



The Linguistic Wants and Needs of Post-Secondary Burmese Refugees Learning English as an Additional Language

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Abstract

Education for refugees has been a hotspot for research with increasing numbers of forced migration situations around the world, one of the long-lasting refugee migration situations is that of Burma. By exploring Burmese history and research related to refugee English education, large literature gaps have been found in relation to post-secondary Burmese students who are or were learning English. Through semi-structured interviews and their subsequent analysis, the linguistic wants and needs of three Burmese refugees learning English are explored, along with challenges they face in the learning process. The findings from interview analysis and comparison revealed that participants perceive relevant course material is crucial for school and communication, they expressed a desire to have started learning English from a younger age and prefer native English teachers for accent purposes – for understanding them and for attempting to acquire this accent. Participants also shared how tools for communicative needs, such as speech pace and comprehending advanced vocabulary, were the most difficult to acquire. The findings of this study can be used to help inform English educational practices for Burmese refugees on policy, classroom, or individual levels to ensure a higher quality of English learning.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter will outline the brief context of Burmese conflicts and ethnic groups, education for refugees, and the aims of this study.

As of 2008, Burma has changed its name to the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, this paper will refer to the state as Burma as per the preference of participants. This is to respect their views and reflects the perspectives of some states, like the Australian government, which do not acknowledge the name change (Watkins et al., 2012).

1.1: The Burmese Context

In 1948, Burma gained its independence from the United Kingdom, which marked the beginning of a tumultuous political landscape (The Asia Foundation, 2017). This same year was the start of a civil war between the military and the Communist Party of Burma, in which almost 18,000 people were killed over four decades, and following its inception, many ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) emerged in the following two decades.

14 years later, in 1962, a successful military coup transformed Burma into a single party military dictatorship (The Asia Foundation, 2017). The EAOs conflict with the military government is partly due to the new Citizenship Law of 1982 which denied many people of ethnic groups, particularly Muslims, citizenship. The new law was framed to be concerned with the legacies of colonialism, however the distinct groups of ‘citizens’ and ‘others’ were more divided along ethnic bounds (Brett & Hlaing, 2020). In 1990, the pro-democracy party won governmental elections, but the military rejected the results and in 2011, the ruling body became a hybrid between civilians and military personnel (The Asia Foundation, 2017).

2015 marked the first victory for the democratic party, who were officially elected to power. The following year, many EAOs attended the first round of political dialogue with the government. However, in February 2021, a coup led to the military assuming power once more, leading to the

interruption of many initiatives from the democratic government such as work towards making teaching methods more student-centred (Metro, 2022; Lall, 2020).

1.1.1: Ethnic Groups and Their Relationship with the Burmese Government

The term ‘Burmese refugees’ is a broad term given by global administrations and is a point of discussion, because the majority of the Burmese population identifies with one of many ethnic groups (Metro, 2022). There are over 135 ethnic groups with over 100 languages, however they are grouped under eight ‘official’ groups (Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust, 2021). Theravada Buddhism is the primary religion of Burma, with religious minorities including Christian (ex. Karen), Islam (ex. Kaman and Rohingya), and small groups practicing Hinduism, Judaism, traditional Chinese religions, and animism (U.S. Department of State, 2022).

Much of the armed conflict between EAOs and the military has been in the country’s eastern and northern states, such as Kayin, Kachin, and Shan States (The Asia Foundation, 2017). With this conflict and strict government suppression, many human rights abuses have been carried out against ethnic groups. It is an extensive list, including unlawful attacks on civilians, arbitrary detention, human trafficking, severely restricted freedoms of expression and assembly, torture, forced labour, and sexual assault (Amnesty International, 2024).

According to data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR; 2024), there have been over 1.3 million Burmese refugees and asylum seekers and over 3.2 million internally displaced people in Burma as a result of the conflict. The United States has also reported that Burma is the second most common country of origin for arriving refugees (Ward & Batalova, 2023).

1.2: Refugee Education

Access to formal education in Burma is relatively low, 20 percent of children never attend primary school, of those only about 30 percent finish secondary school, and these rates are lower for minority ethnic groups in conflict areas (Metro, 2022). In government-run schools, ethnic minority students have high drop-out rates due to the medium of instruction being Burmese which is not usually their first language (L1), hence why many prefer non-governmental or community-based schools along the Thai border as the curriculum is less focused on Burmese Buddhist culture (Speers-Mears & Joliffe, 2016; Lall & South, 2018).

Education is viewed as a right and is therefore a program provided in refugee camps and along the Burmese-Thai border. Most of this subsection will focus on education provided along the Burmese-Thai border, as that is where the participants resided. The curriculum for schools within refugee camps is insufficient. Programs that are imported from Western countries are applied on an ad hoc basis but does not adequately address the need for instruction in Thai or any national or ethnic languages (Purkey, 2006). Of the schools that do have curriculums in an ethnic language, research highlights that they are delivered in Skaw Karen, which results in exclusionary practices to non-Skaw Karen speakers and L1 attrition (Le, 2021; Thawda et al., 2007; Oh & van der Stouwe, 2008). Some minority schools, mainly aimed at Muslim students, offer a different language of instruction for primary education, however, to attend upper years and secondary school, students would have to transfer to larger schools that use Skaw Karen (Le, 2021).

These language of instruction issues are further compounded by the language of materials. Textbooks are either provided in English or there is a complete lack of instructional materials in any language (Oh & van der Stouwe, 2008; Le, 2021; Purkey, 2006). The dual use of Skaw Karen instruction and English textbooks demonstrates an interplay of ethnicity, language, and religion within educational power structures and the dominant groups within refugee camps (Oh & van der Stouwe, 2008).

As for teacher administration of classes, many teachers in Thailand require more general education themselves (Purkey, 2006). Due to this, there are few teachers with the capabilities to meet the needs of older and more advanced students (Purkey, 2006). Classes have also been found

to be quite large, ranging from 60 to 100 students, thus making a teacher-centred approach inescapable (Lall, 2020).

The biggest issue facing educational programs in refugee camps and refugee-organised schools is that they lack accreditation. This is because they are not part of a school system that is officially recognised by either the students' country of origin or host country (Oh & van der Stouwe, 2008; Purkey, 2006; Speers-Mears & Joliffe, 2016). As students cannot acquire secondary degrees from accredited school systems, this greatly impacts their ability to attend post-secondary institutions. The Mae La refugee camp, located north of Mae Sot, Thailand, has a Learning and Management Training College which offers associate Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science degrees which is funded by a Swiss non-governmental organisation (NGO); however, these degrees are not recognised anywhere outside of the camp (MacLaren, 2012). Part of the reason that there is a lack of external funding towards tertiary education is that donor governments and NGOs view it as a luxury, however it is evident that this is not a temporary situation (Loescher et al., 2006). A protracted refugee situation is 25,000 persons or more who have been in exile for five or more years in which refugee populations are long-standing or recurring with no immediate prospects for a solution in developing countries (MacLaren, 2012). The Burmese refugee population falls into this group and therefore the lack of educational accreditation is damaging.

The use of English education in refugee camps has increased due to English-speaking international volunteers within camps and refugees' desire to learn the language for better chances in the resettlement process, which can help lead to employment and further education (Le, 2021). Purkey (2006) discusses a Canadian program called the World University Service of Canada (WUSC), which aims to accelerate the exit of talented youth from where they could have a position of influence on development. The goal of the program is to improve education, economic, and empowerment opportunities (WUSC, 2024). However, their Student Refugee Program is not a scholarship program – students are only sponsored for one year of tertiary education and only accepts students from certain countries each year (WUSC - Student Refugee Program, 2024). One Canadian university was not satisfied with the WUSC program and created their own called the International Students Overcoming War, which provides sponsorship and tuition for all four years of an undergraduate degree by charging all students a small fee per term as part of their tuition

(International Students Overcoming War, 2021). However, the program is small and unable to take large numbers of refugee students. One critical aspect of these international programs, scholarship or sponsorship, is the essentiality of English proficiency (Chongkittavorn, 2012).

The educational issues facing Burmese refugees are not unique to Thailand though. A lack of understanding classroom instruction, curriculum issues leading to no meaningful certification, teaching quality, teacher training, and international funding were all issues affecting Burmese refugee education in Bangladesh (Rahman et al., 2022). Additionally, school curricula in Malaysia did not give students an adequate path to high school accreditation and an inability to sit public exams denied students the opportunity to receive a record of formal academic achievement (K.V. et al., 2019).

1.3: Aims of The Study

The aim of this study is to examine the perspective of Burmese refugees' English education who are not concentrated within one geographic area. Due to the nature of the educational programming for refugees, university requirements, and countries where refugees settle, English has proved to be an important language to learn, hence why it is this study's focus. It will look at the similarities and differences of educational experiences despite some schooling differences to further analyse the wider collective experience and systematic problems of refugee education.

Following sections of this paper will be a literature review, to explore themes within previous research of refugee education, focusing on English education and Burmese refugees, and identify research gaps; the methodology chapter will outline the participant profiles, data collection procedures and analysis, and ethical considerations for this research; the chapter on findings and discussion presents the findings from interviews and how it relates to wider systematic issues that need to be addressed, as well as an analysis of results based on the research questions; the final chapter will conclude the findings of the paper and discuss any implications and limitations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The previous chapter covered the basic educational provision for Burmese refugees looking at three main points: education within Burma, education in refugee camps, and tertiary opportunities. Issues with access to school and attendance, language of instruction, materials, teacher capabilities, lack of school accreditation, and access to post-secondary schooling were all issues that were raised. These will be revisited and more will be covered in the following chapter. This chapter will be divided into four main sections looking at the education and linguistic skills development of students, systematic issues and recommendations from literature, the gaps of the research and aims of this study, and the research goals. The first section is further divided to look at aspects of language and learning within the classroom and within the learners themselves, and the provision of education programs.

2.1: Education and Linguistic Skills Development

2.1.1: Language and Learning

2.1.1.a: Proficiency and Literacy

As outlined from Chapter One, proficiency and literacy in language, particularly English, is important as it allows refugees to communicate with English-speaking workers within camps, apply for post-secondary scholarship programs, and aids the resettlement process, with particular regard to employment and education (Chongkittavorn, 2012; Le, 2021).

Much of the research in this area is focused on the Australian context. Watkins et al. (2012) looked at barriers to education for Karen women, while many of their findings relate to socioemotional aspects and will be covered in a later section, they found that the language proficiency of the host country's language directly and indirectly affects one's wellbeing. This is through factors of self-efficacy, social isolation, and educational and vocational opportunities. Another study looking at Karen students within the same country analysed a school's dual Karen-English programme for refugee students, which will be further discussed under the program

provision section, and the challenges faced by students (Molyneux & Hiorth, 2019). The study critiques general aspects of education for refugees, indicating that language proficiency is one of the greatest hurdles and one of the most impactful indicators for successful refugee resettlement (Molyneux & Hiorth, 2019). One of the main issues within this is the standard that refugee students are held to. Despite disrupted education and school curriculum in a foreign language, students must develop their English literacy in both receptive and productive modes of learning, while continuing to learn through English for other subjects (Gibbons, 2006). Furthermore, students are held to the same standard of academic accountability as their English-speaking peers and are mandated to participate in standards-based curricula with high-stakes examinations (Short & Boyson, 2012).

