing ESOL provision. The participants living within the wards in Tower Hamlets claimed to have much greater availability of ESOL services in their local area. Of the women who attended classes in the borough, they all stated that the teaching centres were within easy reach of their homes and they could walk to classes –

It's [adult education centre] not very far. Most of the time I walk to classes

Female, aged 25-44, Tower Hamlets (out of scope)

Q. How do you go to your classes?

A. By walking. It's close to my younger son's school

Female, aged 25-44, Tower Hamlets (Band 4)

For women with families and children, the importance of education centres being held near to their homes and where their children attended school was paramount. Another female participant reported that although classes were available locally within her area, these were primarily at pre-entry and entry-levels of ESOL and were not suitable to her need. She mentioned that in order to access advanced courses, she had to travel by bus to another education centre –

Q. How do you go to your class?

A. By bus.

Q. ESOL is available in Jago Nari Centre in Whitechapel. Did you enquire?

A. Yes. But I attend more advanced courses. These are not available in the Jago Nari Centre

Female, aged 25-44, Tower Hamlets (Band 5)

Those participants living in the Tower Hamlets area reported quite a range of ESOL provision from basic to advanced courses, and that provision had been identified to accord with local need. Although advanced classes were not available to some participants, they still seemed prepared to travel a short distance by bus outside of their local area to attend classes.

The availability and range of provision reported in Tower Hamlets was not however reflected in the other boroughs. Two participants stated that within their local boroughs ESOL provisions had been closed down or funding arrangements had been drastically rationed –

Now we don't have any English classes in my area because of government funding

Female, aged 45-64, Waltham Forest

Those women who have recently arrived into this country should be given the opportunity to learn English. We have Hackney Community Hall close by where we have benefitted from that before, but those who have recently arrived here cannot take advantage of this provision [ESOL classes]. Most of the time, they are warned by the college that they have to pay for classes until they receive their legal status. There should be something for free

Male, aged 25-44, Hackney

The closure of ESOL centres and the onset of government rationing appear to have affected Bangladeshis living outside of the higher concentrated areas. The situation described by the above participants in Waltham Forest and Hackney seem unchanged from funding issues that existed 10 years earlier in Newham –

In the 1990s ESOL was different. At that time we waited for a space to attend ESOL. Although spaces and resources were limited, but teachers were good... they took great care. They gave more time to us

Female, aged 25-44, Newham

Although not reporting upon resourcing and funding issues currently in Newham, the above comments suggests that ESOL is or has been poorly resourced outside of the densely populated areas inhabited by Bangladeshis. More importantly, as these participants stated that ESOL provision was limited in their local boroughs, thus the perception of the lack of funding could have been a strong deterrent to Bangladeshis seeking and accessing ESOL services.

iii. Ethnicity of teachers & students

The participants were asked whether they had a preference for ethnically-matched teachers (ie Bengali/Bangladeshi teachers) and if the ethnicity of the teacher impacted upon their learning of English. Only one of the participants stated that he thought having ethnically-matched teachers would be more beneficial to learners –

If my teacher was a Bengali, he could have delivered a better lecture. Such a teacher could have easily understood me

Male, aged 25-44, Tower Hamlets (Band 4)

While other participants interviewed in fact stated a preference for non-Bengali/Bangladeshi teachers, as it was argued that –

In my opinion where there are Bengali students, the teacher should be non-Bengali. Because if there is a Bengali teacher, with Bengali students in the class, then s/he will tend to speak in Bengali. If the composition is mixed then they all have to speak in English

Male, aged 25-44, Tower Hamlets (Band 4)

The comment above shows an awareness by the participant of the ease at which Bangladeshi teachers risk switching into Bengali when speaking to their students, thus reducing the opportunity for practising English in class. Other participants were also conscious that having a Bangladeshi teacher could be detrimental as switching into Bengali during English classes could impact upon their learning.

