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# **Learning English for a Life of Choice in New Zealand**

## **A Case Study of Afghan Women Refugees' Bilingual Class Experiences in Palmerston North**

A research project presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of International Development

Development Studies

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis looks at the experiences of a group of women refugees learning English as part of their resettlement in New Zealand. The women's husbands were working as interpreters for the New Zealand Police in Bamiyan, Afghanistan. To ensure their safety after the New Zealand Police were withdrawn, these Afghan families were invited to resettle in Palmerston North, New Zealand. To attain in-depth results, this research report focuses on the women's efforts to integrate within the social life of New Zealand and their experiences in acquiring English as a tool to their successful resettlement program.

A small study was conducted in the context of an English Language Partners' (ELP) Bilingual English for Speakers of Other Language (ESOL)-Literacy class for refugees. Participants for this research were five Afghan women, two ELP's ESOL teachers, and one of the women's husbands. The methods used were semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, classroom observation, and curriculum analysis.

This report is framed within adult pre-literacy education and investigates whether women refugees become empowered through taking literacy classes. Findings show that there are links between language acquisition within the refugees' resettlement process and personal empowerment.

Afghan women's acquisition of English language skills has brought more personal control over their mobility and has changed relationships with their husbands to some extent since moving to New Zealand. Furthermore, the woman's learning experiences have brought them to a level where they can move on from ELP to a higher English level class.

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## GLOSSARY

ELP	English Language Partners
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Language
ETC	English Teaching College
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
L1	Language 1 / the First Language
<i>MS Tampa</i>	United States of America's cargo ship
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NLS	New Literacy Studies
NZPRT	the New Zealand Provincial Reconstruction Team
PNCC	Palmerston North City Council
TEC	Tertiary Education Commission
UN	United Nation
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees
USA	United States of America

## **Chapter 1: Introduction to the Research**

While every refugee's story is different and their anguish personal, they all share a common thread of uncommon courage – the courage not only to survive, but to persevere and rebuild their shattered lives.

(Guterres in UNHCR, 2005)

### **1.1. Rationale of This Study**

The quote above that has inspired this research came from Antonio Guterres, the head of UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and highlights two major problems. Firstly, it draws attention to the inside stories of refugees while they were forced by the fear of war to flee from their home country seeking safety, until being resettled in a new host country. Secondly, it highlights their courage to persevere and rebuild their shattered lives in a completely new culture and language in the host country.

This research project focuses on a group of Afghan women and their families who came to New Zealand through a refugee scheme. Interestingly, none of the families involved in this project have had experiences living in refugee camps before coming to New Zealand. The women are the wives of Afghan interpreters who worked for the New Zealand Police in Bamiyan, Afghanistan. Due to threats to their lives after the New Zealand troops were sent home, the New Zealand government offered these families the opportunity to resettle in New Zealand. However, these women and their families still faced challenges as they entered the new country, even though they have come from an elite background.

My background as a teacher of English for speakers of other languages has generated my interest in a refugees' ESOL-Literacy class in Palmerston North, New Zealand. I observed Afghan women sit and learn Basic English in a class-like situation class for the first time for. Most of the learners have had no prior contact with the English language and the class was designed for low-level learners with refugee backgrounds, from non-English-speaking countries. This study explores the needs and concerns of the Afghan women learners during their resettlement in an English-speaking country.

## **1.2. Research Questions**

Given the fact that these refugees are all adults with low language and literacy skills (Gray & Elliot, 2001; Nash, 2004; Tripodi, 2002; Fletcher, 1999; Beaglehole, 2012; Altinkaya & Omundsen, 1999), it was expected that they will encounter difficulties in integrating into the host country community. The Afghan women were prevented from receiving formal education in both reading and writing in their own language in their home countries. Additional literacy support is required to support their integration within the host country's community (Altinkaya & Omundsen, 1999).

Therefore, the aim of this research is "To explore how a group of Afghan women refugees use their English language learning as a tool to facilitate their resettling in New Zealand."

To achieve this aim, three research questions and objectives were set, and these were as follows:

1. To explore whether women refugees feel empowered after learning English;
  - 1.1. What is the women's view of empowerment?
  - 1.2. What are the dreams and hopes of Afghan women?
  - 1.3. How do the women feel about themselves after they have come to New Zealand
2. To investigate the nature of the bi-lingual classes provided by the English Language Partners (ELP);
  - 2.1. How ELP teaching supports socio-cultural aspects?

- 2.2. What are the support systems that assist women in learning basic English skills?
3. To investigate whether participating in a bilingual ELP class empowers Afghan women to live in New Zealand;
  - 3.1. What were the Afghan women's class experiences?
  - 3.2. How has learning English helped in the settling and integration process?

This study looks at the interconnections involved in the refugees' resettlement processes, particularly in relation to how these women acquire English language skills. Literacy skills may be the means by which they settle in the English-speaking community. The use of these literacy skills is also a part of the integration process which will empower them in psychological, social, economic, and political aspects (Immigration New Zealand, 2004). The interconnections need to be understood through the historical, socio-cultural context, alongside the economic and political background of the Afghan people.

In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the Afghan women's perceptions, experiences and achievements, a qualitative research approach based around focus group discussions and classroom observations was implemented. Semi-structured interviews with five Afghan women, two ESOL teachers, and the husband of one of the Afghan women learners were undertaken.

The following section presents briefly outline this thesis.

### **1.3. Thesis Outline**

**Chapter One** has outlined the key points of this study. The chapter briefly introduced the context of this research project, the rationale and research questions.

**Chapter Two** presents an in-depth academic literature review. A connection between Development Studies and Second-Language Acquisition has been made. An introduction to refugees and literacy for women refugees interconnected with culture and gender relations is presented.

The chapter then discusses literacy in development discourse, focusing on adult pre-literacy education for refugees, particularly women refugees. Subsequently, a review of gender relations in the refugees' context for both men and women is included. A discussion linking women refugees, language acquisition and development discourse shows the connection of these three key points and why it should have a place in the refugee research.

**Chapter Three** provides the context of the study. It elaborates on the general background of Afghan refugees. In addition, an explanation of the context of the Afghan interpreters in New Zealand as the key informants for this study is presented. Consequently, refugee services in New Zealand in general, in particular in Palmerston North City, are also discussed in this chapter. One of the important services for them is provided by the ELP's ESOL-Literacy class due to their needs to acquire English.

**Chapter Four** discusses the methodology used in this research including the methods and fieldwork context as the basis in conducting this research project.

**Chapter Five** is comprised of two major discussions. First, it examines the Afghan women learners and the factors that influence their participation in learning English, and secondly it examines the Afghan women and their socio-cultural changes since they left their home country.

**Chapter Six** discusses the research findings. First, it discusses the meaning of empowerment for Afghan women. Second, the learning experiences of ELP's classroom are explored. And lastly, the Afghan women's participation in English classes and whether these classes have empowered them to live in New Zealand is discussed. The chapter closes with a conclusion which explains the importance of key findings in this research project.

## **Chapter 2: Adult Literacy to Empower: Women Refugees' Journey toward Resettlement Process**

In order to identify the key concepts of this research, this chapter will review the literature on literacy and empowerment in relation to the refugee resettlement process. This chapter begins reviewing the literature on literacy as one of the tools for marginalized people, such as refugees, to be more involved in every aspect of life. This chapter is divided into four parts. The first is on refugees and the role of literacy in development, especially for adult pre-literate learners in a refugee context. The second part is related to gender issues, and the third part reviews literature on empowerment in relation to the refugees' resettlement process. The fourth part explores the link between refugees, literacy and development; it discusses how literacy relates to refugees surviving in the new environment once they are resettled in a host country such as New Zealand.

### **2.1. Literacy in Development: Adult Refugees' Pre-Literacy Education**

A global attempt to improve adult literacy levels by 50% between 2000 and 2015, Education for All (EFA), revealed that two thirds of the 774 million illiterate adults who lack basic reading and writing skills are women (UNESCO, 2013, p. 8). Moreover, 84.1% of all adults worldwide fell below the UNESCO standard of literacy in 2011 (UNESCO, p. 8). Without literacy, people have fewer opportunities to participate actively in the economy as most employment opportunities require literacy. In other words, literacy proficiency is closely related to development. People in vulnerable situations, such as refugees, are one of the main concerns in development discourses. In 1951, the United Nations established Article 1.A.2, the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, in which a refugee is defined as:

Any person who: owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country (UNHCR, 1951).

UNESCO defines literacy as the “ability to read and/or write, with understanding, a simple short statement on everyday life” (Bartlett, 2008, p. 739). However, McCarthy (2005), as cited in Bartlett (2008) stated that “the key question is not whether one reads or writes or does not, but rather the social meaning of languages and literacies – their roles in human social life.” McCarthy points out that the use of literacy is practical in that a person can use their literacy skills to support their daily living, rather than only understanding the use of a language in school-based or class room context (Bartlett, 2008, p. 739).

Based on the practical literacy thinking, Paulo Freire, an educator and philosopher of critical pedagogy in education, sees that literacy is “one of the concrete expressions of an unjust social reality, not a strictly linguistic or exclusively pedagogical or methodological problem” (Freire P, 1985, p. 10). Freire stated that people who do not have the chance to benefit from literacy are “the oppressed” (refugees could be included under this category). Within the context of illiterate and semi-illiterate people, Freire proposed the opportunities revealed within educational processes. He argued that it is the means to actively practice self-determination and principles of democracy, such as to be involved in a decision-making process in terms of what and how people learn by deepening their knowledge (Spener, 1993, p. 81).

In the Freirean approach to education, reading and writing can only have meaning if they are attached to cultural contexts. Freire focused on the types of literacy and the meanings which are engaged with by the local people, the ways literacy can contribute to the larger power structure and the approach that literacy skills can contribute to afford people’s needs. Thus, he explained, literacy is more than simply being able to read and to write, it is the act of consciousness to understand what one reads and to write what one understands - hence it is the act of explicit communication (Freire P, 1970, p. 48). Literacy practice requires systematic efforts to acknowledge the learners’ usage of literacy in everyday life. Hence, being able to use the language for verbal and non-verbal communication is one sign of a successful practice of literacy (Papen, 2005, p. 6).

The implementation of literacy practices in the present day owes much to Freire's contribution, especially in adult education (Bartlett, 2008, p. 738). This view of literacy practice has had a strong influence on the New Literacy Studies movement (NLS), exemplified in the work of Street (2003). NLS is a new approach to literacy; it is more than a set of technical skills taught through schools, rather it defines literacy in practice. It emphasizes what is needed in order to learn literacy in a given sociocultural context, and whose literacies are dominant. This view of literacy rejects the idea of a narrow view of learning as school-based and income related, rather than the broader view of literacy as a social practice (Papen, 2005, p. 6; Street, 2003, p.77). Street (2011) stated that these movements involve efforts such as engaging learners by direct approaches, talking to them, listening and linking the role of literacy in their lives, and identifying the needs of learners on what and how they will learn (Street, 2011, p. 11).

Literacy events refer to what the nature of the literacy practice is and what makes it work, such as catching the bus, making an appointment with the doctor, reading a manual for a new television, and so on. Literacy practices, on the other hand, raise a broader cultural concept (Street, 2011; 2003, p. 79). Literacy may not be considered as a single factor to create a certain impact, rather to attach it into social and cultural context (Bartlett, 2008, p. 751). In the development discourse, literacy is considered to make a positive contribution to macroeconomic growth and gives a positive return on investment by enhancing people's opportunities to gain jobs through education acceleration (Bartlett, 2008, p. 743).

However, if considering people accessing education in a formal institution, one who has spent one year in a literacy class has not necessarily taken economic benefit because of being in a classroom. Bartlett (2008) argues that the only benefit is that the network she/he has built within the class and her environment would provide links to social contacts that could advance some students economically; economic benefit may be long term rather than short term (Bartlett, p. 742). Technical skills in learning to read and write are themselves rooted in the conception of knowledge and social practice, such as to get a job as a cleaner where reading skills are necessary to understand signs and manuals for cleaning materials; or in an educational context in which both reading and writing are essential (Street, 2003, p. 78).