Sharifian et al. (2020) looked at the demographic of Afghan women, but still within the Australian context. Their qualitative research investigated 23 women living in south-eastern Australia and the barriers to their education. The findings revealed that participants who received some formal education prior to resettlement and were more literate generally reported that English classes were more effective and that they could learn, pass, and proceed to higher levels than women who had no formal education. While their interviews were conducted in participants' L1, one participant in fluent English stated that she believed having basic knowledge of English upon arrival in Australia and having independent study skills helped her to utilise teaching materials while at home to improve her language skills (Sharifian et al., 2020).

Another country that has higher amounts of research looking at Burmese refugees is the United States (U.S.), mostly within the primary and secondary education systems. Metro (2022) looked at language and meaning negotiation between Burmese families, students, and schools. While this paper will be explored more in-depth in the following subsection, 2.1.1.b, the author revealed an interesting finding. She states that first-generation Burmese refugees who arrive in the U.S. without proficiency in English are unlikely to move into white-collar jobs, as these jobs require less interaction with others, but their children may move into these jobs depending on their age of arrival in the country (Metro, 2022). This further reiterates the argument as to why English education is important for refugees, as this paper has clearly marked where English proficiency indicates employment opportunities.

Tun (2022), who also researched Burmese students in the U.S. took a slightly different approach. Instead, he looked at power structures and the normalisation (norm) of English. Tun (2022) found that the normalised power of the English language has the potential to marginalise people, this normalisation involved the accents of English, where no accent (by U.S. standards) and doing activities only conducted in English were the dominant norms and were goals for students to achieve (Tun, 2022). These norms have the potential to lead to the subjectification of speakers who only use English at home without other languages ‘interrupting’, speak without an accent, and can do academic English tasks without a language ‘deficiency’ (Tun, 2022). As these became goals of refugee students, the normalisation of English created racialised processes about ‘kinds’ of English enforcing dominant and minoritised ones. Tun (2022) concludes that home languages should not be made to feel inferior under an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learner identity and that heritage language maintenance is important to preserving cultural identity.

The wider context of refugees is demonstrated through Hooft et al. (2021), whose research within Belgium looks at refugees from various countries such as Afghanistan, Palestine, and Syria. Their research centred on those within refugee centres, when they first entered the country, indications of literacy. The findings support the use of language tests that are valid for use on low-literate adults, the use of terms such as ‘functional literacy’ to help destigmatise those otherwise labelled as ‘low skilled’, and it is an important reminder that literacy is a spectrum and that contextual factors influence this (Hooft et al., 2021). Park (2022) investigated the case of a North Korean refugee living in South Korea. While much of this study looked at socioemotional factors, it was revealed that the refugee the study focused on had low English proficiency, which constrained his engagement level and ability to negotiate meanings within student communities (Park, 2022).

2.1.1.b: Learning Methods

Previously discussed in Chapter 1.2 were the teaching materials and textbooks in Burmese refugee camp classrooms, where there was either a total lack of resources or textbooks were only provided in English (Oh & van der Stouwe, 2008; Le, 2021; Purkey, 2006). Lwin et al. (2022) explored the use of flexible online learning programs in Mae Sot to help troubleshoot some of the

identified issues with access to education. They found through semi-structured interviews that with this type of program, the need for teachers can be reduced and the number of students can increase. Additionally, it helps students who cannot afford regular classes, are restricted in movement, and working full time but wish to improve their skills (Halkic & Arnold, 2019). The online learning platform, while being acknowledged for its benefits and opportunities, has not been fully implemented as a mode of education within migrant learning centres (Lwin et al., 2022). The use of online learning and digital literacy is supported by Kendrick et al. (2022) whose research in Vancouver, Canada of refugees from various countries supported learning. They found that using multimodal ways of making meaning allowed refugees to communicate complex understandings and experiences and that digital spaces allowed students to invest in identity affirmation through language learning. Digital literacy also allowed students to have increased autonomy in their learning process (Kendrick et al., 2022).

Rohingya students in Malaysia found that peer-learning and group activities were effective tools (K.V. et al., 2019). When students were engaging with language games in the classroom, activities became fun and easy thus increasing motivation to learn and participate. This is key, as another study looking at Rohingya students in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh found that a lack of understand of classroom instructions impeded refugee children from obtaining the basics of learning instruction (Rahman et al., 2022). However, this context seems to show that there are more issues around teaching practices, educational policy, and issues with the Bangladeshi government and refugee camps.

Within the Australian context, Sharifian et al. (2020) revealed that Afghan women found instructional texts to be too difficult to learn. This does not align with Krashen's (1981) theory of comprehensible input, despite teachers using a wide variety of different teaching materials and sources. Molyneux and Hiorth (2019) found that the dual English-Karen programme was highly effective and supported students between English and Karen mediums because teaching practices, classroom routines, and the use of resources were highly consistent and allowed for continuity. This program had been designed to give additional aid to Burmese refugee students as it was found that their academic achievement greatly lagged behind other learners, including EFL. There is a greater need for schools to be cognisant of the challenges refugee students face socially,

academically, and institutionally (Creagh, 2013). Refugee students, from Burma and Africa, with interrupted schooling faced greater issues when required to demonstrate their learning and knowledge (Windle & Miller, 2019). This was because they had insufficient time to practice new skills as teachers rushed to catch them up on lost educational time. These are two of the key problems that Windle and Miller (2019) identified: too little time for students to practice their learning and not enough acknowledgement of students' abilities. Schools and teachers should not neglect the potential negative impact of individual war trauma on learning ability, as language acquisition is influenced by pre- and post-immigration factors (Watkins et al., 2012), while still recognising that students have previous experience and knowledge they can bring into the classroom.

Metro (2022) found that English and Burmese dictionary equivalents did not always carry the same meaning. This led to some issues between parents and teachers, but meaningful negotiation allowed for both parties to find a middle ground. One example of this was study practices, as in the U.S. homework is assigned, but in Burma, students would read aloud lessons for hours (Metro, 2022). A blended learning approach was suggested based on the views of Syrian refugees in Ireland (Ćatibušić et al., 2019). This type of approach would cater to individual vocational needs and skills, provide some autonomy, and allow students to develop knowledge in areas of interest such as how the educational system works and its relation to their children. Language education is an important area for migrants who do not yet speak the host country's language, this is a key focus for refugee educational policy within England and Scotland (Bouttell, 2023).

K.V. et al. (2019) found that skilful use of a dictionary, proactive learning, willingness to spend time on vocabulary learning, and active practice of new words outside of the classroom assisted Rohingya students in vocabulary acquisition. This reflects Abou-Khalil et al. (2021) who looked at Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Germany. They found that a mobile online learning app increased motivation to learn, as it taught the most useful words first which related to their everyday lives. Currently, vocabulary is taught based on frequency by native speakers, and written materials, and does not necessarily represent the needs of refugees (Abou-Khalil et al., 2021). While these studies examined vocabulary learning in a breadth aspect, Yildiz (2022) looked at

vocabulary depth, via richness, of university EFL students in Türkiye. Through essay writing tasks, he found that developing free and active vocabulary cannot make inferences on lexical richness based on altering passive vocabulary knowledge.

2.1.1.c: Teaching Practices

One perspective to enhance teaching practices is for educators to develop a greater awareness of EFL learners and how language is learned (K.V. et al., 2019). Magno (2009), outlined that teachers should develop awarenesses of how language is acquired to create more effective teaching, differences between general learning and EFL, how individual beliefs can affect EFL teaching, and to assess EFL teachers in relation to their attitudes towards learning and teaching.

Cho et al. (2019) and Newcomer et al. (2020) both analysed the perspectives of teachers working with refugees in the U.S. They found that pedagogical approaches that are clear and provide greater support to students are more effective. Cho et al. (2019) found explicit teaching, individualising, creating a positive environment, and collaboration were found most useful, while Newcomer et al. (2020) revealed that scaffolding through modelling, schema building, and contextualising to be the best methods. One study found that the teachers understood students' experiences and adjustment as a burden rather than a source of strength (Cho et al., 2019). However, the other study found that teachers opened space to share personal experiences and created cross-cultural dialogue with families to further support students (Newcomer et al., 2020). This supports culturally responsive and humanising pedagogies. By creating a curriculum that is connected to students' lives and culturally appropriate (Couch, 2017; Giroux, 2004), educators can act as facilitators of discussion and develop a willingness to learn about students' lives, thus providing them with greater compassion (Couch, 2017; Newcomer et al., 2020). This is further evidenced by Kendrick et al. (2022), who that found students were more invested in learning via identity affirmation by connecting curriculum content and inquiry to student experiences and interests.

2.1.2: Socioemotional Aspects to Learning Language

Within related research to refugee education and socioemotional aspects to learning, three themes are most prevalent: fear and anxiety, motivation, and integration.

All relevant literature about fear and anxiety were concentrated within an Australian context. When looking at Karen students, a lack of English fluency could contribute to emotions of insecurity, higher stress, self-consciousness, lower self-esteem, and fears of alienation (Molyneux & Hiorth, 2019; Poppitt & Frey, 2007). Adult Karen women indicated that English proficiency and communication were the primary problems affecting their well-being (Watkins et al., 2012). As language proficiency affects aspects of social, educational, and employment opportunities, experiences of forced migration and persecution also impose facets of fear and anxiety regarding interpersonal interaction and foreign environments (Watkins et al., 2012). The same fears of self-esteem and motivation impacted language learning for Afghan refugees as well (Sharifian et al., 2020), indicating that these feelings are not isolated to Karen or Burmese refugees. While the literature found is only within Australia, given its geographic location to countries of origin such as Burma and Afghanistan, it can be assumed that these fears are evident when refugees settle in countries even further away, such as the U.S.

Perspectives on motivation and feelings about learning are mixed within research inside and outside of the Burmese community. Rohingya students in Malaysia perceived the classroom positively and were extrinsically motivated to learn (K.V. et al., 2019). This supports Kendrick et al. (2022) that found language is critical for everyday activities associated with digital media and that students were motivated when curriculum, interests, and identity confirmation were linked. These further align with Sharifian et al. (2020), where most students seemed motivated to develop English skills despite low literacy. However, a lack of engagement and encouragement of independent learning was a negative factor relating to difficulties in learning English (Sharifian et al., 2020). Student perspectives on their learning and pedagogical methods were mainly deficit-oriented, and previous learning experiences had a large effect on learner motivation and class attendance (Cho et al., 2019; Čatibušić et al., 2019; Baynham, 2006; Nelson & Appleby, 2015).

It is vital to learn to communicate in the language of the host country for economic, political, and cultural integration (Hou & Beiser, 2006). For adult refugees, language acquisition

aids in the prospects of employment aids social interaction, and allows accurate access to information, autonomy, and general well-being (Ćatibušić et al., 2019). Hooft et al. (2021) found that a substantial percentage of migrant populations need adequate support during the integration process to a host country. Their study looked at newcomers within migrant centres in Belgium, although this is not unique to Belgium. Molyneux and Hiorth (2019) found that refugee students require additional support as they can face academic, linguistic, and social challenges struggle to adapt to a new country and achieve academic success, which could be impacted by impaired concentration from previous experiences, trauma, and stress (Molyneux & Hiorth, 2019; Watkins et al., 2012).