When asked the question whether a Bangladeshi or non-Bangladeshi teacher was preferable, another female participant argued that the ethnicity of the teacher was irrelevant; the main issue was whether the teacher was experienced and skilled enough to enable her to progress –

That is not the issue. Everybody has to speak in English. For example my teacher speaks completely in English, no code switching into Bengali. My teacher has introduced a 10 pence fine for speaking Bengali in our English class

Female, aged 25-44, Tower Hamlets (Band 4)

But if a teacher is good, well mannered s/he could be from anywhere. The important thing is that the teacher must have the capacity to teach

Female, aged 25-44, Tower Hamlets (Band 4)

The participants were also asked about whether the ethnic composition of the other students in class impacted upon their learning and if they had a preference for ethnically-matched peers or whether they preferred attending classes with students from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Again, the participants stated that having students from a diverse range of backgrounds was far more beneficial, as they could practice using English with their fellow peers –

If the students are mixed that would be an ideal setting for learning English. Then all of them will speak English

Female, aged 25-44, Waltham Forest

Students have to speak in English...If the composition of the class is mixed then they all have to speak in English

Female, aged 25-44, Tower Hamlets (Band 5)

Perhaps for Bangladesh female participants, the opportunity to practice English in class with non-Bangladeshis is a much higher priority for them, in particular given the constraints on their time. Not only were ethnically mixed classes deemed a more effective environment for learning English, it also enabled some of the female participants to socialise outside of the Bangladeshi community –

... [I] found out a lot about different cultures, their lives, traditions...learnt a lot of good things from them and made a few friendships...I used to have a negative idea about these people before I met them

Female, aged 45-64, Waltham Forest

These comments suggest that attending ESOL classes are not only instrumental in facilitating learning English, but in fact offers an opportunity to engage with a wider network of peers enabling sometimes isolated and vulnerable women to develop social networks. Thus, the utility of ESOL is two-fold: first, providing the scope for learning and becoming potentially competent in the use of English, and second, perhaps having a far more wider-reaching effect than the former, providing a vehicle in which to integrate within their local community.

Part 4: ESOL services – needs assessment, delivery of classes & cultural competency

The 10 teachers of ESOL reported a range of factors on how they were meeting the needs of their students, how ESOL provision could better meet the needs of Bangladeshi learners, and how they have facilitated the learning of English in response to the cultural background of the students. They also discussed the future of ESOL in particular the pressures on teaching and the impact of rationing of funding, which they feared would have a detrimental impact on access and provision of services.

The ESOL teachers commented that in order to meet the individual learning needs of their students, they were continually adapting and re-drafting teaching materials to use in class –

I could make it better for my students' needs anyway, not necessarily better full stop but, you know, better made, tailor made for my students. And I think if you've got a starting point it gives you somewhere to go from whereas if you haven't got a starting point it's really quite daunting and I... I mean I could easily, when I started teaching, spent eight hours on one hour teaching

Female teacher, adult education centre, ESOL outreach

The teachers showed a clear understanding and commitment to alter and change teaching materials to accord with the needs of their students. They had mixed responses to the *Skills for Life* materials that were made available to ESOL teachers. Another teacher based in ESOL outreach work discussed the difficulty in teaching students with little or poor levels of literacy –

Well like the Skills for Life material aren't good for illiterate students. There's far too much on the page and some of the tapes are difficult to hear. But some of the ideas are good and they're quite... they keep giving little exercises on spelling or charts, little other different things so they're useful but you've got to use them carefully

Female teacher, adult education centre, ESOL outreach

The inappropriateness of teaching materials is especially acute to teachers working in ESOL outreach, as many of the students are at pre-entry and entry level ESOL and has had very minimal experience of learning or schooling before arriving in the UK. Another teacher based at a further education college also spoke about the limited utility of the *Skills for Life* material –

There's very few teachers who use the Skills for Life material heavily. I think probably maybe a third will use it a bit but I think two thirds don't use it at all and I would put myself in the category of using it a bit. I used it today for example