In the context of adult pre-literate learners such as refugees, literacy is an important part of refugees' needs in relation to resettlement in an English-speaking country (Hussein, Abdul Aziz; Abdi, Abdirazak; Bedasso, Adem; Ali, Ahmed Yusuf; Saeid, Arif; Balalchandra, M; Hawil, Banyamin, 2004, p. 10). Efforts in acquiring Basic English skills are required. The status of some refugees as having pre-literate status, or displaying very limited literacy, is a result of never having had access to education in their native language (Spencer, 1993; Freire, 1970; Hussein, et al, 2004, p. 5). Papen (2005) argues that preliterate learners are beginning readers, yet they are not beginning problem solvers – they already have experience of life before fleeing to another country (Papen, 2005, p. 6). Therefore, literacy programmes need to understand the immediate needs of these people by building on existing skills and aligning them with the new sociocultural context.

To break the chain of oppression in terms of attaining literacy skills is the main job for adult literacy education. Moreover, an ideal adult pre-literate learner's program is a nonthreatening, non-judgmental atmosphere in which adults are able to share their responsibility and gain respect over the literacy program that will benefit refugees (Imel, 1994, p. 5). To some extent, as Imel (1994) argues, pre-literate learners, mostly women learners, may need more guidance and direction since the women may lack the prerequisite skills and knowledge to be self-directed, or they may need support due to the lack of confidence, or they may not commit to the learning effort (Imel, 1994, p. 2). These women may have a smaller chance to be able to freely enjoy the services provided for them due to a traditional culture that prohibits them to show themselves in the public sphere, or due to children and family commitments (Huma, 2003, p. 9).

## **2.2. Focusing on Women Refugees: Gender Issues**

This part of the literature review discusses women in relation to gender and displacement. Until the 1970s, migration and refugees studies rarely discussed women's position during displacement (Mosedale, 2005, p. 247).

The standard approach in research was to treat women as companions who are dependent on their male relatives - husbands, fathers, sons, brothers, or other male relatives (Binder & Tosic, 2005, p. 613). Gender relations can be interpreted as negotiating relationships and conflicting interests between women and men during the process of displacement (Mahler & Pessar, 2006, p. 29).

Women's gender roles are discussed in this research through understanding their traditional roles within the family and how these roles have changed in their new country. In addition, a better understanding of a tribal influence on the role of women within the private sphere is necessary (Huma, 2003, p. 1). Most refugee women come from third world countries which expect women to play private roles within the family and in public spheres (Somali American United Council of Arizona, 2010, p. 3). Women's private roles have excluded them from economic, social, and political activity. This imposes constraints on the women's mobility (Beth, Christia, & Enikolopov, 2012, p. 2). Moreover, gender interactions and expectation among family members may influence the decision to migrate or, in refugees' case, to flee the home country (Donato, Gabaccia, Holdaway, Manalansan, & Pessar, 2006, p. 12).

During displacement, some women are considered to have less influence than men on decision-making (Boyd & Grieco, 2003, p. 2) as the role of men is as breadwinners in the public arena (Boyd, 1999, p. 9). Women, meanwhile, are considered as the holder of honour; honour of the family, the tribe, and the nation is invested in women (Huma, 2003, p. 3). Therefore, they are obliged to stay at home, do household work, taking care of children and family obligations, and looking after livestock. Hence, women remain voiceless (Beth, et al, 2012, p.6), in that their opinion is less considered than that of men in decision making.

Furthermore, understanding gender relations as a part of migration requires a viewpoint on how society constructs the relations between men and women (Lipson & Miller, 1994, p. 172). Similar to migrants, these viewpoints may be applied to refugees' gender relations within their family after being resettled. According to Boyd and Grieco (2003), the study of women and migration has evolved on these two questions for the last decade. The first relates to patriarchy or the power hierarchies between men and women, and the second is how families influence the migration process and the relationships between the men and the women themselves (Boyd & Grieco, 2003, p. 3).

The first question concerns the power hierarchies relating to men's domination over women which can be seen in how men position women in a family. This domination can be formed from several factors: historical, political, economic, geographic, kinship-based, and social stratification (Mahler & Pessar, 2001, p. 445). In traditional patriarchy's structure, ensuring power is delegated to men occurs through the transmission of religion, culture and family values from mothers to children within the family (Huma, 2003, p. 8). Most migrants and refugees come from countries where this traditional patriarchy is established within their society. Hence, men are seen to have more power to access resources than women.

The second question is how the relationships between men and women within the family can influence the migration process. Associated with the first question, the patriarchy roles may have changed during the migration process. Women mostly relate to their family members, spouses and children. During displacement, this relationship may have changed and been discontinued on arrival in a receiving country. Women, who are considered weak and to have less access to resources in the home country, may have more opportunities to work in the labour force within the new country, in which women have more service sector skills such as childcare or household work that are valuable in many receiving countries (Boyd & Grieco, 2003, p. 6).

When resettled in their host country, women may be able to earn money and work outside the home, while their husbands stay at home with their children. Gender relations within the family may be changed and may need to be renegotiated. However, even though women may gain legitimacy in the community realm through adding new roles as breadwinners, these changes may not affect the women's responsibility for their own housework and childcare (Boyd & Grieco, 2003, p. 7; Beth, et al, 2012, p. 6).

For some women migrants and women refugees, displacement to a safer place is illustrated as a journey to a better economy, social mobility, safe environments and self-autonomy (Boyd & Grieco, 2003, p. 7) where women can be a part of the work force. While men usually hold control over their family if they, as the breadwinners, stay unemployed for a longer period may lose their self-confidence and feel as though their roles as in the family is being undermined (Binder & Tosic, 2005, p. 617); this too could create gender relation changes within the family.

In addition, gender relations in migration consider not only who moves and how those moves take place, but also the dynamic changes in conceptualizing gender relations (Mahler & Pessar, 2006, p. 28), , because men and women may be treated and experience resettlement process differently (Boyd & Grieco, 2003, p. 6). Women may be hindered in obtaining their rights and entitlements on their own, such as to access language-training classes, to obtain job training, and to access income security programs. In addition, women may face more challenges to acquire literacy in English because they have devoted their lives to the home, while men have more opportunities to obtain English literacy skills due to their perceived needs as economic providers (Gordon, 2004, p. 439). Moreover, the fewer chances for women to access education in their country of origin has put them in a situation where they have fewer skills and experiences in the labour market compared to men (Boyd, 1999, p. 13).

### **2.3. Refugees' Journey to Resettlement: The Process of Empowerment**

This section will consider the empowerment concepts used to explore the refugees' journey in building their new life in the host country. The concepts will also be used to explore how refugees, especially women refugees, perceive changes to empowering themselves through learning literacy in a formal education setting for the first time.

#### *2.3.1. Aspects of Empowerment: The Key to Refugees' Individual Empowerment in the Resettlement Process*

In mainstream development circles, empowerment is a part of development strategy that is included in the Millennium Development Agenda (MDGs) set by the United Nations. The term empowerment in the development agenda is mainly to boost gender equality, in terms of economic growth and poverty alleviation for development (Ali, 2014, p. 122). In contrast to the mainstream development discourse, the idea of women's empowerment was developed in feminist thinking in the 1970s. According to Kabeer (1994, as cited in Mosedale, 2005, p. 247), feminism pointed to an emancipation of women for gender equality, social justice for women and facilitating positive changes in women's lives. In the 1990s, women's empowerment became associated with strategies to improve women's productivity as an individual to be able to contribute to development (Mosedale, 2005, p. 247).

Even though empowerment is a part of the development agenda, empowerment is also a word that has variations in meaning, terminology, and conceptualisation depending on the field of study. For this refugee research, the definition of empowerment proposed by Neville (2004, p. 17) will be used:

“Empowerment is ... to reduce powerlessness, to allow individuals, groups or communities to perceive themselves as forces capable of exerting influence, thereby being able to achieve their own goals and work towards maximizing the quality of their own lives.”

This definition is suitable to describe empowerment for the women refugees in this research who perceived their power changes through acquiring English with the assistance of a Non-governmental Organisation (NGO) such as English Language Partners (ELP) and its ESOL-literacy classes in the new country.

Empowerment is often associated with personal control. Rappaport (1987, cited in Lord & Hutchinson, 1993) stated that empowerment allows possibilities for people to control their own lives. Empowerment is closely related to refugees' resettlement processes in terms of the change to a better life within the host community. Refugees are marginalised people in that they have lived for many years in their home country with an unstable infrastructure usually due to extreme poverty, war, or disaster. During their journey to a new life in the host country, a focus needs to be on empowering them to improve self-confidence, and live independently. The challenge for adult refugees especially is to develop daily routines without extensive knowledge of the dominant language of the new community. Some examples are: finding appropriate clothing for cold weather, shopping for basic needs, turning on a stove or paying an electric bill; these can be very challenging for refugee families. Consequently, Street (2003) highlights that literacy is connected with supporting people to be able to find the information they need to do their daily activities in their new society (Street, 2003, p.77).

The process of empowerment has two related objectives, the first being an equal distribution of resources and fair relationships among people and second, to enhance personal control over self-respect, confidence, knowledge and skills (Rees, 1991). Refugees can only be in a position to be independent and self-sufficient in their resettlement process if they are in an empowering environment, are not being marginalised, and have access to local resources. In the context of refugees' resettlement process, empowerment enables greater independence, where they can express their own power to choose among available choices and take action upon these decisions. However, in a situation where changes do not happen, people may lose their belief that they are capable (Lord & Hutchinson, 1993, p. 13).

Identifying the signs of empowerment and disempowerment helps social workers and others such as refugee services, non-governmental organisations' (NGOs') workforce for refugees, community trusts, mental health practitioners, and bilingual literacy tutors, to be able to recognize refugees' state of life and to acknowledge their needs (Tepou, 2009). Therefore, to associate empowerment and disempowerment signs in refugees, Fairdeal (1991, as cited in Neville, 2004) provides a list of words that can bring about personal empowerment within refugees. Fairdeal's project on disability empowerment and advocacy in Leicester is important for this refugee research in terms of identifying the signs of personal empowerment, which is reproduced in Table 1:

Table 1 <i>List of Words Showing Personal Level of Empowerment and Disempowerment</i>	
<u>Empowerment</u>	<u>Disempowerment</u>
Strength	Weak
Being in control	Being devalued
Feeling in control	Being controlled
Being valued	Lack of resources
Acknowledged	Not listened to
Equal opportunities	Poor access
Being listened to	Being ignored
Self-esteem	No self-esteem
Taken seriously	Not being acknowledged
Concerns acted upon	Nothing being done
Respect	Lack of Dignity

Source: Adapted from Fairdeal's Disability Empowerment and Advocacy Project (1991, as cited in Neville, 2004, p.24)

For refugees who were traumatized by their situation before fleeing for safety, feeling weak and frightened and having no self-esteem, produces a lot of signs of disempowerment. Thus, once they are resettled in a safe country, the changes at a personal level, such as being respected as a part of the host community, create the feeling of being valued and hence, a sign of personal empowerment has occurred.

In addition to identifying the signs of empowerment, Scheyvens (1999) points out that an empowerment framework can be divided into four levels to be utilised: psychological, political, social and economic empowerment. Scheyvens's empowerment framework is to enable communities and development agencies to plan appropriate local community participation within ecotourism projects, hence, the project should not neglect or disempower local people. The framework is relevant to the refugee situation as these levels can show how a refugee can be empowered or disempowered through a literacy programme in their resettlement process. Scheyvens's framework has been adopted for this research and a summary of her framework with an adaptation by the author to the refugees' situation is provided in Table 2.

By identifying the signs of personal empowerment and disempowerment, shown in Table 1 social workers and others involved in the refugee resettlement process may link to further signs identified by Scheyvens based on the economic, physiological, social and political empowerment in Table 2. For example, by providing a program which teaches basic language skills, the host community is valuing refugees. In addition, when the learning continues, basic language skills will enhance the opportunity to gain jobs; hence a sign of economic empowerment occurs. Another example is that being able to do daily routines independently will boost self-esteem, and therefore a sign of personal empowerment has been achieved.