In Germany, pre-school language exposure was found to be highly important for young children as refugee-specific issues do not necessarily impact them the same as adults (Seuring & Will, 2022). In North America, school-aged refugee children indicated that they were not used to having their voices recognised and respected within the classroom, however, some teachers rarely recognised students' funds of knowledge as a way to sustain their cultural identities (Couch, 2017; Cho et al., 2019).

Language acquisition along with cultural adaptation has always been a major challenge facing refugees, particularly adults (Schott & Henley, 1996). While some states emphasise the importance of integration and community cohesion, such as England and Scotland (Bouttell, 2023), some refugee populations must work to see themselves as legitimate members of a community, which can therefore create new meanings towards English and learning (Park, 2022). Some Burmese refugees have indicated that they value social participation and contribution as a way of 'giving back' to host countries and desire to help others in need of assistance (Watkins et al., 2012; Purkey, 2006).

2.1.3: Program Provision

As previously outlined in Chapter 1.2, Burmese refugee camp education programs are applied from a Western-developed curriculum and applied on an ad hoc basis (Purkey, 2006), along

with much of the education within camps being taught in Skaw Karen (Oh & van der Stouwe, 2008; Le, 2021). Conventional teaching and learning for refugee populations has proven to be ineffective, due to large class sizes, particularly when teachers are responsible for creating the programming, leading to a lack of structure (Lall, 2020; K.V. et al., 2019). The issues regarding accreditation within refugee camps in neighbouring countries and the need for refugee students to keep up with English-speaking students in settled countries have been discussed (Oh & van der Stouwe, 2008; Purkey, 2006; Speers-Mears & Joliffe, 2016; MacLaren, 2012; Lwin et al., 2022; Molyneux & Hiorth, 2019).

The broader refugee population still faces issues related to program provision though. Curriculums not written for illiterate, non-Western migrants and a lack of relevant teaching materials have given some refugees a perspective that English classes are not useful to their everyday lives, quitting these programs (Sharifian et al., 2020). In Ireland, a lack of bilingual support and pedagogical approaches to pre-literacy and preferred learning styles and strategies has been identified (Ćatibušić et al., 2019). However, for the issues that Ćatibušić et al. (2019) outlined, they note that the same issues have been raised in previous research, but there has been a failure at local and policy levels to incite change. They theorise that this inaction could indicate the ad hoc nature that EFL programs are provided.

2.2: Systematic Issues and Recommendations

The research within the Burmese context outlines numerous systematic issues facing education for refugees. Accessibility, availability, and quality of education, accreditation, issues, education infrastructure, lack of teacher training, time, and international funding all compound previous issues of fear and anxiety which impede basic education (Watkins et al., 2012; Purkey, 2006; K.V. et al., 2019; Lwin et al., 2022; Oh & van der Stouwe, 2008; Metro, 2022; MacLaren, 2012; Rahman et al., 2022).

Rahman et al. (2022) goes on to outline issues around a lack of schools, adequate training opportunities, and qualified or experienced teachers that can be a result of policy-level

discrimination. This negatively impacts the development of formal curricula, threatens funding, and leads to ineffective collaboration with humanitarian organisations and government ministries, in this case, Bangladeshi ministries (Rahman et al., 2022). Within camps, individuals face further exclusion and discrimination resulting in student dropout for reasons such as adolescent marriage (for females), pregnancy, and students with special needs, as schools are not equipped to accommodate these needs (Oh & van der Stouwe, 2008). Discrimination is also evident through the language medium policies of schools, as it excludes other minority groups who do not speak certain dialects (Le, 2021).

Principles of inclusion based on non-discrimination are rooted in existing international educational policy frameworks can help tackle issues facing education for refugees (Oh & van der Stouwe, 2008). There also needs to be ways of motivating refugee communities within bordering countries and allow for the understanding and sensitive negotiation of cultural customs (Watkins et al., 2012).

More teaching and curriculum-based recommendations look to incorporate approaches that create more meaningful activities that accommodate diversity and inclusion and allow for flexibility for teachers to adapt teaching methods to fit students' needs rather than students learning to adapt (K.V. et al., 2019). This aligns with Couch's (2017) findings that curricula should be locally generated and create spaces for students to contribute to the classroom and learning process, which follows the humanisation pedagogy of allowing students to produce and construct knowledge (Freire, 1998). Teachers should also refrain from using languages that not all students speak, as teaching English should be conducted in English with more access to bilingual support provided to students when needed (Watkins et al., 2012). Students should be encouraged to recognise how multilingualism is a strength to be drawn on and how this can be done within classroom settings (Le, 2021).

Access to centres learning centres, online and in-person, would give students the resources they need to succeed, however, these require proper infrastructure to provide support long-term and should have management structures for communication between communities and education providers (Lwin et al., 2022; Oh & van der Stouwe, 2008). Physical centres should give students

access to proper technology resources, such as devices, power supply, and internet access (Lwin et al., 2022).

Externally to the geographic Burmese context, current learning materials do not teach vocabulary that is relevant to refugees (Abou-Khalil et al., 2021). English as a foreign language (EFL) class assessments frequently focus on assessing the proficiency level of students, rather than assessing their progress throughout the course (Sharifian et al., 2020). These are in addition to the fact that EFL courses, as outlined, are constructed for teaching literate Western migrants (Sharifian et al., 2020). This can lead to two issues: within schools, challenges that students face are not sufficiently recognised nor responded to by school administration (Molyneux & Hiorth, 2019). For adults, immersion is the presumed method that refugees will acquire language, however if they do not speak the language then they are recruited for jobs that do not require a high level of language proficiency and result in refugees working where they have little to no contact with native speakers (Sharifian et al., 2020).

To remedy these issues, schools need to be cognisant of the issues that refugee students face (Creagh, 2013). Pedagogies that enable autonomous learning, enhance literacy, and identity affirmation, and create space for deeper meaning opportunities should be implemented and invested in (Kendrick et al., 2022), which aligns with K.V et al. (2019) in the Burmese context. Teachers should also build on the existing skills and interests of students in order to develop new ones, while also better clarifying the aims and goals of lessons for students to realise the connection to their everyday lives to help motivate them (Molyneux & Hiorth, 2019; Sharifian et al., 2020). Students should be encouraged and be given feedback on practicing language within programs, but programs should also be designed to provide language and cultural opportunities to help overcome language barriers (Windle & Miller, 2019; Sharifian et al., 2020).

In the British Isles, England and Scotland both have inclusion policies for wider adult migrant education, and Scotland has even attempted to involve refugees in the policy-making process (Bouttell, 2023). However, wider state immigration policies by the Home Office impact how people access education and create unequal learning opportunities, which is reflected in the Integrated Communications strategy, and policies such as the Rwanda plan create further

challenges and increase stress and uncertainty in making living and learning in the United Kingdom (UK) more difficult (Bouttell, 2023). Ireland's EFL programs lack robust monitoring and evaluation, and issues raised about programs have not been responded to at a policy level (Ćatibušić et al., 2019). The ESL programming additionally lacks clear guidelines and specialised training for teachers (Ćatibušić et al., 2019).

Adult education and immigration policies that are more welcoming and better funded will help migrants to settle within new countries (Bouttell, 2023). Further support for language programs is needed, such as flexible education approaches, which can cater to pre-literacy, and bilingual support for students (Ćatibušić et al., 2019), which supports Kendrick et al. (2022) and Watkins et al (2012). To further feelings of autonomy and develop knowledge in areas of interest, Ćatibušić et al. (2019) suggest Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) or blended learning approaches, which are learning approaches that aim to integrate the target language into more curriculum content. Increased opportunities for language practice and cultural exchange can help newcomers, and further EFL teacher training can help address gaps in EFL provision (Ćatibušić et al., 2019). Both recommendations reflect suggestions from Sharifian et al. (2020) and K.V. et al. (2019).

Studies from the U.S. found that teachers indicated they had more control and knowledge than refugee parents, so they tried to 'educate' them, and that schools struggled and were not prepared for refugee students (Cho et al., 2019; Gilhooly, 2015; Gilhooly and Lee, 2017; Isık-Ercan, 2012). Teacher perspectives of students are crucial as they impact pedagogical choices and can perpetuate power inequities (Cho et al., 2019). Schools and teachers need to create classroom environments that are more respectful and welcoming of refugee children and incorporate materials that reflect their unique identities (Cho et al., 2019). These methods and forming positive parent-teacher relationships help students succeed and confirm humanising pedagogy by extending it to students and their families (Cho et al., 2019; Isık-Ercan, 2012; Matthiesen, 2016; Szente et al., 2006; Newcomer et al., 2020), supporting the recommendation of this pedagogy by Couch (2017).

Additional research suggests that providing parents regarding opportunities and benefits of language instruction for children is useful (Seuring & Will, 2022). Introductory English courses should also be offered to refugee students prior to starting post-secondary education so that they are better equipped to participate and negotiate for meaning in higher-level classes (Park, 2022). Park (2022) also suggests that teachers need to acknowledge students' potential as learners and help them recognise their unique positionality, which reflects Cho et al.'s (2019) findings.

2.3: Research Gaps and Aims

Available literature on refugees and education is extensive, however literature looking at both refugees and education simultaneously is less prevalent. Some research looks at specific groups of refugees, from this chapter there is a lot of literature that looks at Syrian or Afghan refugees, but some research focuses on the host country instead, which enlists participants from all different backgrounds. While resources for this chapter tried to focus on Burmese refugees, there was more research specific to Rohingya, followed by Karen refugees. In relation to the country context, a lot of research is focused within the U.S. or Australia, and what is available within Burmese refugee camp contexts is related to primary or secondary education or the general provision of education programs.

Most research focuses on education for adult refugees or school-aged children, with little sources on tertiary education. Of what is available for post-secondary education, research analyses the programs rather than the perspectives of refugees in programs or institutions. This has the potential to highlight the benefits of programs without reflecting on potential negative opinions by students or allowing students to have a valued perspective on their education.

These studies also suggest programs, initiatives, and other educational recommendations without proper consideration to the potential of these initiatives truly being implemented in schools. Although these can make for ideal scenarios, like language phone apps and online learning centres, it does not reflect the reality of education for refugees.

Furthermore, a lot of research was written or published prior to the 2021 military coup in Burma. Therefore, this research does not consider recent and current refugee populations, struggles, and educational needs for this community.

This study aims to help fill some of the gaps within research regarding Burmese refugee education. It will do this by considering wider perspectives of Burmese refugees of various ethnic groups at higher education institutions to provide personal experiences on English learning for social, academic, and professional purposes. The participants are all living and studying in different countries, which will provide greater geographic variety to better examine the similarities and differences between experiences.

2.4: Research Questions

1. What do the Burmese refugees view as crucial when learning and using English?
2. What do the Burmese refugees wish they could learn or do to enhance their English education experience?
3. What do the Burmese refugees consider challenging or difficult for themselves in terms of learning and using English?

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter covers the methods to which research was conducted. Participant profiles and recruitment are covered, along with data collection procedures of informed consent forms, semi-structured interviews, and interview piloting. Data analysis of coding and inter-rating is discussed, followed by the final section regarding ethical considerations for research.