Female teacher, further education college, ESOL mainstream programme

There were few teachers who stated that they used the *Skills for Life* materials extensively, primarily because they worked closely with their students and felt able to identify their students' learning requirements –

So a lot of work that I...or materials that have been produced we tend to make them ourselves which is always good because a) it's creative, b) it lasts for a long time and if it works on one group it will work on another group... I tend to do my own because I know my learners

Male teacher, further education college, ESOL main programme

One teacher felt that the resources available for teaching were completely inadequate –

Resource-wise ESOL is very poor, extremely poor. I mean everybody follows through EFL which is English Foreign Language...

Female teacher, adult education centre, ESOL outreach

This teacher felt it necessary to supplement her teaching materials from textbooks and additional English language teaching sources used in the teaching of English as a Foreign Language, which she found more suitable to the needs of her students. She felt she did not have sufficient resources to teach her students and that in general it reflected poorly on the overall quality of materials she could use.

The ESOL teachers spoke in-depth about the varying and creative ways they had delivered their classes. One teacher spoke about using visual items and objects to help prompt conversation in English –

But I like to do things very visually...So if I was doing shopping or something I might bring in some apples and bananas and tomatoes or ...One time I brought in puppets because we were trying to talk about – we were learning introducing each other, so what's your name, where do you come from? And then we were learning about he and she, so where does she come from...

Female teacher, adult education centre, ESOL outreach

The effectiveness of role-play in teaching English was reported by a number of the teachers at pre-ESOL and entry-level ESOL. For learners at the preliminary levels of learning, certainly visual prompts and aids seemed a creative tool for teaching. Other teachers based at the further education college spoke about the importance of 'embedded' ESOL classes, which were linked to a qualification in childcare –

...we find embedded stuff works quite well. With slightly higher levels we've introduced childcare. We do do one E3 course... I think language that's focussed with something in particular of interest to them and childcare is because even if they're not going to be working with children, most of them have got children

Female teacher, further education centre, ESOL mainstream programme

The importance of applied learning was highlighted by another teacher, who spoke about the value of undertaking 'enrichment' activities, such as trips to museums or places of interest, which helped students to practice their English on people they had never met before –

I mean something that one person did which was really cool is they were doing about the home and so she... her enrichment trip she took a bus down to Tower Bridge or... yeah, around the Tower of London and the students just did a survey with just people walking past and just asked them...

Female, further education college, ESOL mainstream programme

The teachers demonstrated a broad range of teaching methods that they had developed to suit the needs of their students in accordance with their use and ability of English. Furthermore, the teachers spoke about creating a learning environment for students that was sociable and fun, where the students did not feel inhibited in front of their peers, and in fact used their fellow students as a learning aid –

Well peer teaching, a bit of laughter. Yeah, it's got to be something that they can see the point of, yeah. And a bit of sort of feeding back from what they've done and what they know

Female, adult education centre, ESOL outreach

In addition, the teachers demonstrated a strong cultural awareness of their Bangladeshi students' ethnic and religious background. However, one teacher did talk about a misunderstanding that had arisen previously when she taught ESOL, which caused some of her students to take offence –

...last year I was pulled up by students to whom I taught English...they complained I was anti-Islamic and anti-Bangladeshi and it was a real shock...And what it was...was that when I was teaching English to them I always gave real life examples, which might be 'a good Muslim prays 5 times a day' which in ESOL to me was totally ...what's the word? You know, not just permissible...But they said everything I did was in some way negative, a negative stereotype, and I said well I don't actually agree but if it gave offence to you then, you know, I will spend a year teaching English where I don't use any real life examples

Female, further education college, ESOL mainstream programme

This ESOL teacher was taken by complete surprise that her students objected to her 'real life' example taken from the Islamic practice of prayer. The boundaries about what causes offence is still unclear and even ESOL teachers with many years of experience teaching Bangladeshi students are sometimes unaware of what the students may take exception to. Another teacher was conscious of not using certain reference points or examples when talking to her students, because she believed it was not good teaching practice to inform her students about such matters –

...there are different topics. I mean nothing to do with what's not good for Muslims, like astrology comes in text books loads and I won't touch that because I think it's actually harmful so...yeah...In general I think it's nuts...