Table 2: <i>Signs of Empowerment and Disempowerment in a Refugee Context</i>		
	<u>Signs of empowerment</u>	<u>Signs of disempowerment</u>
Economic empowerment	By means of refugees' networking gained in their literacy class, visible signs of improvement, such as skills that potentially earn cash through jobs in the community.	Job requirements are skill-based, yet skills and knowledge gained in refugees' literacy class are not enough, therefore the requirements cannot be fulfilled.
Psychological empowerment	Self-esteem of each individual within the host community.	A state of confusion, frustration, distress or not being acknowledged among members in the community.
Social empowerment	Communities' activities bring connections between the host community and refugee families to build a successful integration.	Disharmony and social decay as a result of differences in cultural background raising gaps between refugees and host community.
Political empowerment	Refugees' political rights in terms of the opportunities to participate in decision-making bodies result in political contributions.	Refugees' feel they have little aspiration and negligible impact in participating in political decision-making.

Source adapted by author for the refugees' situation from Scheyvens, (1999, p.247)

The Fairdeal project and Scheyvens's tables are useful to evaluate the success of refugees' resettlement process. In addition to this, the Canadian Council of Refugees (1998, as cited in New Zealand Immigration Research Program, 2004) proposed indicators to identify a multi-dimensional concept of changes in terms of speed and degree of integration and settlement. Refugees' integration into the host community can be through two phases of time, short-term settlement and long-term settlement. This allows meaningful observations toward refugee resettlement processes, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3:

*The Speed and Degree of Integration and Resettlement of Refugees*

<u>Dimension</u>	<u>Short-term resettlement</u>	<u>Longer term integration</u>
Economic	1. Entering job market 2. Financial independence	1. Career advancement 2. Income parity 3. Entry into field of prior employment
Social	1. Establishing social network 2. Diversity within social network	1. Accessing institutions 2. Engaging in efforts to change institutions
Cultural	Adaptation of various aspects of lifestyle (e.g. diet, family relationships)	1. Engaging in efforts to redefine cultural identity 2. Adapting or reassessing values
Political	1. Citizenship 2. Voting	1. Participation in political parties 2. Participation in socio-political movements

Sources adapted from The Canadian Council of Refugees (1998, as cited in New Zealand Immigration Research Program, 2004).

Inevitably, empowerment is not a short term process; it must be understood as a process of change both from a person as individual and as a part of the social community (Lord & Hutchinson, 1993; Neville D. , 2004). Table 3 shows how refugees are assisted to achieve positive changes in economic, social, cultural and political spheres within the two phases (short and long term) in the resettlement process.

### *2.3.2. Empowering Women Refugees through Literacy*

Refugee coming to an Anglophonic community, where English is spoken daily, requires each individual to acquire the language for further communication whether using spoken or written form. Dunstan, Dibley and Shorland (2004) state that language is seen as the first tool in getting refugees to integrate with the host country's society, as well as bringing them confidence. Being able to communicate within the host country's language is also part of the integration process in that it will empower refugees in psychological, social, economic, and political aspects. This can be gained through assisting these refugees, especially women refugees, to access opportunities for literacy in English as the first step for integration.

Empowering women refugee means creating opportunities for women to be able to recognise their strengths and introduce positive changes into their lives (Mosedale, 2005, p. 250). This recognition involves power relations between men and women within family. In order to develop women's personal empowerment through language acquisition, a woman has to have the ability to believe that her actions in learning can effect further improvements. Thus, a woman can gain confidence and play an active role in learning (Mosedale, 2005, p. 255). Mosedale argues that active learning means that women learn to think critically, will have access to information and resources, and are able to choose among several choices. Each woman has her personal story; by being able to speak in her own voice she will reclaim the process of empowerment. Thus, creating an effective learning environment means providing an equitable environment.

Some research by the Strategic Social Policy Group (2008, as cited in Benseman, 2012, p.5) shows that becoming literate in the language that the host country uses every day will be essential for making friends outside the refugees' community, finding and sustaining employment, and maintaining social and psychological well-being. However, many adult refugees, especially women, have yet to experience support or equality in the learning environment.

Altinkaya and Omundsen (1999) have identified barriers for women refugees to enrol in or attend the class. The first factor is relations that bind women's responsibility within the family, such as taking care of children and elder members of the family. Thus, lack of childcare prevents them going to class. Secondly, health issues and age hinder women attending class, under the women's assumption of it being more difficult for them to remember the learning. Lastly, there is often a preference in the family for women to find work rather than to study to add to the family income after government support ends (Altinkaya & Omundsen, 1999, p. 35). Therefore, giving support for women to cope with these barriers creates chances for women's education which would then lead to wider women's employment opportunities. Subsequently, this will lead to economic empowerment, as women's education and employment can be perceived as enhancing family income (Huma, 2003, p. 11). Empowerment is described as a process rather than an event. Thus, as a person becomes more empowered, he or she will gain more confidence and capability to manage his or her own life.

#### **2.4. Exploring the Links between Refugees, Language Acquisition and Development**

Hayward (2007, as cited in Benseman, 2012, p. 4) stated that as refugees' migration is involuntary and often hastened by traumatic events, refugees need to be well-equipped to deal with the new challenges in the resettlement process. Thus, refugees require a wide range of support systems in their resettlement process, such as the establishment of a home, full participation and building of opportunities for community participation, good health, literacy and fluency in English through literacy class, and family reunification to unite family members (Gray & Elliot, 2001, p. 14). Refugees are therefore identified as a high-target group for educational interventions (Benseman, 2012, p. 5).

Most of the women refugees are bound by their traditional roles within their culture which prohibit them an independent life outside the context of family and community. However, gaining education, employment and access to resources for these women during their resettlement process does not need to destroy their values within their family and kinship, rather it can improve the women's status (Huma, 2003, p. 12).

Improving refugees' skills during their resettlement process cannot be separated from language development which includes a broad definition of literacy, not only reading, writing and numeracy but also problem solving in emotional and social literacies, such as motivation, critical thinking and cultural awareness (Benseman, 2012, p. 8). Furthermore, empowering women to gain education will also open opportunities for these women to be able to negotiate their roles in society through their participation in economy, let alone to participate in society and economy (Huma, 2003, p. 11).

## **2.5. Chapter Conclusion**

Refugees, especially pre-literate adults, are in marginalized conditions and might have been prevented or are otherwise disrupted from gaining formal education. Thus, additional literacy support is required in order to achieve a wider impact, to improve their economic level, and to be more engaged citizens within the host country's community. This literature chapter has discussed the importance of literacy for adult refugees during their resettlement process in terms of the importance of literacy and the use of language for communication. Freirian concepts that shaped the New Literacy System (NLS) believe the concept of literacy is not only how learners achieve the ability to read and write, but also learning skills that will help in the integration process with the host communities.

Women refugees possess more barriers to education or language training compared to men, in terms of the women's obligation to take responsibility within the private sphere. Thus, empowering women to gain education will also open opportunities for them to be educated and actively participate in the economy. In the long term, these women will be able to be self-sufficient and contribute to the host country's economic development.

Now that the link between literacy in empowering the marginalized people such as refugees have been outlined above, the discussion will turn to the context of Afghani women refugees and the bilingual literacy classes for refugees in Palmerston North, New Zealand.

## **Chapter 3: The Afghan Refugees' Journey to Resettlement in New Zealand**

New Zealand operates an annual resettlement quota system for refugees and asylum seekers. The formal acceptance of refugees to resettle in New Zealand has been occurring since 1944, when 858 Polish children and adults were accepted. Since 1997, New Zealand has resettled 750 quota refugees per annum (New Zealand Immigration Service, 2004, p. 17). Afghanistan has, for some years, been a conflict area from which New Zealand has accepted refugees. One hundred and thirty-one Afghan refugees picked up by the freighter *MS Tampa* after their boat sank in the Indian Ocean in 2001 were the first Afghan refugees to arrive in New Zealand (Ministry of Business, 2010).

Generally speaking, refugees coming to New Zealand face many challenges. To gain access to refugee supports systems, new challenges arise as they confront cultural, financial, and language barriers (Refugee Services, 2013)(Refugee, 2013, p. 18). Intervention from the New Zealand government, along with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) focusing on refugees' resettlement, is necessary to assist this resettlement process to promote the integration of refugees into their new community. This chapter will discuss the Afghan refugees' journey of resettlement in New Zealand, and in particular in the city of Palmerston North, and the role of English Language Partners (ELP) assisting with refugees' English language learning.

### **3.1. General Background of the Afghan Refugees**

This section will explore the background of Afghan people based on historical point of view, including Afghanistan's politics, economy, and socio-cultural situation before conflict. In relation to this research project, the background of the Afghan families coming to New Zealand is presented.

### 3.1.1. History of Afghan Society: Politics, Economy, and Socio-culture

Afghanistan is situated to the east of Iran and north and west of Pakistan (Figure 1.1). The capital city is Kabul. Afghanistan has an estimated total population of approximately 29.8 million in 2011, 77% of whom live in rural areas. Afghanistan is the hub of ‘crossroads of cultures’ where the four civilizations meet. The Middle East, Central Asia, the Indian subcontinent, and China all converge fostering a sense of cultural unity (Dupree, 2002, p. 977; The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2013, p. 4). The country has multi-ethnic groups, principally Pashtun (42%), Tajik (27%), Hazara (9%), and Uzbek (9%), with smaller numbers of Aimak, Turkmen, Baloch and other minority groups. The largest religious group of Afghan people is Sunni Muslims (80%), with only 19% being Shi’a (including the minority of Hazaras). Hence, the history of Afghanistan is complex with a mix of races melding into one race, with various religious activities. Invasions leading to migration have spread cultural and spiritual ideas.

Historically, Afghanistan was a safe place during the ‘Great Game’ of geopolitics in the 1800s between Britain and Russia. Afghanistan gained its independence from British control in 1919. A number of coups since 1973 had resulted in political instability, followed by the Soviet invasion in 1979. This resulted in ongoing conflicts between Soviet forces and the anti-communist *mujahidin* who were supported by international forces, mainly the U.S.A., throughout the 1980s. The end result was the Soviet withdrawal in 1989. Since then, there have been a number of civil wars within the country. In 1996, Kabul was taken over by the Taliban force – a radical Islamist group backed by Pakistan, which aimed to end the civil war and the anarchist condition of that time. The hard line Taliban imposed a very strict Islamic law against what it called liberal activities such as personal freedom, women’s rights and education. Women were marginalized and they could not go to work, attend school or leave their homes without an accompanying male escort (*mahram*). The minority Shi’a groups, like the Hazaras with their distinctive Asian features, were targeted for persecution and violence during the late 1990s. In 2004, the election of President Hamid Karzai and the National Assembly elections in 2005 symbolize the keystone of redevelopment in Afghanistan.



Figure 1. Afghanistan and Surrounding Countries taken from Google Maps (2014).

The country is recovering from decades of conflict and the economy has shown an improvement since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2011. However, social indicators in Afghanistan are poor, the country is landlocked and highly dependent on international aid, and literacy is low (estimated in 2000 as 28% overall). Services are poor as the Afghan people continue to suffer from a shortage of housing, clean water, electricity, medical care and jobs. Afghan living standards are the lowest in the world, with 78.6% of the labour force working in agriculture to meet their daily needs (Central Intelligence Agency, 2014).

In Afghan society, family is the single most important institution. Culturally, honour is awarded to those who show self-reliance and positive pride by fulfilling their family obligations: respect to the elderly, respect for women, loyalty to colleagues and friends, and tolerance towards others (Dupree, 2002, p. 978). Women are the centre of these values. Afghan women are obliged to pass good traits, which are morally judged by the society, to the younger generation, such as respect for the elderly and affection toward the younger children.

### *3.1.2. Conflict: Afghans are Forced to Flee*

The conflict in Afghanistan, which resulted in a massive exodus of almost a quarter of the Afghan population, started in 1979 when the Soviets invaded the country. The lack of security remained an issue in Afghanistan (Lipson, 1991, p. 352) and migration has become a part of the Afghan social and cultural background (Monsutti, 2008, p. 2). Generally speaking, Afghanistan has been the largest refugee population in the 1980s and 1990s; therefore, migration is becoming a part of the Afghan social and cultural background (Monsutti, 2008, p. 2). Connor (1987, as cited in Monsutti (2008, p.5) analysed responses of Afghan families' decisions to leave Afghanistan, and identified reasons. Two of the top responses are: hostilities; avoidance of conscription (23.48%); recent imprisonment (8.82%) (Monsutti, 2008, p.5).