3.1: Participants

Three participants were recruited who were Burmese refugees and had experience living in a Burmese refugee camp. This number was determined by the difficulty of recruitment, ability to participate in online interview, and the ability to meet the inclusion criteria of status as a refugee and experience learning English.

3.1.1: Recruitment and Sampling

Participants were recruited through a former university classmate who is a Burmese refugee. Through personal connections, the participants of this study were recruited and given a pseudonym based on their preference. The alternative names that were given, and will be how each participant is identified for the remainder of this paper, are: Doraemon, Soe, and H. Due to the nature that participants were recruited, they all resided in the same refugee camp of Mae La.

The age of participants ranged from 20 to 22 years old. All participants were female. Doraemon and Soe are Pwo Karen, and H is Kaman. Both Karen participants are Christian, while the H is Muslim. Doraemon and Soe arrived in Thailand during childhood, four and seven years old, and H arrived in Thailand when she was 18 years old.

In Mae La, all participants received some form of schooling, either in person or online classes. Doraemon reported a linguistic profile of five languages: Pwo Karen, Skaw Karen, Burmese, English, and Thai; Soe detailed she can speak Pwo Karen, Skaw Karen, Burmese, English, and some Thai; and H shared she speaks Burmese and English.

English was learned in classroom settings for all participants. Doraemon and Soe attended Thai English medium secondary schools. H attended secondary school in Burma and learned basic English through school courses and online lectures and videos while residing in Thailand.

All participants are currently pursuing tertiary education at the Bachelor level. Doraemon and Soe are completing degrees in Vietnam and Thailand respectively; H is pursuing her degree in

the United States. Each participant studies a different field in university, being finance, education, and pre-medicine. All university courses for participants are conducted in English.

3.2: Data Collection Procedures

3.3.1: Informed Consent Forms

Before interviews took place, participants were sent informed consent forms for their review and signature (see Appendix B). This gave identified participants the opportunity to review their rights and ability to withdraw from the process, how their data would be handled, consent to audio recording, the use of their information in research reporting, and their consent to participate. All participants were required to return their consent forms prior to the scheduled interview date and time or would require interviews to be rescheduled to ensure that proper university and ethical guidelines were adhered to.

Through the use of informed consent documentation, participants had the opportunity to raise any questions or concerns regarding the process or the form itself. Any of these questions or concerns were quickly addressed and clarified to allow the utmost possible security and comfortability of participants' experience. Returned consent forms were then stored on a secure drive, kept through the university, and permanently deleted upon the conclusion of research.

3.2.2: Semi-Structured Interviews

The use of semi-structured interviews was employed as they allow the researcher to gain insider perspectives on norms, practices, and experiences (Olson, 2016). This interview type also allows additional themes, topics, and specific responses to be expanded on resulting in greater depth of participant interviews and creating space for other themes to emerge that had not been previously identified (Rose et al., 2019).

Prior to conducting the interviews, a list of questions was created based on literature and topics relevant to the study (see Appendix D). The questions primarily regarded participant background, prior learning experience, current learning experience, and desired learning experience. During the interview process, additional questions were added to delve into additional themes that emerged, such as opinions of breadth and depth of vocabulary learning and follow up questions to gain further insight on participants' thoughts and experiences in relation to learning English.

As participants were in various countries around the world, travel to conduct interview in person was not possible. Interviews were conducted remotely through Microsoft Teams video chat to allow some face-to-face connectivity and create a more welcoming space to share their experiences. These ranged between 20 and 45 minutes in length, depending on the depth of participant responses. Interviews were limited to one session and were conducted in private settings to help maintain privacy and comfortability of participants. The audio was securely recorded until transcripts were transcribed, then permanently deleted, to ensure as much anonymity as possible throughout the process.

3.2.3: Piloting

The list of interview questions was put through piloting prior to its use in interviews with participants. Two individuals reviewed the question set to determine the relevancy and depth of questions. This was to ensure that questions were not too specific and would allow participants to give more detailed responses or give the opportunity for follow up questions. From this, additional questions were added to further explore their current learning experience and future aspirations and its relation to English.

After the initial review and changes had been made to the interview questions, a pilot interview was conducted. The questions were trialled with one person who did not speak English as their first language. This person was carefully chosen such as that they were able to confer their

opinions on the questions to ensure that they were easy to understand, not too vague, and were not leading questions.

3.3: Data Analysis

Upon conclusion of data collection via semi-structured interviews, each participant was pseudonymised based on their requested pseudonym, as previously outlined. The audio recordings and transcripts were identified as interviews one, two, and three. All personal identifying information, such as real names, were redacted from the transcriptions and replaced with their pseudonyms.

3.3.1: Coding

When the transcription process was completed and documents were stored on a secure platform, the transcripts were transferred to NVivo 14 for thematic analysis. A thematic approach was used because of its ability to analyse and compare topics, perspectives, and issues between participant experiences. The NVivo 14 software was able to effectively handle the data and allow for an organised coding process.

The codes used were identified previously from relevant literature and interview questions, however the coding names became more specific to the group's perspectives. Some coded themes were data driven, rather than theory driven, this will be explained in the following chapter, and no codes emerged in the coding process. Broadly, the codes covered participants feelings about English; feelings about the learning experience; linguistic specifications, such as breadth and depth of vocabulary learning; perception of their proficiency; linguistic and educational needs; and linguistic and educational wants. Transcripts were thoroughly read to determine which code information would suit, sometimes needing to be coded for multiple codes. Some codes were utilised more; however, code frequency was most often dependant on how much each participant was willing share on a given topic or question.

3.3.2: Inter-Rating

To test the reliability of data analysis and ensure validity, the process of inter-rating was used. Inter-rater reliability identifies how consistently different raters can distinguish different items using a measurement scale (Bajpai et al., 2015). The measurement scale is out of 100 percent, with 75 to 90 percent indicating an acceptable level of consistency.

The process was conducted by assigning each interview a letter in the English alphabet and using a random generator, one letter was chosen for which interview would be inter-rated. From there, the interview questions were removed from the transcript so that answers could be equally divided into sections based on word count. The sections represented about 10 to 12 percent each and were divided to maintain coherency of participant answers, thus not cutting off sentences. These sections were assigned a colour code, which was put into a random generator for which section would be given to the inter-rater for analysis.

The inter-rater, a qualitative researcher, was given the predetermined codes and an explanation of what the codes were. They then coded the randomly selected section before determining the consistency. The inter-rater reliability score was 88.8 percent accurate. This score is within the acceptable consistency score, making the codes reliable and valid to the rest.

3.4: Ethical Considerations

As this study relates to the perspectives of refugees, it was imperative to take careful ethical considerations as they are members of a vulnerable population. Ethical considerations allow for the safe participation of interviewees to ensure as minimal negative impact as possible.

Several steps were taken to make sure that ethical guidelines were adhered to. The first was to obtain an ethics approval for the study via a Central University Research Ethics Committee

(CUREC) form. Approval was granted with no revisions under the reference number EDUC_C1A_24_134 (see Appendix C). This number was included in the informed consent forms given to participants prior to the interviews. The use of these forms was also used to give participants relevant information regarding the study, the use of their data, and their rights as interviewees. All questions regarding any unclear information or concerns regarding the form or the interview process were quickly answered and clarified so that participants were able to make informed judgement on whether to participate.

Additional safeguarding measures were taken to help participants feel as comfortable as possible during the process. This included allowing participants to skip interview questions, stop the interview at any given time, provided as much time as necessary to answer questions, rephrasing questions, ability to withdraw from the research until a certain point, and redirecting interview topics if answers strayed too far from relevant topics or participants seemed uncomfortable or upset. All but one of these safeguarding methods were unnecessary to use during the process, however, were informed of them for their comfort, security, and rights.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

This chapter will examine the themes that emerged within the literature and data collection. The overall themes that were evident relate to feelings about English, linguistic aspects, and linguistic wants and needs. The research questions will also be addressed in this section. The findings conclude that participants view relevant course material as essential for school and communication; they desired to have learned English at a younger age and prefer native English teachers for accent purposes; and that tools for communication needs were the most difficult to acquire.

In this section, the term ‘native (English) speaker’ occurs, as this was the terminology used by participants. This term is used to identify speakers of English as their first language or those

who speak English ‘without an accent’, where the accent is deemed as that of a Western state where English is the official language.

4.1: Feelings About English

This theme covers a significant portion of the findings from the interviews and is aimed at individual and general feelings about learning English as a language. The following sections will further examine each participants’ feelings about English, language learning, their learning experience, and thoughts on native English speakers where applicable.

4.1.1: Doraemon

4.1.1.a: Feelings about the language

Doraemon’s feelings towards English as a language were generally positive. She indicated that English is beneficial for daily communication with Vietnamese people. As she cannot speak the local language, they use English as the medium of communication. She indicated that the English used is not grammatically perfect, however, communication is still possible and allows for everyday interactions, such as food shopping.

She did indicate that some aspects of English can be difficult since it is not her first language. One of these was the example of ‘bus’ and ‘bud’. These words are minimal pairs, meaning that they are only differentiated by one phoneme. Bus and bud are both alveolar sounds, so it is unsurprising that these words can be difficult to EFL learners. In addition to [s] and [d] being both alveolar sounds, these phonemes do not appear in word final places in Burmese, as only a nasal or glottal stop consonants can be word final, so an inherent vowel would be naturally placed after the [s] or [d] (Green, 2002; Scriptsource, 2024).

4.1.1.b: Feeling about their learning experience

In contrast to her perception of English, Doraemon's feelings about her learning experience were largely deficit-oriented, where her main perspectives were on what her abilities lacked. She outlined the difficulties of switching to an English-medium high school, where the type of language spoken within class and with peers were different. As she was mainly learning English for academic purposes, a lot of the curriculum was not considered to be relevant to her everyday life, as the majority of the vocabulary was not useful outside of school. However, she mentioned that courses to teach English proficiency were useful in help for communicating with others in English. She continued that English in university is vastly different to secondary school and finds the new English demands to be challenging.

When communicating with others, Doraemon detailed that English allows her to communicate, although it is 'broken' English. Speaking with foreigners, or native English speakers, is more difficult as she does not have a native English speaker to teach her, so her pronunciation was not as advanced. When interacting with native or high-level English speakers, Doraemon said that "it's not satisfying" because she has issues comprehending advanced vocabulary or following speech at a quicker pace.

In university, she struggles to keep up with other students at times. This is because she started learning English at the beginning of high school, placing her four years into the learning process before attending post-secondary. When studying, she outlines her difficulty trying to keep pace with other students:

"[...] when other people study for one hour, we need to study for like double or triple, just to master the one that other people just read for one minute or two minutes."

This additional study can negatively impact the learning process, as evidenced by her perception in a deficit-oriented manner. She goes on to detail that she does like speaking and reading aspects of school but does not enjoy writing or listening. This is because she finds it difficult to write academic papers, such as articles or reports. Despite the positive perspective on speaking and reading, there are still negative aspects to her responses. When speaking, she detailed that sometimes desired words or phrases become difficult to mentally access and that when reading

documents or files, she will “get lost in the middle”. Academic articles, particularly research studies, have an additional disadvantage for EFL learners as they often use jargon throughout, which makes the reporting less straightforward. This will be expanded on in section 4.1.5 through Doraemon’s experience in relation to literature.