Female, adult education centre, ESOL outreach

One teacher did take a more cautious approach when discussing the issue of religion –

...now sort of going to religion and you can really feel the students tensing up because that is a very sensitive issue so... I suppose sometimes it can be discussion points but again you have to be really sort of careful. And I mean as a teacher you always have to have the balance right as well whether you're actually teaching or you're preaching so you have to...

Female, adult education centre, ESOL outreach

In general, the ESOL teachers did not risk engaging in any kind of discussion around the subject of religion or Islam, and avoided any conversation that they thought would cause offence. They were very careful to remain neutral and endeavoured to be sensitive to the cultural background of their students.

Future of ESOL and outreach

The last two interviews with the ESOL teachers took place at a time when the impact of the 'new approach' to ESOL was to be fully realised – at the beginning of June 2009. After the announcement of the Government's rationing strategy, the ESOL teachers felt compelled to voice their anger and concerns about the impact of the new funding system, which would in effect lead to a cut in funds and student places especially in adult education outreach centres. One teacher spoke about her anxieties over cuts in funding impacted upon services in outreach centres –

And that's why I am desperate in hoping, praying if you like that what the college is now going to give up if you see the lists...You see how many outreach centres...[refers to cuts]... And I just hope that charities can take them on because otherwise there are going to be a lot of women who don't have what they've got used to...

Female, further education college, ESOL mainstream programme

This teacher's comments show that the services that would be the hardest hit by rationing of ESOL provision would be in outreach centres where Bangladeshi women have the heaviest attendance rates. Another ESOL teacher echoed the same sentiment –

...there's going to be massive, massive cuts, particularly in ESOL...So for example outreach centres most of them are going to be closed, we're withdrawing from outreach centres. So it's going to have a massive impact on the community. I'm not... I don't know really what's going to happen. And we're cutting...I can't remember how many less students are gonna be able to be taught next year

Female, further education college, ESOL mainstream programme

Both ESOL teachers were fearful about the future of ESOL services in their borough especially as the cuts seemed to be targeting women – who had the greatest need to access services. According to their comments, certain sections of ESOL provision had a very bleak future for both the staff and students.

Discussion

This study sought to identify the key motivating factors for Bangladeshis to learn English, and also explore the barriers to attaining fluency, after coming to the UK. In order to investigate this area further, the research explored a range of factors including profiling the use and ability in English of Bangladeshis living in London, an assessment of the need for ESOL in this community using a needs-based assessment approach, and a mapping of ESOL services in London Boroughs to explore the level of cultural competency of provision from the position of ESOL providers (in this case with ESOL teachers). The mixed methods approach underpinning this work offered both background information on the language profile of the Bangladeshi community in London and provided a complementary dataset when finding out from the participants the facilitators and inhibitors for attaining English.

This discussion will critically review the work in relation to issues around policy relevance and consider what to take forward in the context of policy development. An important underlying aspect of this project was the use of both statistical analysis and in-depth qualitative interviews to assess need, which has helped to compile an evidence base of the language requirements of this group. This evidence further strengthens support for continued funding for ESOL provision to settled groups in Britain – thus questioning the Government's new rationing strategy, which focuses on the most excluded.