However, Afghan reasons' to flee in the present day are more in anticipation of a worsening situation at home. Their aims are to find a better and more secure life, with educational, healthcare and working opportunities outside Afghanistan.

### *3.1.3. The Context of the Afghan Interpreters Coming to New Zealand*

The case study presented in this research report will focus on a group of Afghan women in Palmerston North who came to New Zealand as refugees in 2013. This opportunity to be resettled in New Zealand arose because their husbands had worked as interpreters for the New Zealand Provincial Reconstruction Team (NZPRT) or the New Zealand Police through the European Union Police Mission in Bamiyan, Afghanistan. These interpreters had worked for at least two years and were considered by the New Zealand Police as having a vital role assisting New Zealand's police team, which aimed to strengthen the Afghani police troops in areas such as training, management, and leadership. The New Zealand government awarded the interpreters with operational medals (Onenews, 2013). However, once New Zealand's troops left, their lives became threatened (Onenews, 2013). Subsequently, these refugees were invited by the New Zealand government and escorted by a military plane which landed in Whenuapai airbase (Tan, 2013).

Unlike other refugees, this group of Afghan interpreters' families held an elite status in the Afghan community and experienced a relatively safe pathway entering New Zealand. They never experienced living in refugee camps, and their role as interpreters meant that at least one member of each family could speak proficient English on arrival.

There were 30 interpreters with sixty four family members who landed in New Zealand on 22 April 2013. Half of these interpreters and family members were resettled in Palmerston North, and the other half were resettled in Hamilton (Onenews, 2013). Those who were resettled in Palmerston North can be considered as the first official Afghan refugee group settling in the city. Currently, these 15 Afghan families in Palmerston North have lived as a small community with the support of the Palmerston North City Council. Palmerston North's community support and Refugee Services assist them with the resettlement supports they need. English language providers are also helping on-English speaking members of the families to acquire English language skills to assist their everyday activities.

### **3.2. Refugee Services in New Zealand**

Through Refugee Services, New Zealand's government plays an important role in the first 12 months after refugees arrive in New Zealand. Refugee Services provides a package of services for quota refugees including: access to housing and social services, and other supports such as English language tuition through ELP, educational and working opportunities (Beehive New Zealand, 2009, Para 13). Refugee Services provide a program of volunteer support workers, and is regarded as a model of international best practice for a volunteer program. In collaboration with the New Zealand Settlement Strategy and the National Settlement Action Plan, settlement support initiatives take place to assist the local city councils and social agencies with the refugees' resettlement process. The objective is to find local solutions to local problems for those who are already being resettled within cities in New Zealand (Beehive New Zealand, 2009, para. 17).

The first thing to occur upon arrival at the Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre is to receive a full assessment and orientation. Part of this assessment and orientation is preparation for the refugee's integration in the community (Table 4: Resettlement Service Required by Refugees). However, once resettled, access to service providers is often constrained due to lack of transportation or knowledge. These situations are also worsened by a lack of funding to provide trained interpreters for the mediation of service.

For the success of the refugees' resettlement process, a number of important resettlement services is required. These services bring benefits, both for the refugees and the communities in which they are settled, such as creating a significant contribution to the economy and the future social well-being of refugees and migrants (Refugee services, 2009, p. 9). These resettlement services are shown in Table 4.

Table 4:

*Resettlement Services Required by Refugees*

<u>Resettlement Service</u>	<u>Activities</u>
Arrival	Reception, orientation, interpreting, translation, health referrals, registration with services and documentation preparation;
Language Training	Formal English classes, work-readiness classes, non-formal and community-based English language training
Employment	Career counselling and support, C.V. preparation, skills training, workplace orientation, job referrals, work placement and support;
Social Support	Individual and family counselling, family and child services, crisis intervention, housing and budget advice;
Health	Health promotion, health education, interpreting services, peer support groups, mental health counselling and support services;
Legal	Immigration, housing, family law, income maintenance, employment standards, workers' compensation;
Community Participation	Inter-agency referrals, community outreach programs, needs' assessments, community support, advocacy on access issues, language and cultural maintenance, and community development.

Source: Adapted from New Zealand's Red Cross Refugee Service (2013)

Afghan refugees spent their first eight weeks' in the Mangere Refugee Centre, where they familiarised themselves with everyday life in New Zealand, focusing on skills and important information needed for living in New Zealand. Despite these Afghan refugees' passage into the country being different from other refugees (who usually spend years in refugees' camps before being resettled in another country) they received the same services as other refugees in the New Zealand Refugee Scheme (Onenews, 2013). As is generally the case, they were then resettled in a city where a Refugees Services facility was present to support access to services provided for migrants and refugees (Refugee services, 2009, p. 18).

### *3.2.1. Refugee Services in Palmerston North*

New Zealand has sought to identify needs and gaps, and maximize services which improve the refugees' lives (Refugee services, 2009, p. 4). To assist diverse ethnicities, and to help them experience a smooth resettlement in New Zealand, the *Settling In* program was initiated in 2004 (Department of Labour New Zealand, 2003). In the settling-in process, refugees need assistance to be able to contribute within the society. Refugees need to easily access any support they need to reach their full potential as society members, to secure a place to live, and to understand how to access social services, health, education, and English language tuition (Department of Labour New Zealand, 2003, p. 12).

Palmerston North is one of the cities that have a Refugees Services centre in place. Located in the wider Manawatu region, Palmerston North is a city with a continually changing mix of cultures. Refugee support services are organised in cooperation between Palmerston North City Council (PNCC) and organisations, mainly Refugee Services, Migrant Employment Assistance Program, the Manawatu Multicultural Council, and English Language partners (ELP) (Palmerston North City Council, 2011). These services assist the refugees' integration process and provide opportunities for social interaction and jobs.

Some of the activities offered are cooking classes, social English classes, and outings. However, adequate social services are still lacking for migrants and refugees, such as facilities for second language speakers and interpreters, mental health support, working opportunities, housing options, community building, places for prayer and spiritual leadership to meet spiritual needs, and refugees services for elderly people (Palmerston North City Council, 2011; Refugee services, 2009). Nevertheless, PNCC has tried to improve their services by creating a volunteer centre to assist with the first 6-12 months of settling in. There is also a Newcomers' Network to welcome new immigrants and refugees upon their arrival to the city, and a New Settlers' Guide with information about the city to help them adjust (Palmerston North City Council, 2011; Refugee services, 2009)

Some of the key issues in relation to refugee needs include language barriers and communication difficulties. Acknowledge that the husbands in the Afghan families had been working as interpreters. Husbands had some English language skills, even if their wives and children did not. As a result, this educational and language barrier is the main constraint for the resettlement of refugees, let alone for the Afghan women. Due to the challenges they must face in accessing services without ESOL competency, a major obstacle has arisen as they attempt to access any of the services provided (Refugee services, 2009, p. 18). Fortunately, there are a number of English Language providers operating in Palmerston North, such as English Language Partners (ELP), who offer a home tutor service and low-level ESOL-Literacy class; English Training College (ETC); Queen Elizabeth College; school based ESOL providers, and several community English classes which offer English language (Refugee services, 2009, p. 21), some of which the group of Afghan women have attended since their arrival in 2013.

### **3.3. The Refugees' ESOL-Bilingual Class in Palmerston North.**

Living in an English speaking country such as New Zealand means that refugees arriving in the country need to equip them with knowledge about the cultural life in New Zealand and at the same time are required to use and understand English in their everyday life. This language ability helps refugees to access information easily, while building the self-confidence necessary to communicate with the local community such as making friends outside their ethnic community (Refugee Services, 2013, p. 17). Language constraints cause some refugees, especially women, to rely on family members or friends to undertake the social interaction, and this inhibits their integration within the community (Palmerston North City Council, 2011).

This research report focuses on how English Language Partners (ELP), New Zealand's non-profit English teaching organization, addresses integration needs. ELP is located in 23 sites and offers Basic English language proficiency for the success of adult refugees' resettlement process (English Language Partners, 2012, p. 7). ELP provides one-to-one home tutoring and a series of basic English literacy classes for pre-literate learners, whom most providers cannot accommodate. ELP provides an opportunity to learn English from New Zealand teachers to familiarise the learner with the New Zealand manner of speech, and bilingual assistants to assist with the first language translations during the ESOL-literacy classes (Council, 2001; ELP, 2012, p. 7).

### *3.3.1. The ESOL-Literacy Class as Experienced by the Afghan Women.*

The context of the refugee literacy case study presented in this thesis is ELP's Bilingual ESOL-Literacy class and focuses primarily on Afghan women learners. This class is mainly attended by adult refugees of many ethnicities, such as Nepali, Burmese, Afghan, and Bhutanese. The program offers pre-literate learners who experience difficulties in reading and writing in their own language 8-10 hours of class a week, at 3 hours per session (English Language Partners, 2014). Trained teachers involved in the classroom are assisted in tailoring the class sessions by a bilingual assistant.

Most of these refugees had no ability to read and write even in their own language, did not have any experiences of a classroom situation or local culture, and may only have heard English for the first time in their life after arriving in New Zealand, although the Afghan women had English speaking husbands (Benseman & Sutton, 2012; Robertson & Breiseth, 2008). Thus, ELP's ESOL-Literacy class, with its aim of teaching the low-level skills learners, assist these students in acquiring English skills as well as other learning skills, such as how to hold a pencil, how to write the Latin alphabet, and many more, from the beginning. They may need a much longer time to acquire English than other groups with educational experience.



Figure 2. ELP's ESOL-Literacy Class: The Afghan Women Learners and Their Classmates and Teachers

Source: Courtesy of English Language Partners (2014)

Afghan women learners were firstly exposed to English language learning by ELP's one-on-one home tutoring system. The one-on-one home tutorial consists of a two hour session each week, with a trained volunteer, in a safe and trusted place, such as their home, and helps Afghan women and other refugees with limited mobility which prevents them from going to ESOL classes during the first few months since they were resettled in Palmerston North (English Language Partners, 2012,p.7).

### **3.4. Chapter Conclusion**

Being forced to flee the home country entails traumatic experiences for refugees. For the Afghan women and their families, fleeing Afghanistan was for their families' safety, which was under threat after the New Zealand Police had been withdrawn from Bamiyan, Afghanistan. Subsequently, these Afghan interpreters' families were given an option to come to New Zealand under the New Zealand's Refugees' scheme.

Once the resettlement process has been completed, New Zealand became the second home for these Afghan refugees. This research report focuses on a case study of a group of wives of Afghan interpreters in Palmerston North, their experiences acquiring English and their integration process with the New Zealand community. In contrast to their well-educated husbands, the women were pre-literate even in their own language. Thus, their English learning support was given by English Language Partners (ELP) as one of the English providers for low-level English skills for refugees and migrants in New Zealand.

Due to the need for these women to acquire English language to support their integration within the community, as well as to boost their confidence in doing everyday activities, ELP assisted them with an ESOL-Literacy class. This class was for adult refugees and provided Basic English lessons. The next chapter will discuss the research findings and discuss how this group of Afghan women learners experienced learning English at the ESOL-classes, what they regard as being self-sufficient and how the class contributed to that.

## **Chapter 4: Methodology of the Research**

This chapter discusses the methodology used in this research, how the data set was collected, and the processes involved in preparing and conducting the fieldwork. This research explored an in-depth issue associated with the Afghan women refugees in New Zealand, in terms of their learning experiences in a bilingual ESOL-Literacy class. In addition, doing research with these women refugees required a very careful strategy to avoid causing any harm to either the Afghan women or the researcher. This chapter, therefore, specifies the decisions made as to what data sets were collected and from where, as well as discussing the ethical considerations around working with the Afghan women who had come to New Zealand as refugees.

### **4.1. Methodology**

To obtain an in-depth knowledge and to create an inquiry for this case study, a qualitative approach was needed to answer descriptive and analytical questions (Greener, 2011, p. 94; O'Leary, 2004, p. 104). Thus, this research is focused on a case study of the Afghan women refugees' real life and social experiences in Palmerston North, New Zealand. By observing the constraints that shape the enquiry this case study used multi-method data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 8; Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 223; Stewart-Withers, Banks, McGregor, & Meo-Sewabu, 2014, p.59). Although research concerning refugees' background experiences may raise a range of sensitive issues, such as the issue of power, trust, gender, risks and benefits, or social justice (Mackenzie, McDowell, & Pittaway, 2007, p. 300), this research project predominantly focused on exploring how a group of Afghan women experienced learning English, how they found going to ESOL classes, and what Afghan women regarded as being empowered.