4.1.1.c: Perception of their proficiency

When asked about what she believed was her current English level, Doraemon stated it was B2, which is an upper intermediate level (Council of Europe, 2014). She believes her secondary school successfully gave her the tools to communicate in English because the school was based on the U.S. education system, so the level of English they taught made it easier for students to pursue post-secondary education in institutions that have courses in an English-medium. Doraemon also credited her high school to teaching a higher quality of phonics and pronunciation, leading to a ‘better’ accent than students who did not attend such a school. Despite this, she still described difficulties with English outside of school, as the necessary vocabulary is vastly different and struggles when others use large or advanced words when speaking. Even though her English level is detailed as a higher intermediate level, she will still get confused by words when reading documents.

4.1.2: Soe

4.1.2.a: Feelings about the language

Soe’s perceptions of English were less focused on daily interactions, but more on future endeavours. She indicated that based on her future employment, it may be essential to be able to work professionally in English. Soe felt positive that English is helpful and useful to her life now. As Soe is studying to be a teacher, she indicated that she preferred to teach in English rather than another language. This could be because her university course is taught in English as well, or due to her own learning experience. As she had outlined that when learning English in school, the teachers would explain concepts in Karen, despite the textbooks being written in the target language. The adjustment from Karen to English mediums was difficult for the initial two years.

4.1.2.b: Feeling about their learning experience

Compared to Doraemon's perspective on learning experiences, Soe has a more positive outlook on her experience. She outlines that she began learning English in primary school, but when switching to another school for secondary education, the transition was difficult because it was an English-medium school. Like Doraemon, she struggled to adapt for the first two years after this switch. However, Soe's school was well known for teaching languages, particularly English, so they conducted more classes for English proficiency.

Due to an English medium of instruction, Soe did confirm that her English classes met her needs for what was needed to communicate with others and that she did not have any issues accessing English classes. When in high school, Soe did not find that all her lessons were relevant, however she has since found the vocabulary and lessons to be helpful as it helps her to communicate with others.

Textbooks were a beneficial resource for Soe as this resource was abundant, but there was no access to computers or the internet. She described the teaching methods as an "old school way", which is generally accepted as a more teacher-centred approach. This could mean that there were fewer opportunities to ask questions or for practice, particularly when speaking.

Soe was also proactive with her English learning. She detailed that when she arrived in Thailand, she and her sister would visit libraries where the books they read were in dual languages, either English and Karen or Burmese. Once she acquired access to the internet, she also began to listen to English music, which she contributed to an improvement of her English knowledge.

4.1.2.c: Perception of their proficiency

In the interview, Soe described her English proficiency level as a seven or eight out of ten. She attributed her higher proficiency in English to the use of dual language books and English music, in addition to English classes, as methods of improvement. Due to the international student

population of her university and course, she is required to communicate in English. The high-frequency use of English with peers is another aspect she credits to her English proficiency.

4.1.3: H

4.1.3.a: Feelings about the language

H's perspective on English was more balanced. While she outlines benefits, she also details some areas where she has struggled with the language. She detailed that learning English has helped her immensely, especially as it is the primary language of the country she currently lives. English was described as an international language and many people decide to learn it as a foreign language, so that in numerous places around the world there will be people that can communicate. However, accent was also stated to be an aspect that was important when learning and speaking the language. She stated that some people have a difficult time understanding her, as she is not a native speaker. She also wishes to help others within her community communicate with others in the U.S., so she desires to have strong English skills in order to assist with translation and interpretation which also serves as useful practice for her own English.

She felt that English was an intimidating language to begin learning, but while in the learning process found it to not be very difficult. As English is not a gendered nor tonal language, this can make the learning process easier for those who know these types of languages, of which Karen varieties are tonal.

H is studying within the science field and finds English to be important for the future directions of her career. She anticipates needing to publish academic papers in pursuit of a medical degree. To this end, she concludes that English is a language used in academic spheres, so it is important to know in order to communicate scientific findings with the research community. While studying science, as she is trying to learn new words and keep pace with English-speaking peers, it is difficult for her at times if she does not understand certain words and follow the content taught in English.

4.1.3.b: *Feeling about their learning experience*

Similarly to Soe, H's learning experience is largely positive. Although she does speak about difficulties when learning English, she discusses how many of these difficulties are learning experiences. In high school and in Thailand, H describes her learning experience as insufficient. She did not know greetings when interacting with others, as her English classes focused on reading and writing. In Burma, the English courses she attended were taught in Burmese to explain English concepts, thus she did not learn much because the material was easily forgotten and she had difficulty focusing on information regarding two languages simultaneously. H found her high school English classes to be a source of stress due to the vocabulary they were teaching, and she did not think that she would be able to memorise the words.

Since moving to the U.S., H's perception of English education has shifted to become more positive than her experience in Burma and Thailand. Despite feeling like she "forgot" the English she had previously learned, she felt that in the two years since immigrating her English has improved exponentially and now thinks that learning English is "fun". H has found that speaking English for socialisation purposes has also helped her English proficiency.

H also has specific perspectives on interacting with native English speakers, as many of her peers and teachers are from the U.S. She detailed that she likes to have a native English teacher because she can better understand what they are saying and that they are a good source to improve her own skills. She is also required to pay more careful attention when interacting with native speakers, which increases her speaking and listening abilities. Despite the beneficial learning experience that native speakers provide to H, she shared that she is more afraid and lacking in confidence when speaking with them, and when speaking with other EFL learners, she is more confident in her abilities. She outlined her difficulties when speaking with others compared to Burmese as:

"I know very well how to explain in Burmese but when I- I try to explain in English I hesitate. They understand me but the word doesn't come out from my mouth. I don't know, maybe I need more practice or practice to speak. But at the time, I'm like very upset."

In this instance, spontaneous speech production is a skill that can be more difficult for EFL learners to acquire as it entails speakers to quickly access target language words (Al Hosni, 2014). However, she shared that while she does struggle with speaking at times, she recognises that mistakes are part of the learning process, so she is not afraid to make them, as “we are human”.

To further assist in improving her English, H detailed that when reading for university classes she prefers to use an English-to-English dictionary which also improves her skills. The use of the dictionary for her is necessary as some words, particularly in some of her science-related courses, are difficult. H also believed that the university courses greatly improved her English, as she is required to read many articles and write a response paper which helped her realise the importance of educational words in different contexts.

In relation to H’s previous perspective on accents, she described how having a non-native English accent has impacted her learning experience. When speaking with university professors, they sometimes do not understand her question due to her accent and she would feel afraid to speak with professors and others in the university. H had tried to attend a pronunciation class previously but found that it was not very effective and grew bored of it. The negative experience with professors due to their inability to understand what she is asking, could have the potential to put H at an academic disadvantage if she is unable to properly understand and receive clarification on course content.

4.1.3.c: Perception of their proficiency

H described her English level as intermediate or advanced, part of which is due to her enrolling in university-level English courses. She outlined the use of dictionaries to help improve her vocabulary breadth and depth from articles for her English courses. H’s perspective on her proficiency level was more balanced between positive and negative aspects. While she does believe her English is to a higher level, she described low confidence when speaking to be an initial barrier to practising. As she felt more confident verbally interacting with other EFL learners, this

would be a better path to build confidence talking and slowly interact with more native speakers to encourage and motivate her to seek out speaking opportunities with native English speakers.

4.1.4: Similarities/ Differences

4.1.4.a: Feelings about the language

All the general perceptions of English were positive about the language in and of itself. Doraemon and H both found that English was beneficial to their daily communication with other people. While Soe did not indicate much regarding day-to-day interactions, she did expand on how English is helpful for her future career plans. As Soe would prefer to have future work in an English medium, learning the language is imperative. This is also like H, who expressed that she would require English for her future career plans in the medical science field. English, for her, would help with communicating with colleagues in the same field. Doraemon and H also concluded that some daily communication is more difficult. This was due to ungrammatical language use and accentedness of speech. Accentedness refers to a listener's perspective of how strong a speaker's foreign accent is (Tergujeff, 2021).

4.1.4.b: Feeling about their learning experience

Out of all three participants, Doraemon was the only one who had a largely deficit-oriented perspective, which is when a learner takes a negative approach to their learning and views what their abilities lack. Soe and H still acknowledged difficulties within the learning process, but their outlook was notably more positive.

Doraemon and Soe found difficulties when switching to English medium schools from schools in their L1, and both required two years to adjust to the new language of instruction. Soe and H described difficulties in English classes, as teachers would describe concepts of English in their home languages, Karen and Burmese, respectively.

Doraemon found that vocabulary taught in English courses was not relevant to everyday life, while Soe did find it to be helpful. H neither agreed nor disagreed whether the vocabulary

taught was useful but said that the volume was intimidating and stressful. All participants were in agreement that lessons in Thailand were not fully relevant to their everyday life. However, Doraemon and Soe indicated that their lessons were sufficient for basic communication with others, and H had a parallel perspective that speaking English for socialisation was beneficial.

Both Doraemon and H found interacting with native English speakers to be more difficult than speaking with other EFL learners. They outlined different but similar reasonings for this. Doraemon shared that she had issues comprehending the speech and found conversation difficult to follow, while H stated that she needed to more actively listen so that she could understand, thus improving her skills. This furthers how Doraemon takes a deficit-oriented outlook to her learning. However, H did detail that native speakers would have difficulty understanding during conversation or when asking questions due to her non-native accent.

These two participants also shared that when speaking, it can be difficult to access the words they want or need. They both described a sense that words they desire “won’t come out”, even when they know what they would like to say in their L1. This could be related to the ‘tip of the tongue’ phenomenon, where a speaker is unable to access a word, but can recall similar words in form or meaning (Brown & McNeill, 1966). However, it was unclarified if this was the phenomenon participants were referring to or if it was a difficulty recalling words and an inability to access similar words.

Similarly, they both agreed that there are greater English demands in post-secondary education, requiring greater reading and writing needs. Doraemon detailed that she finds writing for post-secondary challenging. Since writing is not an aspect she enjoys and that while reading the materials she can become “lost”, as she requires more time to comprehend and complete tasks than other students. Contrary to Doraemon’s difficulties with reading and writing, H viewed this as a strength and learning opportunity. She viewed these exercises as ways for her to further her knowledge. H outlined that her university English classes have helped her improve her English and that when faced with difficult terminology for reading exercises, she utilises an English-to-English dictionary to learn words. By not using a translated dictionary, she is able to increase her English abilities. Like H’s use of dictionaries, Soe also used additional methods to grow her

proficiency. Although Soe's choice of materials were books and music, this allowed her to become more exposed to the information and culture of English-speaking countries.

4.1.4.c: Perception of their proficiency

All three participants described an upper intermediate level of English proficiency, however they all used different measurement scales to indicate this. The implication of these different rating systems is unclear but could relate to whether participants were informed of their proficiency levels from a standards-based guideline in school. Each participant also outlined different reasons that contributed to their reasoning. Doraemon attributed her proficiency level to her U.S. curriculum-based high school delivering higher quality English lessons, including pronunciation for a 'better' English accent. Soe shared that the use of books, music, and communicating with students of different nationalities in university assisted in her English level. H credited her English to university English and English literature classes with the added help of dictionaries.