i. Policy relevance

The relevance of undertaking research on the language needs of Bangladeshis and other minority ethnic groups with skill deficits in English is linked to an evidence base that shows that those groups who have the poorest skill levels in the use of English experience a wide range of disadvantages in accessing services (Lakhani 2008) and in the labour market (Shields et al., 2003). With respect to general practitioner consultations, for example, Gill et al. (2009) have estimated that annually 2.52 million such consultations for individuals from Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Chinese ethnic groups are likely to require interpreting services. The very demographic groups that report high skill deficits in the use of English – women and older individuals – are the very ones that also report higher consultation rates. The most recent data on economic inequalities demonstrates the scale of the employment and pay disadvantages for the Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities, cross-cutting with Muslim religious affiliation (Hills et al., 2010). For example, Pakistani and Bangladeshi men and Black African Christian men are paid between 13% and 21% less than white British Christian men with the same characteristics and qualifications. Nearly half of Pakistani and Bangladeshi households are in poverty.

ii. The provision of interpreting and translation services and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

This study also revealed that the extent of a match between survey evidence on skill deficits in English and that on the utilisation of services to address these deficits – interpreting, translation, and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) – is still unknown. Currently, there is no central requirement to report expenditures on interpreting and translation by statutory bodies such as primary care trusts or local authorities. Such information as there is has been obtained by Freedom of Information Act requests. Similarly, there is no official reporting on the utilisation of ESOL services which are provided by a wide range of official and voluntary organisations. Nor is there any comprehensive information on the capacity of ESOL services. The London Health Commission's London Language Plan[12] promised a London-wide survey of language support provision but this has not taken place.

iii. Deriving appropriate models for service delivery

Moreover, there are few models for the culturally sensitive delivery of ESOL amongst the different ethnic communities. While the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Department for Communities and Local Government and the Learning Skills Council have started the implementation of the 'new approach' to ESOL provision, this makes no reference to the specific needs of the different communities for culturally sensitive and competent delivery of services, but only to 'shape provision so that it meets their needs' and to 'consider other barriers to access, for example childcare arrangements' (DIUS 2009). Cultural competency appears to have been a casualty to an approach focused on integration and cohesion rather than multiculturalism. This research is therefore well-positioned to respond to the needs of members of the Bangladeshi community for language support and offers some timely pointers.

Interviews with members of the Bangladeshi community have shown that learning English continues to be of great importance and high priority with both men and women. Bangladeshi men identified the following reasons for this: working within an environment that required speaking English, especially in an area where Bangladeshi colleagues were a minority, obtaining employment or increasing employment prospects, and accessing health and social services, such as visits to the GP, hospital, or the local borough council. The reasons given by Bangladeshi women included: accessing services, the women wanting to be able to communicate on their own without the use of an interpreter when using their GP or local hospital

12 Draft London Language Plan. Project Initiation Document. February 2005.
See: http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/London%20Councils/Item11Appendix1LondonLanguagePlanPID22.doc

services; understanding the schooling needs of their children, including the wish to support their children in their studies, communicating with their children's school teachers without the assistance of their children acting as interpreters, and joining the workforce in areas such as childcare and nursery education. The needs identified here of both Bangladeshi males and females have a significant overlap concerning the three main areas of work, family and accessing statutory services.

This research has shown that ESOL training was a widely-used service and continued to be a key area of need within this community. Interviews with the ESOL teachers provide evidence of how teaching and learning should be targeted according to the learning requirements of their Bangladeshi students. Rigid learning environments were considered to be the least effective, supportive and informal classroom conditions where students were not embarrassed to make mistakes being the most important. For adult learners, using visual teaching resources and having a creative learning environment seemed an appropriate way to communicate with students whose English levels were very basic. 'Enrichment activities' such as taking students on cultural trips to museums or visits to historic sites not only enabled the students to practice their English but, more importantly, enabled them to travel outside their local area, thereby increasing their exposure to other (non-Bangladeshi) communities. 'Embedded courses' also enabled students to take an applied approach to learning English and was useful for increasing future employment prospects. Overall, the ESOL teachers were very conscious of teaching English in accordance with the cultural sensitivities of their students. They were attuned to their needs, avoided discussions on subjects that may cause offence (such as religion) and demonstrated a high level of knowledge and understanding of the students they taught.