Mackenzie, McDowell and Pittaway (2007) argue that bringing a sense of trust and respect to the participants' different background and perspective would construct a notion of reciprocity (Mackenzie, et al, 2007, p. 301). Hence, a variety of methods which were culturally appropriate for these women were necessary, and were thought through so as to be well prepared before the fieldwork began. A variety of data was obtained from this multi-method data collection, which along with a combination of participatory techniques also included the main aim of inviting these Afghan women learners to share their stories about their English learning experiences.

## **4.2. Data Collection Methods**

This study used four data collection techniques: focus group discussions with the Afghan women learners; interviews with the ELP's ESOL-Literacy teachers and one of the husbands of the Afghan women; observations of ELP's ESOL-Literacy classroom; and curriculum analysis.

### *4.2.1. Focus Group Discussions*

The emphasis of this method is on the shared meaning discussed within a group, including how each participant interacts in a naturalistic situation, the group dynamics, how they discuss issues together and bring up their own ideas and thoughts that may not be visible in a one-on-one interview (Stewart-Withers, et al, 2014, p. 63; O'Leary, 2004, p. 165). In this Afghan women learners' context, a focus group was the most effective way to explore these women's experiences, thoughts, desires and concerns over their experiences. This research was assisted by a female Farsi translator who translated the information letter from English into Farsi (which is similar to the Afghani's language) and one of the Afghan women's husbands who assisted the interpreting process for focus group discussions. Translations and interpreting assistants helped participants to understand the research aim and sign the research consent agreeing to participation. This is to ensure that there were no misunderstandings during the discussion process and also helped these women learners to elaborate their ideas in their native language.

Therefore, the women could respond to questions in their own way, in their own cultural context, and in their own language, in a convenient time and in a familiar place. In addition, I also offered a one on one interview for those who preferred to talk in private, hoping that these reticent individuals felt more comfortable speaking by themselves (Michell, 1999, p. 36).

#### *4.2.2. Interviews*

Interviewing involved semi-structured open-ended questions with the class teachers, with the aim of obtaining in-depth information and flexibility in structure about the Afghan women learners' learning process in the ESOL-Literacy class. Questions also asked how these tutors organized their bilingual class. The interviews were conducted in an informal setting with the attempt to establish a warm relationship, gain trust, and as a result avoided a rigid situation during the interviews (O'Leary, 2004, p. 164).

#### *4.2.3. Observations*

During this case study, I spent time with the women in their ESOL-literacy class observing the spontaneous interactions and discovering unexpected information in the classroom, in the course of the learning process. Observations allow a researcher to understand interactions or behaviour of participants in their actual learning environment (Greener, 2011, p. 76). Thus, class visits and observations formed a critical part of the method, to triangulate qualitative information gained at interviews. Approval to conduct this observation was requested from the women through their informed consent. A participant observation guide was used in structuring the observation as suggested by O'Leary (2004, p. 173).

#### *4.2.4. Curriculum Analysis*

This research project also analysed the existing curriculum in order to complement the data collected in the field. An analysis was undertaken of the curriculum used by ELP bilingual ESOL- literacy class where the Afghan women learners attend. This document is an ESOL-Literacy Curriculum for adult ESOL learners with limited literacy by English Language Partners New Zealand (2009).

### **4.3. Fieldwork Preparation**

Collecting data in the community requires some preparation. As Tolich and Davidson (1999, p. 3) suggest, not only is fieldwork preparation necessary, but the process in conducting the data collection stage also need to be well considered.

#### *4.3.1. Initial contacts*

For successful fieldwork, a researcher needs to build trust and a sense of belonging within the community or the participants. Scheyvens and Nowak (2003, p. 102) propose traits such as sympathy, empathy, patience and courtesy will support the researcher to build that bond. Thus, a prerequisite for this study was to establish contacts, to facilitate access to the key informants of this research. This research project was facilitated by one New Zealand teacher working for ELP. Later on, the teacher gave me her contact to the institution where she works. I then sent a request letter to ELP's manager asking permission to conduct research in one of the ESOL-classes.

#### *4.3.2. Ethical Considerations*

In conducting a study based on human research, ethical principles needed to be adhered to. These principles guided the research process in ways that ensured no harm was caused to any participants: by ensuring that the women participated in the research on a voluntary basis, by creating a safe environment, and by assuring the anonymity of the women and the confidentiality of the data (Tolich & Davidson, 1999, p. 70; Massey University Ethics Committee, 2010). Thus, as a researcher, I was obliged to make every effort to guarantee these principles during their research process (Massey University Ethics Committee, 2010, p. 7).

Importantly, I needed to gain an ethical clearance from the Development Studies Department, the program in which I enrolled for my Master degree. The approval from the department led to an ethical approval from Massey University Human Ethics Committee. Subsequently, Massey University released a Low Risk Notification for this study.

Before taking any part in this research, the Afghan women were informed about what would be involved in the research. These women were able to give their consent because they had been given a full explanation about the research and its goal by the researcher. They also had the chance to read the information letter and understand each of the points written there through further discussion with their husbands and/or other family members. Subsequently, the women agreed to take part in the research and signed their consent. Assuring anonymity and confidentiality to participants is at the heart of this research project for avoiding future harm to the participants (Scheyvens, et al, 2003, p. 146; Massey University Ethics Committee, 2010, p. 10). All data collected was saved on a secure personal computer with password. Therefore, an ethical code of conduct for the research was fulfilled and did not cause any harm to any parties.

#### **4.4. Fieldwork Process**

After initial contact had been made and the ethical approval as a low risk study had been granted, the data collection period started. Being aware that the planned research design might need to change, I was aware that being flexible and adjusting positionality was important during this fieldwork period.

##### *4.4.1. Being Flexible and Adjusting Positionality*

The research design for this project was to arrange a female who speaks Dari language to assist with the research permission forms, translation and interpreting during discussions with the Afghan women. However, due to no female Dari speaker being available, a female who speaks Farsi agreed to assist with this research. In this regards, Farsi and Dari are mutually comprehensible. The aim was for the women to understand more about the research in the language that they could understand and to have a chance to discuss these letters with their husbands, before signing a consent letter. Unfortunately, she was available only for a short time. Subsequently, as there was no female interpreter available to assist me, a male Dari interpreter; who was one of the participant's husbands and the leader of the community, agreed to assist the interpretation for these women as he used to work as an interpreter for the New Zealand Police in Afghanistan.

My positionality of being a Muslim woman and having worked as an English teacher meant I was adjusted very well among the participants. As a Muslim and married woman away from home to study overseas and originally from an Islamic country, I had many similarities with these women. We wear the same religious Muslim women's clothing and also share the same experiences in having difficulties acquiring English as a second language. Thus, I did not have any trouble mingling with them. On the other hand, my teaching background, as a teacher of English for speakers of other languages, gave me the same perspective as the two teachers in the class and with the ELP institution. Thus, we could share our teaching experiences and techniques to use on our classrooms.

#### *4.4.2. Organising and Analysing the Data*

Data collection took place in the period of 4<sup>th</sup> of August to the 10<sup>th</sup> of September 2014. Five Afghan women agreed to be the participants for this research; three agreed to be audio-recorded, whereas the other two wanted to talk without a tape recorder. Information and consent letters were also given to the two classroom teachers. The letters were written in English along with a cover letter to English Language Partners (ELP)'s manager seeking the institution's approval. Later, I received approval to conduct interviews with the two teachers from ELP, as well as conducting classroom observations. Both teachers gave their consent and agreed to be audio-recorded and to be observed during their class time.

A pre-structured question template for the group discussions and interviews was prepared beforehand. For the group discussions, the question guide was firstly discussed with my research interpreter to check the cultural appropriateness of the questions asked. All recordings were saved on a digital voice recorder and based on the consent letter, participants' identity removed from the final results. Therefore, the participants were depicted as a woman with number; husband/interpreter and teachers were likewise assigned numbers, to identify their narratives.

The coding used to organise the data were based on themes and sub-themes in order to divide the two stages of the participants' resettlement process: the stage of learning English, and the stage of being able to integrate into the host community. The data was then analysed by comparing the theoretical framework and background context outlined in Chapters 2 and 3 along with the narratives of the participants and the observations notes in the field triangulated with the document used in the learning process.

#### **4.5. Limitations**

The major limitation for collecting data was the issue of finding a female Dari language translator in Palmerston North. I contacted the Refugee services, but unfortunately, they were unable to provide a Dari translator. Thus, what had been planned as the research methods did not entirely work. Although a husband of one of these women offered to help with the translation, the different gender and his respected position as the leader of the Afghan community made the women a little reticent during discussions. Other limitations were the fact that some of the women had moved to another English language provider so were in a different situation than when all of them were in the same class.

Lastly, one limitation was the time and venue available to set up a group discussion with the Afghan women. It was difficult to find a perfect time when they could all come and talk at the same time, in a place that was convenient for them. Thus, the time frame for group discussion took longer than planned.

#### **4.6. Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter has described the methodology used in this research project. Alongside the methods chosen to collect data, narratives from the participants and observation notes have given sufficient data to answer the research questions. The fieldwork preparations and ethical considerations needed for conducting this research project along with the researcher's flexibility and positionality were explained. In addition, the strategy used in organizing and analysing data was presented in this chapter.

The chapter lastly discussed the limitations in obtaining the data for this research. Despite the limitations, the data collected are enough to illustrate changes these Afghan women have experienced during their resettlement process in Palmerston North, New Zealand.

## **Chapter 5: The Refugees' Resettlement Process: Learning English and the Social Impacts on Afghan Women Refugees**

This chapter is based on the experiences of a group of Afghan women acquiring English as second-language. Through these language learning experiences, much more is divulged about their integration into a New Zealand community. Resettled in one city in New Zealand, namely, Palmerston North, the Afghan women refugees and their families require the ability to adjust to and integrate with the new culture and language used within the society. Thus, these women's views on how they value the changes and how they have been overcoming these changes become a story by themselves, such as the way of life in the host country with a different cultural and social background, the language they have to use in the community, and the routines that they must now perform independently as housewives and as mothers.

Two important phases emerge from the narratives of the Afghan women's lives. These are explored in this chapter. The first phase covers the Afghan women's experiences in acquiring English language in New Zealand. Being pre-literate in their own language creates additional challenges for these adult women learners living in an English speaking country. The features of an ESOL-Literacy class which they are attending and how they perceived their learning process are explored in the first section. The second section explores further socio-economic factors that influence these women's learning process.

The second part explores the processes by which the Afghan women adjust to their new life in a new country and the changes that come during the resettlement. The first section explores the differences in the way of life between the previous home in Afghanistan and their new home in New Zealand. The second section explores how these changes are affecting the Afghan women's relationships with their spouses.

The chapter ends with concluding points on what was expected to be found in this study and what was different in the field.

## **5.1. The Afghan Women’s Learning Experiences: The ESOL-Literacy Class Context**

To achieve a good integration during the refugees’ resettlement process in New Zealand, in the first six months after the refugees come to New Zealand, they need to receive basic language training to enable them to acquire Basic English skills. This section has two parts; the ELP’s ESOL-literacy class and its features by means of the observations conducted in the ESOL-Literacy classroom during the data collection period; and secondly, the women’s learning experiences in the class.

### *5.1.1. Features of the English Language Partners (ELP) ESOL-Literacy Class: Observation Notes.*

In the ESOL- Literacy the focus is on the language needs of the refugee in the process of integration within the community, as well as to provide experiences in using the language. These are some explanations explaining the system of ELP’s ESOL-Literacy class from the teacher participants in this study:

*This program is a beginner-based class and it fitted their level in the beginning, when they started (Teacher 2)*

*We really are concerned with the learners’ experience and how we can improve [the experiences] for the learners (Teacher 1)*

The ESOL-Literacy class was located in one of the rooms in a public museum, Te Manawa Museum, Palmerston North. The room was set out in a classroom setting with long desks, chairs, a white board and other learning equipment. The room also functioned as the place to have a morning tea room when the learners spent 15 minutes of their class time resting and having a cup of tea. This room was not quite representative of a normal formal classroom, due to its location inside an attraction site, and there were times when museum visitors interrupted the class. This was quite distracting for some of the learners and made it more difficult to focus on the lesson. However, the teachers successfully created a relaxed learning situation while acknowledging the cultural background from the learners. They sat in a “U” shape; the men habitually sat together at one side, and the women sat on the other side.