Doraemon and H were the only participants to detail that they do struggle when speaking in English due to other speakers' vocabulary choice or their own confidence. These issues were only discussed in the context of speaking with native English speakers though, as they did not outline issues when conversing with other EFL speakers.

4.1.5: Relation to Literature

Much of the research into refugees' learning experiences has focused on the themes of this section. The first point that will be covered is Doraemon's recurrent deficit-oriented view of her learning experience. Her perspective on her education relates to Cho et al. (2019), who found that students' perspectives on their learning were mainly focused on what they lacked. This is contrary to the other participants of this study, who took more positive views of their learning and viewed areas of difficulty as learning opportunities.

Soe and H both outline how teachers would describe concepts of English in their home languages. Soe found this difficult as the textbooks were written in English and H faced difficulty with this as she felt it confusing and hard to focus on the material. Watkins et al. (2012), found that teachers should be sure to teach English courses in English, and provide additional bilingual support where it is needed. By teaching these classes in the target language, as per the previous study's recommendation, this would have resolved the issues faced by Soe and H as the medium of instruction would align with the target language and classroom resources.

Additionally, Soe described her school in a more teacher-centred approach. This type of teaching approach bars opportunities for students to participate in the learning process, particularly by speaking, and asking questions about the material. This aligns with Metro (2022) and Couch (2017), who stated that in classes that take this approach with higher numbers of students, it is uncommon for learners to have the ability to speak alone with teachers or have their voices heard.

All three participants, in different ways, expressed difficulties keeping up with peers in school. For Doraemon and Soe, this is evident by the two-year adjustment period they described when switching from schooling in the L1 to English. For H, she outlined that at times it was difficult for her to follow content because she was trying to learn new words while keeping up with the material of the course. A lack of comprehension of classroom instruction can impede a refugee student's ability to obtain the basic outline of instructions and content (Rahman et al., 2022). This also aligns with Short and Boyson (2012), who described how students are held to the same academic accountability as their peers in a standards-based curricula. While none of the participants indicated that they are currently struggling academically on a grades-based indicator, Molyneux and Hiorth (2019) found that language proficiency to be a large indicator of academic success. This shows that while the participants may have struggled initially, they were able to overcome barriers to their education and language learning to progress to post-secondary education.

H shared how her early years of English learning was marked by stress from the vocabulary that was being taught and her uncertainty if she could learn and memorise it. This aligns with the findings of Molyneux and Hiorth (2019) and Poppitt and Frey (2007), who described that a lack

of English fluency can contribute to feelings of insecurity and stress. The large amounts of vocabulary that H was taught does not necessarily equate to low proficiency, however given that she indicated this to be an issue when she first began learning English, it could be presumed that her proficiency was lower than it is now.

All participants agreed that language classes conducted in Thailand were not fully relevant to everyday life's applications. This coincides with Sharifian et al. (2020), where participants found that English classes were not useful to everyday life. However, unlike Sharifian et al. (2020), the participants of this study did not quit their education. These are two different populations though, as the previous study looked at adult women, and this study examines women's experiences when they were and are in school contexts.

One aspect that was more closely related to Sharifian et al.'s (2020) findings, was one perspective from Doraemon. She outlined how some texts, particularly articles, can be difficult to read due to the vocabulary and can get "lost in the middle". Sharifian et al. (2020) described that some of their participants, Afghan refugee women, found instructional texts too difficult to learn. This demonstrates how the classroom materials must be appropriately selected for the populations and that this learning issue is not isolated to one group's learning experience.

Soe and H had more positive perspectives on their learning, and they were also the participants who took more initiative in their learning process. Sharifian et al. (2020) found participants that utilised independent study skills outside the classroom assisted in improving their English skills. This further aligns with K.V. et al. (2019) who described a willingness to learn proactively outside school aided in vocabulary acquisition. H found the use of an English-to-English dictionary to be helpful to her for acquiring more words and their meanings, a skilful use of dictionaries was found to aid in vocabulary learning (K.V. et al., 2019). Using an English-to-English dictionary could have also negated the any issues that Metro (2022) outlined as problematic between English and Burmese dictionary equivalents, as it would have explained the English meaning for and through English. As Doraemon was the only one with a more negative perspective and did not indicate she took proactive learning measures, teachers and teaching

practices should be implemented to encourage students to learn autonomously outside school to help bolster their language abilities (Kendrick et al., 2022; Sharifian et al., 2020).

4.2: Linguistic Aspects

Linguistic aspects will cover subthemes related to specific fields of study within linguistics. This includes participants' experiences and perspectives around areas such as grammar, vocabulary, and vocabulary breadth and depth.

4.2.1: Doraemon

Doraemon shared her experience when learning English and her school involved many classes specific to developing areas of English abilities. She outlined that her classes involved reading, writing, speaking, and listening, but also looked at grammar, spelling, vocabulary learning, and vocabulary comprehension. She detailed that vocabulary comprehension was a separate course in her school, mainly taught through reading and analysis of stories and other written material.

Vocabulary, spelling, and phonics were aspects that were taught every day in classes. Due to the fact that Doraemon was learning phonics every day, she believed this helped equip her with better pronunciation than other people who did not study phonics as much. She continued that when learning English, she did greatly struggle with pronunciation.

In relation to vocabulary breadth and depth, Doraemon acknowledged students need to learn a lot of words. However, she felt that it was unnecessary for it to be an extensive list of words. She detailed that some words are frequently reused in communication, so it is more beneficial to learn different meanings of fewer words and how to use them contextually.

4.2.2: Soe

Similarly to Doraemon, Soe outlined that her English learning experience had aspects of courses focuses on phonics, grammar, vocabulary, and comprehension. However, it was unclear whether these were taught within an English course or if these were their own separate courses.

Soe shared that when learning English, grammar was difficult for her. As she said:

“Sometimes, I speak like, I speak what’s on my mind without considering the grammar. Yeah, so sometime it goes wrong.”

This is a difficulty that can occur with spontaneous speech production as it requires a greater ability to quickly access conjugated verbs within the mental lexicon. Soe explained that, as she had begun learning English in primary school, she would have liked to have learned more grammar at a younger age.

Contrary to Doraemon though, Soe did not feel strongly in relation to breadth or depth. Her learning experienced seemed to have covered both breadth and depth of vocabulary, so she realises the importance of both. She described that between the two, she is partial to vocabulary breadth as it helped more with comprehension. This was because when doing reading tasks, knowing more words did not require as much use of a dictionary because the words would have already been learned previously.

4.2.3: H

While H gave extensive details in many aspects of her learning experience, the only area that she specifically mentioned learning within English classes was grammar. She explained that grammar was a difficult area for her to learn especially in high school. However, H had previously mentioned that her learning experience was insufficient, as it did not give her the necessary tools to communicate and feel confident in her abilities.

H did give a strong stance regarding vocabulary breadth and depth, though. She firmly argued that vocabulary depth is more effective for learning. Her reasoning behind this was that it is more efficient to learn several words that can be used in multiple contexts than many words that can only be used in one context. This requires less mental space to be taken up by an excess of words and “is not wasting time”.

4.2.4: Similarities/ Differences

Grammar was a specific topic taught within English classes for all participants. Only Doraemon and Soe further outlined that phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension were further areas taught in school. This could be because they attended English medium high schools within Thailand, whereas H received an English class during high school in Burma and most of her English was acquired upon her immigration to the U.S. Both Soe and H were aligned in their perspectives that grammar was an area of greater difficulty in English classes, while Doraemon shared that large and advanced vocabulary was more difficult for her.

Doraemon and H agreed that vocabulary depth was more important when learning vocabulary. This was because they found it more useful to know words that could be used in multiple scenarios and thus reducing the mental demand of memorising more words and accessing the appropriate ones in a situation. Soe did note the importance of vocabulary depth; however, she was in favour of vocabulary breadth as it helped her understand a greater number of words when reading.

4.2.5: Relation to Literature

K.V. et al. (2019) and Abou-Khalil et al. (2021) both studied refugees’ acquisition of vocabulary through a breadth lens. In their respective studies, they found that vocabulary breadth could be improved through proactive learning and easily accessible means. Yildiz (2022) examined EFL learners’ vocabulary depth acquisition but was unable to make conclusive correlations between vocabulary richness and free and active vocabulary through essay writing tasks. While all

these studies did not directly analyse participants' feelings regarding breadth or depth, the findings are still interesting to compare to that of the participants of this study. Two of three participants expressed a preference to vocabulary depth, while only one preferred breadth. The previous studies could lead to an indication that refugees would prefer vocabulary breadth, given that the findings were mostly positive and lead to greater strides in language acquisition. However, this is contrary to this study's findings.

Abou-Khalil et al. (2022), further discusses the implications of vocabulary that is taught to refugees. They share that vocabulary is not relevant to refugees and is taught based on word frequency of native speakers. This could provide some explanation as to why the participants found lessons to not be relevant to their everyday lives. The reason behind this could also be that their classes were designed as English for academic purposes courses, which would further restrict the course material's applicability to external use.

The available literature does not seem to outline any aspects that are specific to learning any particular linguistic task, such as grammar or reading comprehension, which were some of the specified areas that participants outlined. This demonstrates a further gap in the research that needs to be explored in future studies.

4.3: Linguistic Needs

This theme investigated what participants viewed as essential when learning English. It also looked at what they needed to learn and were requirements of learning English during their education.

4.3.1: Doraemon

In addition to aspects of English, like grammar and vocabulary, that Doraemon was required to learn in her classes, she shared that her school mandated a rigorous study schedule. She

described how her high school involved an 11-class schedule per day. Students were not permitted to skip classes and there were daily assessments. This necessitated large amounts of time and effort to be dedicated to studying daily.

Doraemon outlined that a lot of the vocabulary they had to learn was not used and was not applicable to her everyday life. In comprehension courses, she stated they often involved reading stories and answering questions about the story to assess students' learning. This type of study was organised into its own separate subject for students to focus their application of learning.

4.3.2: Soe

Soe's perspective on what she mandated to learn was slightly different. While she had previously stated that phonics, grammar, comprehension, and vocabulary were part of the curriculum she expanded on other aspects of her learning experience. Soe described that in secondary school, she was taught how to write essays. This is an essential skill for advanced English classes and university courses conducted in English. However, she did go on to share that while she is in university now, she is adjusting to the needs of post-secondary essay writing skills such as the acquisition of adequate source articles.

4.3.3: H

H's response to this theme was similar to that of the previous subsection. As she had only outlined that grammar was a specific linguistic area she was required to learn, her perspective on this theme also revolved around the need to communicate with others.

She explained that listening and speaking are crucial points of her learning, as they gave her practical experience communicating with native speakers and other EFL learners. H shared that the language practice was important as it would give her stronger language skills to help other members of her community who did not have as strong of a command of English.

H outlined that the need to effectively communicate is also a requirement for her career aspirations. Her goal to be a doctor would mandate her to be able to share research with other scientific community members, of which the dominant language is English. This creates not only a desire but a need, for her to continue her English studies.

4.3.4: Similarities/ Differences

None of the participants' responses perfectly aligned with each other. However, this would speak to the different educational experiences they all had. Doraemon's and Soe's answers were related to their time in high school and what they were taught in classes. While H's was restricted to communicative needs and future plans. This does align with their experiences though, as Doraemon and Soe both attended secondary schools where the language of instruction for all courses was English.