iv. Impact of Government's new rationing strategy

The Government's new rationing strategy does however highlight some worrying trends in terms of future policy developments. The 'new approach' to ESOL policy prioritises the least integrated segments in society and many of the pathfinder partnerships (DIUS 2009) have excluded the settled South Asian population as priority groups. Currently, provision for third country nationals is poorly developed, the Borders and Immigration Agency seeking ways of commissioning these services from bodies such as colleges of further education and other providers. Consequently, although groups with the highest levels of need for ESOL training amongst the settled minority ethnic communities, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis are likely to experience significant difficulties in gaining access to such training. These difficulties may be compounded by those community members, such as newly arrived spouses, who have little if any skills in English and therefore require access to pre-ESOL training. The Government's 'new approach' to English language services was an area of growing concern to ESOL providers. The interviews with the teachers was timely as the first proposed cuts were gradually being phased into the participating further education college and its outreach programme, which threatened to cut provision to those groups most in need – namely isolated Bangladeshi women based in outreach centres. The impact of the rationing of ESOL services is still yet to be fully realised, but drawing from the evidence provided for this study, the strategy seems to only partially accord with the discourse on encouraging integration and strengthening steps towards social cohesion.

Conclusion

This study on the motivations of Bangladeshis into English acquisition has demonstrated that this community is willing to learn English, despite challenges they may encounter on the pathway to fluency. If given the opportunity – in terms of access and provision, availability of locally-funded classes and time-commitments, Bangladeshi are keen to attend classes and wish to see an improvement in their use and ability of English. They also value the importance of English for improving prospects in employment, accessing statutory services and supporting the second generation of Bangladeshi children in education. An underlying message must be that Bangladeshis do not actively resist learning English – but that the lack of English is due to a multiplicity of reasons that impact upon entry onto classes, regular attendance and completion of courses.

Any action required to address these issues are complex, but not impossible. ESOL service providers have gone to great lengths to respond to the learning needs of this group. However, the Government's 'new approach' to ESOL provision threatens to undermine the work of the teachers. In the light of this rationing of services – the future of ESOL provision to 'settled' communities such as Bangladeshis seems uncertain.

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Appendix 1: Participant interview schedule

Nuffield Small Social Science Grants

'What kind of language services should public authorities provide to minority groups: the case of Bangladeshis in London'

Interview Schedule:

a. Current family – household

1. Do you speak any other language(s) (other than Sylheti/Bengali) with your husband/wife? If yes, which one(s)?
2. Do you ever change the language you use depending upon where you are? (ie different settings and social contexts?)
3. **(If they have any children)** What language do you speak to your children in? What language do your children speak to each other in?
4. What language do you speak with other members of the family?
5. Knowledge of other languages? Hindi, Urdu, Arabic? If yes, why/how did you learn this/these?

b. Family – extended – usage of language across generations

6. Do you speak any English with members of your family?
   If yes, who and how much?
7. Are there any non-Sylheti/Bengali speakers of the family?
   If yes, who? Do you talk to them often?

c. Place of residence before arrival to UK

8. Where did you spend the most part of your (childhood and adult) life – in Bangladesh/London/elsewhere? (try to gauge urban/rural context in Bangladesh)
9. Have you visited any city areas in Bangladesh? (ie cities
   such as Dhaka, Chittagong or towns such as Sylhet town).
   If yes, where?
10. Before arriving to the UK, had you ever come into contact
    with UK public 'officials' or public authorities?
    (ie British Embassy/Consulate interviews)

d. Friends and neighbours/neighbourhood

11. Are all of your friends and neighbours Sylheti/Bengali/Bangladeshi?
12. Do you have friends or neighbours from any other countries? Do you have friends who are English speakers?
13. Have you ever lived in any other neighbourhoods (in the UK) other than in this (present) area?