Most of the learners were Muslim even though they come from different countries, so it was important to note that in the religion of Islam, there must be a separation between men and women when they were in one place. Nevertheless, the teachers have introduced some of the New Zealand cultural context through their thematic lessons so that these learners were aware that they may have a different situation once they interact with New Zealanders.

For some learners, their first integration process started here. The morning tea break allows all the learners to interact with each other in an informal way. I observed that some of them sat down in groups of their same ethnicity and talked in their first language (Language 1/L1), while some of the others mingled with other ethnicities and tried to speak in English. This observation was also made from one of the teachers:

*They [those of the same ethnicity] like to sit together during morning tea time, and during the class, which is fine, but they are ok, if they need to be separated from the group [when conducting learning sessions] (Teacher 1)*

This class allowed its women learners to take their babies with them while learning. These women learners definitely benefited this arrangement as caregivers who were not accustomed to leaving their children with strangers. This is also supported by the teacher's testimony as follows:

*We have flexibility in our program; they can come with their children. In other places, they are not allowed to bring their children in the class. The benefit is that they can learn while taking care of their children (Teacher 2)*

However, on the down side, I observed that there were times when these women were distracted from the lesson due to a crying baby. Another flexibility of the ESOL-Literacy class was that this class is a part-time class. The class was three times a week, from 8.50 a.m. to 12 p.m. Thus, this allowed the learners with school-aged children to have time to take their children to school and pick them up afterwards.

*It is only a three days of class or part time [class], so at other times they can do other activities, such as learning to drive, taking care of the children, dropping their children at school. The class has good timing too; we start at 9 o'clock and finish at 12pm. They have enough time to go and pick up their children (Teacher 2)*

Unlike other adult literacy classes in New Zealand, ELP's ESOL-Literacy class offers personal approach to students when learning as well as the flexibility in the classroom that enables the learners to feel less stressed in a non-threatening environment.

From the observations, this ESOL-Literacy class had refugees only; there were no migrants. For these people, as pre-literate learners, it required a huge cognitive task to achieve the goal of English literacy in their resettlement process (English Language Partners, 2009, p. 5). This class was taught by a female New Zealand teacher and a male Burmese bilingual assistant. The assistant corresponded to the Burmese refugee learners who make up the largest number (by ethnicity) in the classroom. By focusing on the learners' needs, the teachers worked together in tailoring the learning materials and learning skills for the refugees.

As qualified teachers, these two teachers have recognised the specific challenges for this group which is very unusual in New Zealand adult education, as it is one for whom the normal classes offered would not be suitable because they do not start at this basic level.

*They are low level learners; they haven't had the benefit of formal education or literacy in their own language (Teacher 1)*

*We'll teach them how to use the exercise book and how to hold a pencil, and how to start making a letter, because they have never held a pen before they come to our class. We'll teach them reading, writing and speaking (Teacher 2)*

During their time studying at the ESOL-Literacy class, these women followed several learning activities, mostly to deepen their Basic Skills in English, such as introducing themselves, identifying what the weather is like that day, recognizing the day and month, and practising their writing skills in copying the sentences on the whiteboard.

In conducting some of the learning activities, the Afghan women did not have any trouble doing most of the activities with other learners; through they preferred not to face a younger male.

*They are more comfortable if they have to work with an older Muslim male, but not with a younger male (Teacher 1)*

*They don't have any issue if I put them with other members of the class, and they can refuse if it does not suit them (Teacher 2)*

Class assessment of the learners' progress focused on the acculturation and the success of these refugees' resettlement process. Due to the nature of this adult refugee ESOL-Literacy class being to create a non-threatening environment, the assessment did not rely only on giving learning tests and grading them, rather observing the learners' participation in the classroom and how they have improved their interaction with other learners in the classroom. I observed there was a lot of peer teaching and small group work embedded in the lesson. Hence, the learners were able to interact and help each other in English. This class may be the only forum where the learners can develop their English experiences. This is described by one of the teachers, as follows:

*The incremental learning is an assessment of the learner's participation in class. [Although] It is not formal assessment; ELP considers this as a really important outcome because it is the link to acculturation and the successful resettlement process (Teacher 1)*

ELP New Zealand has worked closely with these women to assist them in acquiring English from the first time they were resettled. The low level of English lessons provided by ELP has taught these women not only learning experiences but also learning skills which these women have not acquired before.

#### *5.1.2. The Afghan Women's Class Experiences in Learning English*

This section explores the Afghan women's experiences in acquiring English in the classroom. The section explores these women experiences in the ELP's ESOL-Literacy class and the reason they moved to another provider, English Teaching College (ETC). As just explained above, most of these refugees are not familiar with the formal classroom learning, hence, they do not recognize the learning skills, such as how to hold a pen, to trace and copy the Roman alphabet, to write on the line in their exercise book, to start the writing on the left side, to be able to read one word, to be able to count, and other learning skills. Learning for these adult refugees can be very daunting.

The ESOL-Literacy class has been an enormous first step for these women. Consequently, these women see education as a way of gaining independence and life choices, as depicted in the following quote by one of them:

*At the beginning we started going to ELP, I didn't even know a word in English. So I started from learn ABC [the alphabet], and I learn explaining the weather. I learn the name of the days in a week and the name of the months, [and also] greeting and saying hello (Woman 1)*

The interpreter, who is one of the women's husbands, explained that even though women were completely inexperienced with the English language, they enjoyed the classes.

*When we arrived in Palmerston North, they [the Afghan women] couldn't understand even a word in English, but when they are started going to ELP, they are very keen to go to this English class (husband/interpreter)*

English language presented obstacles for these Afghan women; thus, the women's goal is being able to communicate and to become actively involved within the community. They also gain confidence to do daily activities without the help from their husbands. A simple quote illustrates this:

*I just aim to learn some English to solve daily problem with the language. Because my husband not home all the time so I need to handle every problem while he's gone (Woman 2)*

From observations, it can be seen that these women gain support mostly from their well-educated husbands, who help their wives to learn and practice English and other supporting skills at home. One example is that the Afghan women have chosen not to join the computer class, which is different from other refugee learners who divide their class time into learning English and learning computer skills. The women's justification is that they can learn computer skills at home with their husbands or their older children. In addition, the husbands were feeling positive about their wives being able to speak fluent English and to take on the household responsibility when the men start working outside the house.

*We are the men, as their husbands need to find a job. When we start working, our wives will be supporting our children and look after everything inside the house, for that purpose they have to understand English (Husband/interpreter)*

The second important support comes from the Afghan community, where they formed a community class for Afghan women to learn literacy and numeracy in their own language.

The class is held every Friday morning, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m., conducted by one of the elderly in the Afghan community, as well as a husband and an interpreter for this research. Besides teaching how to read and write in Dari, the man reviewed the women's English lessons and discussed their difficulties in learning English.

Clear learning goals and the support from family and the Afghan community, made these women's learning process faster than other refugee learners in the class. Another factor is, as mentioned earlier, that these women never had the traumatic experiences that many other adult refugees had. The two teachers' testimonies show how these women learners' learning process is different from other refugee learners in the class.

*I noticed that they [the Afghan women learners] don't have any mental torture. They have never been in refugee camps, so they have no stress. Thus, they have a fresh mind to pick up [the lesson] very quickly. They are fast learners, compared to some other learners (Teacher 2)*

*I really enjoyed teaching the Afghan ladies; maybe it was because they are ideal adult students. They come to the classroom like most typical adult learners come to the classroom; motivated, because they have clearly defined goals that they want to achieve in class, and they think about their learning. Whereas the other background refugees' learners don't have that, so they [the Afghan women learners] learn a lot quicker (Teacher 1)*

These women also shared their experiences learning English at the ELP class. Since it is the nature of ELP classes to respond to basic needs of its students, these women acknowledge that the teachers were great, as well as their classmates, which created a positive feeling about the class for the women. Most of these women deeply appreciated the performance of the teachers in the class, as they claimed that the teachers have given them good guidance and support, as testified as follows:

*They [the teachers] were very helpful (Woman 3)*

*ELP is good. The teacher is good, and they are trying to help us. They were not even sitting even a moment, always they were walking and observing and trying to help every single person. (Woman 1)*

*The way of the methods of their teaching is good as well (Woman 4)*

The women seemed to enjoy working in a multi-ethnic classroom, and said they had no issues mingling with other learners. Also, the women stated that their classmates also play an important role in their learning process. They received help from other learners as they try to understand the lesson. “*They [the classmates] were helping me to study*” (Woman 3)

Furthermore, the sign of success in learning can be identified as one woman being able to play an active role in teaching other students in class who have difficulties in understanding the material. This can be shown by this quote:

*While I was in ELP, I was helping others, because mostly are old people and could not catch the lesson quickly. (Woman 1)*

Over time, these women achieved their learning goals. Hence, they are motivated to go to the ESOL-Literacy class. This language improvement has brought satisfaction for not only themselves but their husbands as well, in that their wives are now able to use their Basic English in their everyday life. Furthermore, the women acknowledged the importance of the classes in contributing to their growing knowledge and language improvement: “*Whatever I have now any English knowledge is from ELP*” (Woman 1), ELPs’ ESOL-Literacy classes was a very important stepping stone in acquiring Basic English.

At the time of collecting research data for this project, from five Afghan women who had originally participated in the class, four had decided to move to another English provider, English Teaching College (ETC). Of these four women, one had been recommended by both teachers to move to a higher level, whereas, the other three moved from ELP based on their own decision. Only one stayed to study at ELP. The Afghan women’s decision to take the step to move to ETC can be seen as a sign of a learning achievement, because these women decided to move to a more formal education institution which requires higher level of English.

When the decision to move to the ETC was made, one of the reasons for the move was due to the limitation at ELP for further study. The reasons which hinder their learning process, as the women revealed, were that ELP does not have a formal classroom to study, as they study in a public museum:

*ELP was good, but there was something that they don't have, it is a particular place. In general, ETC has a better place (Woman 4)*

These women also develop their ability to adapt to formal learning and set their learning goals grew apart from others who were less able to. Hence, one woman claimed that some of her classmates sometimes were too noisy;

*The only issues is sometimes classmates are too noisy and not focused in learning (Woman 5)*

Having a taste of the value of formal learning in a classroom, the brief periods were not enough for the gains they could see that they could make. Thus, these inhibiting learning factors encourage these women to move to ETC.

*If they [ELP class] can make it four or five days a week it will be better, because if we spend only three days, we forget the lesson easily (Woman 1)*

*In ELP [we study] only three days a week, at ETC four days a week (Woman 4)*

However, their decision was not discussed well with the ELPs' teachers, as they have not yet discussed about their plan on moving to ETC and only one woman, from the two teachers' perspective, actually has increased her English skills sufficiently.

*[Actually] It is up to their interest. [However] We were not informed when they are moving to ETC (Teacher 2)*

Both ELP and ETC are funded by the Tertiary Education Committee (TEC) to provide fees-free access to English for speakers of other languages (Tertiary Education Commission, 2014, paragraph 1-2). Consequently, the Afghan women are free to decide where they want to acquire English.

*Because both places [ELP and ETC] are funded by TEC. [However] it is not good if they decide to leave and change classes [without notification], but it will be fine if they go to ETC (Teacher 1).*

ETC is an English language provider for refugees and migrants. Through its Foundation Courses, ETC provides English for Migrants, English for Refugees and English for Employment classes. All are aimed at assisting refugees and migrants to find a job (English Teaching College, 2014, paragraph 1). These Foundation Courses run full-time, 4 days a week from Monday to Thursday.

Unlike ELP, ETC's Foundation Courses follow a formal education policy, in which the learning process was conducted in a formal classroom, equipped with tables, chairs, whiteboard and dictionaries, and uses formal textbooks and hand-outs for its material. ETC also provides kitchen facilities for students to prepare their meals and hot drinks while on break (English Teaching College, 2014, p. 2).