4.3.5: Answering Research Question and Relation to Literature

When looking to answer the first research question, regarding what the participants view as crucial when learning and using English, there is no brief answer. The participants have different perspectives on what is crucial depending on their previous learning experiences. Doraemon and Soe shared that it is crucial for them to learn language aspects that are applicable to their schooling, whether it be relevant vocabulary or how to write essays. H outlined the essentiality of communicating with others and that the right tools and practice for this is needed. These answers, while different, are not unlike each other. All the participants, despite different educations, described that when learning and using English it is crucial that the content is relevant to their lives and can be used, whether it is for educational or informal communicative purposes.

As the previous section outlined, a lot of the available literature does not focus on specific linguistic aspects that refugees learn, which is a main component of this section. H did discuss, though, that she had a desire to help others within her community who had lower English proficiency than her. This was a way for her to be able to support and give back to her community

in a foreign country. Her desire to help aligns with Watkins et al. (2012) and Purkey (2006) who shared from their respective studies that some Burmese refugees indicated a desire to give back and help others in need. This further supports Soe's aspirations of becoming a teacher to help other refugees in Thailand and refugee camps.

Yildiz (2022) utilised essay writing tasks in their study on lexical richness. The task used in this study shows the importance of learning to write essays for academic purposes, as stated by Soe as essential for her own learning experience. Another point that had previously been iterated was the connection between participants and Sharifian et al.'s (2020) findings that not all vocabulary or lessons were applicable to everyday life.

H also shared that she found listening and speaking to be crucial to her learning experience. This is demonstrated through many studies outlined in this paper, that listening and speaking are key points of English learning and proficiency to adapt to new schools and new countries, without which can negatively impact their wellbeing (Molyneux & Hiorth, 2019; Bouttell, 2023; Cho et al., 2019; Sharifian et al., 2020; Schott & Henley, 1996; Watkins et al., 2012; Čatibušić et al., 2019).

4.4: Linguistic Wants

Linguistic wants, contrary to linguistic needs, will cover the participants' perspectives on what they wish they could have learned in English courses. Additionally, it outlines what participants wish they could have done differently in the learning process to bolster their experience and English knowledge.

4.4.1: Doraemon

Doraemon outlined several aspects of her learning experience that she expressed a desire to learn or do differently if given the chance. In terms of her direct learning experience, she shared

that due to the high volume of vocabulary students were required to learn, she found it to be ineffective at times when they were not applicable to everyday life. This led her to describe that she wished the vocabulary she had learned was reduced to what was necessary and essential for her to grasp the material better. Doraemon also stated that given the intensity of the school schedule and the division of English courses, a reduction in the number of English courses would be better because some of the course content overlapped with each other. She described that given refugees need to learn many languages, including their ethnic languages, home country's language, and language of the host country, it would be more beneficial if the English learning process was simplified.

She continued that learning English from a younger age would have been preferred as well. This was because Doraemon only started intense English education in high school, which required her to learn English and participate in courses conducted in English. If she had the experience of learning English from a younger age, she felt that she felt her proficiency level would be higher and she would not have to work significantly more than other university students to comprehend and master the course material. As she is required to utilise English in her daily communication with other students at university, it would also make regular interactions easier.

Due to the institutional connection of this research project, Doraemon shared that she believes that universities of English-speaking countries could benefit their own students and refugees as university students of Western English institutions could help teach refugees English, either through field work or online classes. The relationship would benefit Western country university students who are studying to be teachers or studying in a linguistics-related field. This was because English teachers in refugee camps and rural areas do “not get the right essence or the right pronunciation”. Therefore, her suggestion was for a mutually beneficial relationship between university students gaining experience teaching and refugees learning English from a native speaker.

4.4.2: Soe

Soe's experience of what she would like to learn related to her previous response relating to research. As she was not taught how to conduct research in high school, a skill needed in post-secondary, she wished she had been taught how to do this. While the research aspect may relate to finding sources and material for essay writing, it could also relate to conducting her own research. Soe does not specify which of these she was speaking to but given that she is an undergraduate student and not in her final year, when undergraduate theses are written, it could be concluded that it is in relation to writing essays.

She also described that she does not think her high school had enough resources, particularly technological sources. She believed that access to computers would have helped her learning and could make lessons better and more interactive, such as the use of slide presentations rather than studying from textbooks.

Similarly to Doraemon, Soe also outlined that she would have liked to have learned English at a younger age, such as during primary school or kindergarten. She felt that this would have helped improve her language abilities because she would have started learning grammar and other linguistic aspects earlier, giving her a greater command of them when older.

4.4.3: H

Within schooling, H's perspective was more specific than Doraemon and Soe. As H shared previously, she is taking a university-level English literature course, so she did not receive the opportunity to study Shakespeare's work in the previous semester. This was something she expressed desire to study because he wrote famous stories, however his works are long and the language is difficult which was why it was not included in the curriculum. Along this, H outlined that she wished to have more opportunities to practice reading and speaking.

In relation to communication, as H aims to join the medical community, she would like to learn more words related to medicine. This would help her in her field but also when she needs to access medical services in hospitals and drugs in pharmacies, but also give her more background

for when she pursues her field of choice, which is outlined is emergency medicine. To communicate with others, H said she would like to change her accent because sometimes people, particularly native speakers, have difficulty understanding what she is saying. Despite her proficiency level of English, it can be understood why she would like to alter her accent to sound more ‘native-like’, as she wishes to pursue emergency medicine, it is crucial for patients and other hospital staff to clearly understand what everyone is saying as it can be a highly stressful and time-sensitive environment.

4.4.4: Similarities/ Differences

The perspectives of the participants within the school environment vary depending on experience, such as H, whose perspective is focused on the university level compared to Doraemon and Soe who mainly discussed desires for the high school level.

Doraemon and Soe both agreed that they desired to have started learning English from a younger age. Both participants also aligned on the reasoning that learning English when younger would have given them greater proficiency for high school and university. This would have allowed them to better focus on the material being taught rather than focusing on the material while learning the language medium of instruction concurrently.

While Doraemon’s and H’s perspectives were not fully aligned in how they described pronunciation and accent, they both agreed that these aspects are preferred when taught from a native speaker. This is so that they, and other students, would be able to learn and acquire the accent of native speakers. Their opinion of the accent of native English speakers is viewed as ‘better’ because it would make language acquisition easier and would better help others understand them, making communication easier.

4.4.5: Answering Research Question and Relation to Literature

There was no specific aspect of their learning that all participants wished to enhance, though they did outline individual aspects desired to learn or improve. The areas that multiple participants agreed on were age of acquisition and accentedness. Two participants were in agreement that they wished they had started learning English when they were younger, which would have aided their proficiency now. Two participants also were aligned on the desire to learn from native English speakers and the acquisition of a native accent. This was because it would be easier to understand, both when learning from teachers and when communicating with others. However, age of acquisition and accentedness are out the control of these participants, as most of them did not begin learning English after they were displaced as refugees.

These two areas that the participants cited as a weakness are correlated as it can be thought that learning a language from a younger age will give learners a more native-like accent. This somewhat aligns with the Critical Period Hypothesis, as Granena and Long (2012) found that native-like competency and native-like accentedness were only possible when learning additional languages at a younger age, although not guaranteed. Flege (2018) outlined that the key factor for learning an additional language was the quantity and quality of exposure of the target language. This further aligns with Doraemon's view that native English teachers would be more helpful, because English teachers in refugee camps or rural areas, who also have English as an additional language, do not get or teach the correct pronunciation or "get the right essence" of the material. Despite Doraemon and Soe having started learning English under the age of 10, they may not have been receiving the quality of English input that is necessary to develop a higher proficiency and attain a more native-like accent. In contrast, this also supports H's learning experience as her quantity and quality of language input was insufficient before moving to the U.S. After two years in the U.S., she described how her English proficiency has greatly improved, and while this is in part to taking EFL courses, she is also in an immersion environment with native English speakers, where both the quality and quantity of English is higher.

The negative aspect to the participants desire for a more native-like accent demonstrates how they currently view their language abilities in a deficit-oriented manner. In line with Tun (2022), the participants of this study expressed a desire to be able to participate in activities without a language 'deficiency', of which would mean speaking without an accent or being 'interrupted'

by another language. This is further supported by the participants where perspectives on speaking were sometimes negative because they could not recall words in English and their abilities were ‘interrupted’ by their L1 to communicate. H even specifically described how she would like to change her accent to sound more native-like. These views further show that refugee students have normalised English, which in turn creates dominant and minoritised versions of English (Tun, 2022). As they are not native speakers of English, they classify themselves within the minoritised group, especially when native speakers cannot understand them. This creates racialised versions of English which favour Western native speakers, even if an EFL demonstrates a high proficiency of English, non-native accents could be seen as ‘less than’ or ‘inferior’ in knowledge (Tun, 2022).

4.5: Answering Research Questions

The first two research questions relating to the linguistics needs and wants of Burmese refugee participants were addressed in previous subsections. In terms of needs, the participants’ responses generally agreed that it is essential for the course material to be relevant to their lives so that it can be utilised for their education or for communicating with others. The second research question focusing on linguistic wants found that the two main points of agreement were the age of acquisition and accentedness. This was because they wished to have started learning English at a younger age and to have native English teachers to help acquire their accent.

The third research question though, is yet to be addressed. When analysing what the participants found challenging when learning English varied. Doraemon expanded the most on areas of difficulty when learning, but this could also be attributed to her more deficit-oriented perspective. One aspect that was unique to her experience was the difficulty of learning minimal pairs. As minimal pairs are only differentiated by one phoneme, this problem area could be exacerbated if they involve sounds that are more difficult to acquire or are not used in one’s L1.

The remaining points of difficulty were agreed upon by at least two participants. Communication was found to be difficult but for different reasons. Ungrammatical language of other non-native English speakers, one’s own accentedness, inability to mentally access words,

speech pace, and advanced vocabulary use were all hindrances to communication with others. Advanced vocabulary was particularly an issue regarding university-level work for reading and writing. Additionally, grammar was also an area that was problematic to learn and master for participants.

Adjusting to English medium schools was an additional source of difficulty, requiring two years for participants to become adjusted. The issues around English learning were further emphasised when English concepts were explained in participants' L1, which was found to be more difficult and confusing.

The final research question can be addressed that while all participants have different learning experiences and encountered different problems, communication needs were the biggest challenge. The different aspects that effect this were not all present for all participants, but they were all aligned in their view that it was most difficult.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The goals of this study were to examine the perspectives of Burmese refugees when learning English to view what the learning needs, learning wants, and challenges are. These three aims were analysed through the lens of three Burmese refugees who are all pursuing tertiary education in three different countries. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed participants to share their insights and experiences to these research goals and their education. All of these research questions were answered through the findings of the study. Linguistic learning needs were identified and agreed upon by participants that is essential for the course material to be relevant to their everyday lives, allowing practical use for their education and for communicating with others. Linguistic learning wants were agreed upon in two main aspects: age of acquisition and accentedness, because they wished to have started learning English at a younger age and to have native English teachers to help acquire a native accent. Learning challenges was less straightforward to answer, as each participants had different learning experiences, and thus

different challenges. However, between all participants there was a consensus that all their challenges related communication needs, such as mentally accessing words, difficult vocabulary, and others understanding their own accent.