e. Educational attainment – in Bangladesh

14. Have you ever attended school in Bangladesh?
    If yes, what age were you when you left school?
    If no, did you do any learning at home? (what subjects?)
15. What do you think your level of reading or written Bengali is
    (ie up to which class)?
16. What (if any) is your highest qualification gained in Bangladesh?
17. Have you had any formal or informal learning of English before coming to the UK (either learning to read or write in English)? (try to gauge ANY exposure to English)
18. What is your father's or mother's educational background? (or other relatives' educational background such as brothers or sisters, uncles or aunts, grandparents?)

f. Arrival to the UK

19. What age were you when you arrived in the UK? When and why did you first come to the UK? (ie for work, marriage?)
20. How long have you lived in London?
    (ie recently, last 5-10 years? 10-20 years, 20+ years)
21. When you arrived in the UK, where did you first settle?

g. Occupational status

22. Do you work? If yes – in what field?
23. For women working at home – any home-based salaried work, other work outside of the home? (if any?)
24. How much English is spoken to co-workers or senior colleagues?

h. Language & social identity

25. How important is it to you that you continue to speak Sylheti/Bengali at home? Why?
26. (If they have children) Do you feel it is important to teach (your) children Sylheti/Bengali? Why? (maintaining mother-tongue for cultural reasons; transmission of culture)
27. Do your children learn Bengali at school/outside of school?

i. ESOL experiences or other English language learning in the UK

28. Have you attended any English language classes? If yes – what did you learnt, if anything?
29. Were your experiences positive or negative?
30. What was the ethnicity or gender of the teachers – did this make a difference?
31. What was the ethnic or racial background of the other students?
32. Why did you want to learn English in the first place? (ie first motivations to learn English – if any?)
33. Were there any problems with the cost of learning or problems with travelling to the language classes?

j. Current usage of English out of areas where Bangladeshis live

34. Do you need to speak any English outside of the home?
    Why? When? Where?
35. If not, what is the alternative? How do you communicate with non-Bengali speakers in these contexts:
    - in public
    - to get health-care
    - to teachers at your children's school?
    - out shopping – outside Bangladeshi/'Bengali areas'/outside of East London

k. Visits to Bangladesh?

36. When was the last time you went to Bangladesh, how long for? Why was this?
37. Have you any plans to return to Bangladesh for family/work/other reasons?
38. (If they have children) Have your children ever been to Bangladesh? If yes, when have you usually taken them?
    If no, what are the reasons why they haven't been to Bangladesh?

Appendix 2:
ESOL teacher interview schedule

Nuffield Small Social Science Grants

'What kind of language services should public authorities provide to minority groups: the case of Bangladeshis in London'

General questions

1. Why did you choose to teach ESOL?
2. How long have you been teaching ESOL?
3. How long have you been teaching ESOL at ********** college?
4. Do you feel you receive sufficient support from the college? Or from other staff? Of from ESOL programme officers?

ESOL Curriculum

5. Since you began teaching ESOL, have there been any significant changes in the curriculum?
6. Would you recommend any changes? Would you describe these?
7. What teaching methods do you find the most effective for teaching English?
8. What do you think of the learning materials available for teaching ESOL? Through the college? Elsewhere?
9. What do you think are the main differences between ESOL and EFL?
10. What impact ford ESOL learning materials have on students' expectations for learning?

Influence of the citizenship test

11. Have there been any curriculum changes in teaching ESOL (that you have noted) since the introduction of the citizenship test?
12. Have there been any differences in student interests or student motivations for learning English since the introduction of the citizenship test? Why do you think this is?
13. Have there been any differences in the type of students attending ESOL recently? Why do you think this is?

ESOL students

14. What kinds of students attend ESOL classes? (ie ethnicity, gender, age ranges?)
15. What reasons have the students given about why they are learning English?
16. Are there any particular groups (age, gender, ethnicity) you feel are under-represented in your student cohort? Why do you think this is?
17. Do you think the college should provide women only classes to increase their attendance?
18. Have you noticed whether rates of attrition (drop-out rates) are high or attendance poor in any particular groups (age, gender, ethnicity)? Why do you think this is?