ETC requires students to have a high elementary level or above to be able to achieve the goal, which is to attain a job in New Zealand. Therefore, moving to ETC creates a new challenge for these four women learners. They need to adjust to the new setting of the class and the learning system at ETC. Most of the women found it difficult to cope at the beginning. Fortunately, their husbands are able to help and support their learning at home. This can be illustrated from the following quotes:

*It is definitely hard for me. I could not complete any job or papers at [ETC] class (Woman 3)*

*Although Learning [at ETC] is hard. But I try to do my best. Any paper that they give us which I need to complete, I will try to complete. If I couldn't, I will bring it home and ask my husband or family members to help me at night (Women 1)*

In contrast with these four women, the one woman who decided to stay at ELP presumed that she needed to stay longer due to the easier level of English and more cooperative teachers. A simple quote shows her reasons:

*Reason staying at ELP is that ELP's lesson is easier, [Basic lesson] compared to ETC. ELP teachers also more focus in giving more attention in teaching [the learners] (Woman 5)*

While learning English was difficult in the first place, over time, these Afghan women have shown success due to their determination to learn and practice their English. They received full support as well as supportive teachers at ELP who have given them an important starting point in learning the language. However, in addition to the inhibiting factors these women revealed about the classroom, there are socio-economic factors that also encouraged them to make the decision to move to ETC.

## **5.2. Socio-economic Factors Influencing the Afghan Women Learners' Learning Process**

This section explores the factors that influence the women's learning process. The first part explores maintaining the Afghan socio-cultural values; and the second part explores economic benefits from moving to ETC.

### *5.2.1. Maintaining Afghan Socio-cultural Values*

Ideally, when learning a new language in a new country, practising the language regularly will enhance the language skills, especially the speaking and listening skills. Nevertheless, the need to maintain the use of the mother tongue in the family can be a hindering factor to being fluent in English. To keep the first language spoken within the family strongly relates to the bonding of the Afghan home-culture and includes the desire to form their children's identity as part of Afghan community.

*In our community we don't speak English, we understand if we start speaking English from now, our children will get habit of speaking English. But we want them to keep our culture and our language, for that reason we don't speak in English in our community rather we speak in our own language (husband/interpreter)*

Furthermore, the roles of women within the Afghan families are to maintain the household, so these Afghan women have a greater obligation to their family rather than to reviewing the lesson from the ESOL class. Thus, ESOL classes are one way for these women to be able to learn and practice their English skills alongside very few other limited opportunities, namely shopping or greeting their neighbours.

*My wife, she doesn't have enough time for studying or doing her homework at home because she always busy all the time with our children, with cooking, with washing and all of those [household] stuffs (husband/interpreter)*

These women are positively about encouraging their children to always speak in the Dari language at home to maintain the Afghan socio-cultural values. Despite this, the lack of opportunity to practice English does not make them lose their enthusiasm to learn more English.

#### *5.2.2. Moving to ETC as Economically Beneficial: Gaining New Zealand's Refugees Entitlement*

From the first time the Afghan families resettled in New Zealand, they were all depending on the economic support from the New Zealand government. Through the Work and Income Department, these families are entitled to a weekly allowance for their daily life. It is quite different from life in Afghanistan, where the husbands had a respected job as an interpreter and earned money from the job. Thus, they were financially independent to support their family.

When the husbands saw the improvement in their wives' English skills, and the women decided to move to a higher education level, other benefits followed this decision.

Being both a mother and a student, these Afghan women need to efficiently manage their time between study and household work. Most of them have little children who demand much of their time and energy. When they were studying at the ELP class, the class's flexibility allowed these women to attend morning classes, and considered their needs to take their older children to school and pick them up afterwards, and take their babies with them to the class. However, over time, these women did not find it convenient to always take their child with them while they were learning. The ELP teachers noticed that these women needed child care to enable them to focus more on their learning process,

*We [the teachers] found babysitting is an issue because we can't offer a longer program. Whereas they will get a child care subsidy if they are a full-time student. That is what we lose out from ETC. We can't offer longer hours because we don't have the funding (Teacher 2)*

*I think, if they have someone to look after their child, it will be good. Because while they are learning, they will have a full concentration on the lesson rather than their son (Teacher 2)*

ELP is a good stepping stone towards more demanding study. Thus, the teachers at ELP can fully understand the reason the women are moving class to ETC. As one of the teachers explained:

*If we talk about ETC, they have quite a little hard level, and ELP is a very low level. Those who never went to school maybe it is a good chance for them to start from the low level so they can move forward (Teacher 2)*

So to move to another English language provider offering full-time studies will bring greater benefits to the women. Besides being entitled to a child care subsidy, they also receive the 'Go card' facilities which enable them to travel anywhere within the city with no bus fare. This can lessen their daily expenses. Therefore, they will save more money for their daily needs. A simple quote from the husband reveals this:

*I have told ELP when they invited me to improve their service. I told them that it is an issue for us to spend money on bus fare [to go to ESOL class three times a week]. Maybe there is some way that they can talk to the City Council about giving us a free bus card to use (husband/interpreter)*

While these Afghan women made an effort to be able to learn more English, as they have already learned the Basic Skills of English, other factors influence these women's decisions to move class to ETC, as they receive more economical benefits.

### **5.3. The Afghan Women Learners: Free Movement and Gender Relationships**

These refugees' stories differ significantly from others who did not leave their home country by force, as they have experienced different lives, in which sorrow, fear, helplessness, defeat, hope, and passion collide (Gutierrez in UNHCR, 2005). Although they come from a country from which an extremely high number of people fled as refugees due to various conflicts, unstable infrastructure and lack of security, these Afghan women and their families may not have experienced the saddest side of this situation. Nevertheless, coming to New Zealand, where they have to adjust to a different socio-cultural background creates a challenge for these women. While there are some barriers to the process of integration, the safe environment and a good neighbourhood provide opportunities for these women to be able to do some activities independently.

### *5.3.1. Cultural Factors: The Afghan Women's Reflection on the Past and Future Life*

In Afghan society, it is the women's role to ensure good behaviours and respect for the elderly, and the men's pride to be able to fulfil the needs of their family. Family is the most important institution in the Afghan society (Dupree, 2002, p. 978). Although women play an important role within the family, this research found that most of the Afghan women were reluctant to share their experiences of their family life back home, in Afghanistan. They were more comfortable sharing their experiences of the present time. Nonetheless, this research was assisted by the husband of one of these women. Hence, his participation allowed for more information concerning that life back in Afghanistan, the story that the women were reluctant to tell.

There are three factors, based on the explanations from the husband/interpreter's point of view, which make life in New Zealand different from Afghanistan: economic conditions, educational background, and cultural and religious performances. The first factor is that there are differences in economic conditions. As previously mentioned, it is the men's responsibility to earn money for the family and do the work outside the house. Living a new life in New Zealand means they are starting off as unemployed and only receive benefits from the New Zealand government. Hence, this creates a challenge for the men as family breadwinners. The following quote from this husband reveals his own insight into his economic life before coming to New Zealand:

*I was working in Afghanistan. I can say my life is a little bit better than here*  
(Husband/interpreter)

The husbands' challenge is to apply for a job that will help them earn money rather than relying on the support of the government. Thus, this affects relationships within the household between the husband and wife now that these families live in New Zealand. This will be explained in detail in the next section.

The second factor is that the Afghan women are pre-literate, and cannot read and write their own language. They were prohibited from accessing education, as the cultural role common to the women is to stay home and take care of the family rather than gain education. The acknowledgement of these Afghan women's educational background comes from one husband's perspective:

*They [our wives] are totally illiterate, and they have never been to school. They had no motivation on learning anything. They are housewives, looking after the children, and doing all the internal housework. They have never been out of house to work or learn (Husband/interpreter)*

The women's educational background and their cultural role within the family potentially hamper their ability to acquire English as a second-language. Thus, husbands are obliged to take some of the household responsibility alongside their wives. However, as time goes on, these women found themselves more motivated to attend the ESOL classes, as they need to be able to do daily routines using the dominant language in the new community.

The third factor, the opportunity to perform religious practice, is an important issue. Although during the Taliban regimes the Shi'a were the minority and targeted for persecution and violence (Central Intelligence Agency, 2014), Shi'a have a certain ethnic place in the Afghan community. However, unlike in Afghanistan, this group is still a minority in the Muslim community in Palmerston North, where most of the religious facilities are used by Sunni Muslim. No mosque or other religious facilities are provided for Shi'a. This is explained by the husband:

*In terms of our religion, we can't actually perform our religious activities here in New Zealand as we could do in Afghanistan, because there is no particular place to perform our religious activities. We are not a big community to finance our own religious activities (Husband/interpreter)*

Thus, they have difficulties being able to perform their religious activities; moreover, when they want to celebrate their religious festivities, it creates isolation within the wider Muslim society itself.

These three factors: economic conditions, educational background, and cultural and religious performances are among other factors that make the integration process seem potentially difficult at first. However, things changed as these Afghan families tried to adjust to the New Zealand life during their resettlement process. This was especially so for the women who were always in the shadow of their husbands doing activities back in Afghanistan, whereas now in New Zealand, they have learned to do some daily activities independently, such as being able to go to the ESOL class on their own, by bus or by driving a car. In Afghanistan, most of these women were not allowed to sit in the front seat, let alone to drive on their own. These women have testified during a group discussion to how women find their roles as independent women in New Zealand.

*I go to Roslyn School every day to drop my daughter, and take my youngest daughter to kindergarten. And then catch a bus to go to ESOL Class. Sometimes I take my children to the nearest park to play. (Woman 2)*

*[To go to ESOL class] I drive on my own with the company of my husband, and then my husband drives back home. And I will take the bus to go home from ESOL class (Woman 4)*

In New Zealand, these women found that they are happy with their new neighbourhood. The safe environment allows more opportunities for these women to be independent in conducting their role as a mother and a housewife, and also gives more opportunities for their children to gain good access to education.

*I am happy living here in New Zealand. The environment is safe and I have easy access to school for my children (Woman 5)*

*My area is in a good area. The school is close and the neighbourhood is clean. I like living here (Woman 2)*

Two of the women perceived positively the relationship with their neighbours and are settling well. Efforts are being made by these women in their neighbourhood to connect with others, and they testified that they are feeling good about it and feel more familiar with their surrounding:

*We have a neighbour that we have good relationship with. They are Kiwis. And I sometimes talk to the wife, and greet her (Woman 1)*

*I am getting familiar now. We know where to go and know some of our neighbours (Woman 4)*

However, one woman also stated that she is reluctant to have relationships with her neighbours:

*I don't have any relationship with the kiwis, only with the Afghan community (Woman 3)*

Interestingly, Woman 3 then stated that living here in New Zealand is convenient, which is contradictory to what the husband/interpreter had stated in his testimonies about how life was difficult at first in New Zealand. This woman claimed that “*Everywhere is the same for me*”. Therefore, it shows how members within this Afghan community have perceived these changes differently.

Adjusting to a new life in New Zealand is not the same for women as what life had been in Afghanistan. Despite their positivity, these women still sorely feel loneliness and being remote from other people in the host community, mostly because their extended family are absent. One woman claimed the difficulty of returning home to visit family as the “hardest part”, but their husband’s familiarity with technology allowed them to skype and to have contact by telephone.

*Now, we are getting better, we are more familiar and getting into the habit of being away from our relatives and family. So we are learning how to live here in New Zealand. We have to understand that we are not living in Afghanistan anymore and we have to adjust ourselves to the situation of living here. It is quite a challenge at first, but now life is getting smoother rather than it was in the beginning (Husband/interpreter).*

To start a new life in a new country, where everything is different, has been quite difficult for these Afghan women and their families. However, the Afghan families are well-adapted and have appeared to have the potential to integrate well within the community. Despite some obstacles in the first part of the resettlement process, they have managed to adjust to the new way of life in New Zealand.

### 5.3.2. Changes in Gender Relations during the Resettlement Process

Afghan people are illustrated as people with self-determination on keeping their responsibility, mostly for their family. Thus, men play an important role as breadwinners in every family. Although most of the important decisions are passed to the men to make, women also have an important role as the axis of the family (Dupree, 2002, p. 978), in which women are to take care of the children, to make sure that the values of culture and religion are passed to them, and to take care of the household work, such as cleaning, cooking and maintaining the needs of family members. Inevitably, being forced to flee out of Afghanistan, there have been some changes in the women's relationships with their husbands.