This study does include some limitations. One of the largest hurdles of this study was the difficulty for recruitment. Given that refugee populations can be difficult to gain access to for research, it was incredibly difficult to find participants. Some potential participants had been identified but were unable to participate due to accessibility to necessary online platforms for interviews. With this difficulty for recruitment, it resulted in a limited sample size which was incredibly challenging to expand. A limited sample size led to a more homogenous group in this study. The participants of this study were of a similar age, same gender, similar schooling experiences, similar residence area or refugee camp in Thailand, and were all recruited through the same mutual contact. While this does make for a more concentrated study, it is not representative of all groups, particularly to a male perspective of English learning nor allow for trends within participants in certain countries to emerge.

When conducting interviews, due to the large location variety of participants, there were issues with interviews themselves such as connectivity issues and refugee camp power supplies temporarily going out. Additionally, the nature of some of the research questions allowed some participants to give simplistic answers such as 'no' or 'not really' without further expansion. There were also silences within interviews at times, however it was outside the scope of this to be able to analyse the meaning behind silences and conduct any discourse analysis.

This study could be altered for future research by taking a different approach to the interview questions and the interviews. As participants did not always give detailed responses, it raises questions about whether some of the questions were too difficult or if participants had difficulty expressing themselves. Harder interview questions could be given to participants ahead of interviews so they can prepare an answer that could more accurately describe their experiences while having greater time to reflect and gather the vocabulary they wished to utilise. Furthermore, speaking with a native English speaker could have impacted their experience and ability to express themselves. Even though the interviews were not being assessed for their abilities, they could have

felt that they needed to be more careful about how they were expressing themselves, making them unable or unwilling to give an unfiltered opinion. Future interviews would be more beneficial if they could be conducted in participants' L1 to make them feel more comfortable and allow them to share their thoughts and experiences with greater ease.

The findings of this study could be used to further inform the English educational practices for Burmese refugee students. Based on what the participants revealed as essential, desires, and challenges, teachers and schools can further develop curriculums and additional support practices to help students tackle areas of difficulty and learn about areas that interest them. The results could also be extended to language learning practices within refugee camp schools, to demonstrate to need for greater English education for younger students, which would give them the tools for success in secondary school. This study can also inform Western tertiary institutions of the benefits of partnerships with refugee camps and schools which can assist both their own student body and refugees who wish to learn English.

The Burmese protracted refugee situation has been ongoing and with education being a right and one of the United Nation's Sustainability Development Goals, it is important to understand the experiences that these refugees have. English is viewed as an important language for resettlement or job purposes, which was outlined by previous studies and the participants of this study. It should be further researched how their experiences shape their thoughts and feelings, and how the educational system can better help students achieve the learning goals without creating further barriers, such as accreditation issues. Refugees around the world face hardship in numerous ways, education can provide a path for them to pursue careers that can benefit themselves and their families, with the aid of research, policy makers, and education systems a true difference can be made to lives of those who were forced to flee their homes.

Chapter 6: References

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Chapter 7: Appendices

Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet



The Linguistic Wants and Needs of Refugees in the UK

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Central University Research Ethics Committee Approval Reference: EDUC_C1A_24_134

1. Introductory paragraph

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether you wish to take part.

2. Why is this research being conducted?

The purpose of this study is to look at the wants and needs of refugees for language learning in the UK. The goal is to look at the feelings towards language learning and any issues accessing language learning opportunities.

3. Why have I been invited to take part?

As a potential participant, you have been identified based on the following criteria: you are a refugee or forced migrant, have been residing in the UK for at least 6 months, are over the age of 18, and have no serious mental or physical conditions impacting your ability to participate and give full voluntary consent for this study. For this study, there are about 5-10 participants in total.

You may not participate in the following study if you are currently detained in a refugee camp; currently hold asylum seeker status, have been refused asylum seeker status, or are in the appeals process; are experiencing homelessness; are under the age of 18; and/or if you have any serious mental or physical conditions that impact your ability to give full voluntary consent.

4. Do I have to take part?

No. It is up to you to decide whether to take part. You can withdraw yourself from the research, without giving a reason, by advising me of this decision. The deadline by which you can withdraw any information you have contributed to the research is May 30, 2024. If you choose to withdraw from the study, any data that you have provided will be deleted from all online platforms and storage; any paper copies of data will be responsibly disposed of through a paper shredder to ensure protection of sensitive data.

5. What will happen to me if I take part in the research?

The research will take place in person in a comfortable public, yet quiet, setting for the interview to be conducted. Upon arrival, there will be general greetings, a review of the consent form, and a chance to ask any questions before starting the interview. If it is not possible to conduct this in

person, then it will take place over Microsoft Teams. Before the interview, you will complete a consent form for your participation. Any questions regarding the consent form will be answered to help its completion. The research will last about 30 minutes to one hour, and you will not be involved in the research after that. The research will involve one semi-structured interview. This means that a question will be asked but you can talk as much or as little as you would like to answer the question. It may result in answers that have follow up questions. Topics involving your experience and feelings about language learning and education in the UK will be discussed. With your consent, I would like to audio record the interview so I can have an accurate record of our conversation. This will be a one-time interview. No repeated sessions are necessary. You can ask to pause or stop the research activities at any time.

6. What are the possible disadvantages and risks in taking part?

The interview questions may result in some answers containing information relating to past trauma, although this will not be the centre of any questions themselves. If this happens, we will have a break and move on to a different topic/question. Your information will be pseudonymized. This means that original transcripts of interviews will not have your name attached to it and any name used in the resulting literature will not be a pseudonym (alternative/fake name).

7. Are there any benefits in taking part?

While there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the research, it is hoped that this research will lead to recommendations on policy and education structure for refugees and forced migrants in the UK.

8. Expenses and payments

There will be no payment for taking part in this research.

9. What information will be collected and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the research objectives?

Data relating to your experiences and feelings about English classes, education, and issues accessing this education will be collected. The information will help me better understand gaps in the education system and government policies in order to help make recommendations to meet the needs of refugees in the UK.

The researcher and supervisor will have access to the research data.

Identifiable data (including consent forms) will be stored on the University Nexus 365 platform. This data will be collected through recordings of the interviews. The interviews will be transcribed (written out) and the original recordings will be deleted to ensure privacy. Any reference to participants will not be to your actual name, but to a fake name assigned for each interview. Research data will be stored for 3 years after publication or public release of the work of the research.

10. Will the research be published? Could I be identified from any publications or other research outputs?

The findings from the research will be written up in a thesis, with the potential for academic publications. You will not be identifiable from these outputs.

I would like your permission to use direct quotations but without identifying you in any research outputs.

A copy of my thesis/ dissertation will be deposited both in print and online in the [Oxford University Research Archive](#) where it will be publicly available to facilitate its use in future research.

11. Data Protection

The University of Oxford is the data controller with respect to your personal data, and as such will determine how your personal data is used in the research. The University will process your personal data for the purpose of the research outlined above. Research is a task that is performed in the public interest. Further information about your rights with respect to your personal data is available from the University's Information Compliance website at <https://compliance.admin.ox.ac.uk/individual-rights>.

12. Who has reviewed this research?

This research has received ethics approval from a subcommittee of the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee. (Ethics reference: **xxxxx**).

13. Who do I contact if I have a concern about the research or I wish to complain?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this research, please contact [REDACTED] and we will do our best to answer your query. We will acknowledge your concern within 10 working days and give you an indication of how it will be dealt with. If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please contact the University of Oxford Research Governance, Ethics & Assurance (RGEA) team at rgea.complaints@admin.ox.ac.uk or on 01865 616480.

14. Further Information and Contact Details

If you would like to discuss the research with someone beforehand (or if you have questions afterwards), please contact:



Appendix B: Informed Consent Document



Consent to take part in The Linguistic Wants and Needs of Refugees

Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) approval reference: EDUC_C1A_24_134

Purpose of Study: To investigate refugees' experiences with language education, how the curriculum reflects their everyday language use, and any barriers they face to accessing language education.

Please initial each box if you agree with the statement

I confirm that I have read and understand the information for the above research. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any point (until ~~xxxx~~), without giving any reason.

I understand who will have access to personal data provided, how the data will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the project.

I understand that I will not be identifiable from any publications.

I consent to being audio recorded.

I understand how audio recordings will be used in research outputs.

Use of quotations: Please indicate your preference (select *one* option):

a) I do not wish to be quoted. **or**

b) I agree to the use of quotations in research outputs as I am not identifiable.

I give permission for you to contact me again to clarify information.

I understand how to raise a concern or make a complaint.

I agree to take part.¹

Name of participant

dd / mm / yyyy
Date

Signature

Name of person taking
consent

dd / mm / yyyy
Date²

Signature

Appendix C: CUREC Approval

SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES
INTERDIVISIONAL RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
DEPARTMENTAL RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE



[REDACTED]
Department of Education, Social Sciences Division
University of Oxford

19 April 2024

Research ethics approval

Research title: The linguistic wants and needs of refugees in the UK

Research ethics reference: EDUC_C1A_24_134

The above application has been considered on behalf of the Education Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC) in accordance with the University's procedures for ethical approval of all research involving human participants.

I am pleased to confirm that, on the basis of the information provided to the DREC, ethics approval has now been granted for this study.

Please note the following:

Personal data: It is the responsibility of the PI to ensure that all personal data collected during the project is managed in accordance with the University's [guidance and legal requirements](#).

In-person activities: Any data collection involving in-person interactions with participants must have an up-to-date fieldwork risk assessment in place; further guidance is available from the Safety Office's [website](#).

Amendments: Please notify the committee if you intend to make any amendments to the information in your ethics application as submitted at date of this approval, as all changes must receive ethical approval prior to implementation. The amendment form is available on the [SSH IDREC webpage](#).

We welcome feedback on your experience of the ethical review process and suggestions for improvement. Please email any comments to staff.curec@education.ox.ac.uk / student.curec@education.ox.ac.uk or ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk.

Yours sincerely
[REDACTED]

Appendix D: Sample Interview Questions

1. Where are you from?
2. Do you prefer to call it Myanmar or Burma?
3. When did you move to the country you are living in?
4. What languages do you know or know how to speak?
5. For the languages that you know, did you receive any formal schooling for them?
6. Before going to Thailand, did you know any English?
7. How long have you been learning English for?
8. What would you say is your current English level?
9. What language did they teach in your high school?
10. Was that hard to start all your classes in English?
11. Can you tell me about your experience learning English?
12. What do you study?
13. What language is your degree in?
14. Did you have any issues when you were learning English?
15. The topics you learned about in English, did you enjoy learning about them?
16. Were there any topics that you would have liked to learn but didn't learn about in school?
17. Did you have any issues accessing classes for learning English?
18. The English you learned, is it useful to you now?
19. What do you hope to be doing in the future? Do you think you will use English in your future or no?
20. Where you are now, do you communicate in English all the time or only for school?
21. Has English allowed you to socialize with other people and feel at home?
22. For my research, I'm not going to use your real name, but do you have a particular fake name you would want me to use for you? Do you have a preference?
23. Do you have any other comments or feelings that you want to share about your experience?