Learning environments

19. What factors do you think encourages students to learn English in the classroom?
20. What factors do you think discourages students to learn English in the classroom?
21. Do you think ESOL classes should also expose students to 'British culture' or reflect the cultures they live in?
22. What kind of social environments (outside of the classroom) do you think would help students learn English?
23. What kind of social environments (outside of the classroom) do you think discourages students from learning English?

Bangladeshis & learning English

24. Why do you think learning English is important to Bangladeshis?
25. Do you think Bangladeshis actively resist learning English? Do you think this resistance impacts upon your students practicing their English?
26. Is there a question you feel I should have asked?

Appendix 3: Participant/ESOL teacher information sheet

A University of Kent project on: 'English Language Acquisition and Bangladeshis in London'

We are researchers at the University of Kent who are conducting a one-year research project on 'English Language Acquisition and Bangladeshis in London'. It is funded by The Nuffield Foundation.

Before you decide if you want to take part or not, we thought it was important that you understand what the project is about.

What is the project about?

This project will find out if and why first generation adult Bangladeshis (aged 25 to 70) learn English while living in London. We want to know if this group is able to access English language training.

We will also link the information you provide by drawing a comparison of the interview data with a mapping of local language provision in London.

Your answers will help us understand whether English language training is suitable and appropriate for adult Bangladeshis who hope to acquire English as a second language.

If I take part what do I have to do?

All we require from you for our study is that you agree to take part in a one-to-one interview.

We will focus in particular on English language requirements amongst Bangladeshis in particular looking at language needs.

We will be talking about whether or not you have attended English language training, what encouraged you to attend these classes and whether you found them helpful for improving your English.

If you are a teacher of English (ESOL teacher) we would like to discuss your experiences of teaching English to adult Bangladeshis.

If you allow us, we would like to tape record the interview that will last between 30 to 60 minutes, depending on how much you want to discuss with us.

If you allow us, we would like to tape record the interview that will last between 30 to 60 minutes, depending on how much you want to discuss with us.

What happens to the information?

We would like to bring to your attention that anything you discuss with us will remain completely confidential. Your answers will be coded and your name anonymised, which means that your responses cannot be traced back to you. Any information that has been recorded in the project, such as tapes or documents, will be destroyed when the project is finished.

We hope to use the information you provide to inform Government policy to improve English language provision to Bangladeshis in this area. We will report back our research to the Dept. for Communications and Local Government, the Social Inclusion Unit and the Commission for Racial Equality. We will publish a report, which will be available on the University website (www.kent.ac.uk/sspssr). We will also provide local feedback at a seminar held at the Brick Lane Circle in Whitechapel (details to be confirmed).

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you if you want to participate, but if you decide you do not want to take part, this will not affect you in any way. If you agree to participate and later change your mind, you can do this at any time during the interview.

How can I find out more?

If you would like to know more about the project or if there is anything that is not clear, you can contact me (Ferhana Hashem) on 01227 824887 during office hours, or leave a message and I will call you back.

You can also contact me via email on F.Hashem@kent.ac.uk or by writing to the following address:

School of Social Policy, Sociology & Social Research,
George Allen Wing,
University of Kent,
Canterbury, Kent CT2 7NF

Appendix 4:
Consent form

A University of Kent Project on:
'English Language Acquisition and Bangladeshis in London'
A Nuffield Foundation funded Project

School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research
George Allen Wing
University of Kent
Canterbury
Kent CT2 7NF

Ferhana Hashem
Research Fellow
T: 01227 824887
E: F.Hashem@kent.ac.uk

Consent Form

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the chance to ask questions.

   Please tick box ☐

2. I understand that taking part in the project is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and without my rights being affected.

   Please tick box ☐

3. I agree to take part in the above project.

   Please tick box ☐

Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name of Person Taking Consent: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

University of Kent

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