While the women were ready to reflect on their recent social life and learning experiences in New Zealand, none of them spoke about any personal life before New Zealand. So, observations during several focus group discussions and a husband/interpreter's information are used to illustrate how this relationship has changed.

Working for the New Zealand Police in Afghanistan, these Afghan families lived in an adequate financial situation. Most owned a bigger house and a nicer car in Afghanistan compared to New Zealand. Because the nature of Afghan men is autonomous in earning money for fulfilling their family needs, living in New Zealand and only receiving unemployment support from the government, the men have a lower status as a breadwinner, and they are no longer self-sufficient. This is illustrated by a quote from the husband/interpreter:

*Afghan people are very hard working people. We don't want to receive any free financial support from anyone. We need to work, we want to earn, and stand in our two feet. So for that reason, we [the husbands] are trying to find a job (Husband/interpreter)*

This shows that to have a job and earn money is a matter of pride, a husband's sign of financial independence, and a husband's role in the family. Hence, to keep what is in the Afghan culture is an unchanging cultural value, despite the changing place:

*Because it is in our culture that the women work at home and the husband work out of house, this is something that we cannot change*  
(Husband/interpreter)

However, regardless of the condition of the women who are pre-literate in their own language and have never had experience of learning or working outside their home, living a life in New Zealand requires these women to acquire English as one of the first tools to enable them to integrate well. This is a challenge for them, yet, the Afghan husbands endorse their wives to learn English and do some daily activities on their own, as they realize that all responsibilities within the household will be in their wives' hand when the husbands start working.

*I don't expect my wife to go to work or get a job, but I want her to take the responsibility of internal home* (Husband/interpreter)

These women perceive the challenge as a part of their obligation as a wife and a mother to be able to serve their husband and children.

During the period of data collection, observations revealed that these women are being fully supported by their husbands to be able to do some of the activities that they were not able to do in Afghanistan, such as driving a car, learning how to use a computer, going to their ESOL class or shopping on their own, and taking their children to school. However, these activities are not seen as an end in themselves, but as a way to ensure they can conduct all the necessary household activities that require English for communication. This demand motivates the women to always attend the ESOL class. This can be seen from the testimonies of some of the women and the husband/interpreter:

*Our aim is to learn English to living in New Zealand. When we go to the doctor, [go] to [our children's] school, or any other activities, we can solve the problem* (Woman 2)

*She [my wife] has to cover everything at home. That is why I expect her to learn English. [Such as] If someone knocks at the door, she can face them and talk to the person and ask what the reason they came. And then my children's school, which will be another responsibility, going to GP [General Practitioner] or hospital, or some [other] emergency condition, will be another responsibility for my wife* (Husband/interpreter)

Although there is a delegation of power from the husband to their wife to support them in achieving some of the daily activities independently, there is a sense of the husband's keeping their decision making role within the family.

#### **5.4. Concluding Points**

This refugee and literacy research started with the assumption that it would focus on the Afghan women learners and their changing life before and after they arrived in New Zealand. Most importantly, research would focus on their perspective on learning English as a second-language, which is a great challenge for these women as they are all pre-literate in their own language. Thus, the learning process is new to them. At the same time, they are obliged to adjust to living in New Zealand and to integrate within the host community.

However, as data collection started, surprising things happened which were not predicted by either the researcher or the tutors that teach the class. The findings show a wide range of influences on these Afghan women's learning, their husbands' influence on and expectation of the improvement of their wives English in the class, how the gender relations change within families, the value of a formal classroom to the learners, and socio-economic factors that these women's husbands considered would give them greater benefit both in economic terms and a higher level of English class for their wives.

## **Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion**

### **6.1. Thesis Summary**

Refugees arriving in New Zealand are faced with many challenges; one of the major ones being learning a new language. This research focuses on a group of Afghan women refugees who came to New Zealand with their families. The women's husbands had been working as the New Zealand Police's interpreters in Afghanistan; thus, these families were the elite group in their home community, enjoying the facilities offered as a part of their job. However, their life was no longer safe once the New Zealand Police troop was withdrawn back to New Zealand. Although the families' lives were considered to be under threat within Afghanistan, these families did not necessarily experience the trauma of the violence, insecurity and worsening political situation in Afghanistan. Their decision to flee was based on a desire to seek a safer environment for their family as well as giving their children a better future in New Zealand. Now, having been resettled in Palmerston North since 2013, these families have experienced some social and cultural integration. This research project examined their experiences of the women adjusting to life in New Zealand and learning English.

This chapter draws together information in earlier chapters and looks into the ways in which the Afghan women's learning experiences helped in their resettlement in New Zealand; it explored how these learning experiences may have contributed to independent life of choices in New Zealand. The women's first integration process with people outside the Afghan community was made through an ESOL-literacy classroom for refugees with low-level learning skills conducted by ELP.

The first part of this chapter discuss the key issue of how the Afghan women perceived the meaning of empowerment, and how the women perceived themselves after resettling in New Zealand. The second part discusses the Afghan women experiences in acquiring Basic English skills at ELP's bilingual ESOL-literacy class. The last part discusses the learning process after ELP class in which how these English classes contribute to the success of the resettlement process. The chapter will then close with the research report conclusions.

## **6.2. Key Issues in the Context of this Study**

This section will present three key issues in response to the research questions.

### *6.2.1. Key Issue 1: The Meaning of Empowerment for an Independent Life for Afghan Women*

In regard to women's traditional roles, the view of empowerment, an idea that emphasises women's emancipation and gender equity for women's individual productivity (Mosedale, 2005, p. 247), may not sit well with the Afghan women's cultural role. However, since Afghan women came to New Zealand, the gender relations were renegotiated with their husbands as a part of the resettlement process. Women were not directly asked about their notion of empowerment. However, results have shown that there were many subtle signs of empowerment, such as the women gaining the ability to use some of their English learning to help with their daily activities. This learning access is aligning to Mosedale's (2005) point that women may have more opportunities through active learning. This will be a reclaiming process of empowerment as women may have more opportunities to access resources and information. Indeed, being able to tell their stories in their own voice can be seen the first sign of empowerment.

Women's life back in Afghanistan was restricted to the life inside their houses, especially during the rule of the Taliban which imposed a very strict Islamic law, restricting the women's mobility and rights to gain education and work outside home. In Afghan culture, women's role in society was tied to family and home. As suggested by Beth, et al (2012, p. 2), the private roles for the Afghan women excludes them from social, economic and political activity, and their mobility is limited. Their important role, culturally, is to take responsibility in the domestic sphere. Women were not allowed to go to work, attend school or be outside the house without being accompanied by their male relatives. In addition, the Afghan community believes in a traditional patriarchy structure, based on religion, culture and family values (Huma, 2003, p. 8), where men hold the decision making power and play active roles in the public sphere as the breadwinners within families.

Placing refugees in a supportive environment during their resettlement as well as giving them access to resources, such as health care, language acquisition, and housing, enhanced their personal control, confidence, and self-respect. These findings align with aspects of empowerment explained in Chapter 2, in particular with Rees (1991) who states that the two objectives of empowerment are equal distribution of resources and enhancing personal control among people.

Coming to New Zealand, these women have experienced the ups and downs of living in a different culture and country. Their stories showed how much they have changed. The first change is what learning English means for these women in terms of mobility and independence; and the second is renegotiating gender roles in the home.

The first change for these women was having the opportunity to learn English in a bilingual ESOL-literacy class as a part of their resettlement program. To be able to participate in this class, they have to learn both language and learning skills which include learning English verbally and non-verbally. Initially, they learned how to write in a Roman alphabet which is very different to their first language, Dari; to learn the nature of a classroom, and to adjust to multi-ethnic classmates. As Papen (2005) suggests, being able to use the language for verbal and non-verbal communication is one sign of a successful practice of literacy (Papen, 2005, p.6).

Being asked what they wanted to achieve from learning in this class, these women expressed the hope that learning English would enable them to carry out daily tasks. Their learning indicates a desire for personal independence where they can do everyday activities on their own without relying on their husbands and older children. However, their aim to obtain more English to be better able to communicate well to solve their problems has been fully supported by their husbands. It fits with Bartlett's (2008, p.751) suggestion that literacy may not be considered as a single factor to create a certain impact, that it needs to be seen in a social and cultural context.

In terms of free movement, being able to be independently mobile in New Zealand means these women are now able to go outside their homes without being anxious for their own safety or their children's when taking them to playgrounds and dropping them off to school. Moreover, having the chance to learn how to drive a car was a big step for these women as they never even had the chance to sit in the front seat, let alone to drive the vehicle by themselves. Obtaining driving skills was an important part of their resettlement program, one which they often found fearful. Being able to drive gave women's mobility in New Zealand and may have changed women's role as mother as they now able to take their children to places independently. Women's learning how to drive in New Zealand aligns with Mosedale (2005) who states that women come to be able to identify and realise their strengths and potential by utilizing opportunities which can create positive changes (Mosedale, 2005, p. 250).

The second change since coming to New Zealand is renegotiating women's relations within their family. Although there was a shift in how men delegated some of their power to their wives to enact their daily routines independently, this research project found that the sense of men as breadwinners and decision makers in the families is respected by wives and children. Moreover, Dupree's suggestion fits with the women's condition in this regard as the women will always have a greater role within the household (Dupree, 2002, p. 978).

The increases in the women's independence did not reduce their responsibilities for their housework and childcare as was also observed by Boyd & Grieco (2003, p. 7), Beth, Christia, & Enikolopov (2012, p. 6). In addition, these women have recognised their self-ability; the feeling of being valued for what they have achieved boosted their self-esteem to conduct all of their family obligations independently. Signs of empowerment from Fairdeal's disability empowerment and advocacy project (1991, as cited in Neville, 2004, p.24), have been achieved. Therefore, research question one has been addressed.

#### *6.2.2. Key Issue 2: The Learning Experiences in the ELP's Classroom*

The women's aim in learning English was to solve daily problems when their husbands were not home to help. ELP's ESOL-literacy class has given opportunities for these women refugees to initiate social integration within the community. This fits Imel's (1994) argument that pre-literate women learners may need more assistance since they may need support with their lack of confidence to commit to learning activities (Imel, 1994, p. 2). Women will find it hard to engage socially or gain employment without English language skills (Sutton & Benseman, 2012, p. 108). Therefore, enhancing English literacy as the basis of the resettlement process encourages these women's self-confidence and independence.

ELP's ESOL-literacy class is based on the needs of refugees to acquire English skills to support the resettlement process. The focus of the program is to provide refugees with the language needed for integration and give experiences to use the language actively (English Language Partners, 2012, p. 7). Starting from the point that the women are illiterate in their own language, they were more ready to join the ESOL-literacy class compared to other refugees mainly due to their husbands' support. In addition, the Afghan community itself contributed to improve their literacy in their first language, Dari. Support given by the ELP teachers and classmates was also important for these women's language proficiency. The class's encouragement has been demonstrated through a comfortable classroom situation, where all the learners can feel relaxed in joining classroom activities and the flexibility the class offers in terms of enabling women to take their babies with them during class.

This type of adult classroom fits with Gunn's (2003, p. 38, as cited in English Language Partners, 2009, p. 9) suggestion that these learners need "a safe, uncritical environment with time to encounter the basics of reading and writing, bilingual support to provide clarification and an immediate means of feedback and the opportunity to participate in formal education for the first time". Thus, to encourage the learning process, adult literacy class provided learning guidance enabling them to feel good about the English lesson that they have learnt in class.

As observed, the class demonstrated religious and cultural awareness in terms of respecting most of the learners, who are Muslim, to be separated by gender when they are sitting in the class. However, the teachers have introduced New Zealand cultural context for these learners to acknowledge for their interaction with the New Zealanders as suggested by Bartlett's (2008, p.751) point about literacy being embedded in social and cultural practise. Moreover, the teachers have recognised the challenges that the learners faced.

As the women progressed with their learning, they found that the learning environment offered different challenges. For example, the highly motivated women found that some of the classmates were too noisy and not focused on the lessons, which disturbed their focus. Also, the literacy classes only allowed women to study three times a week for three hours per class. Lastly, women's obligation as mothers and wives may sometimes hinder them in doing homework or practising the lesson at home. Therefore, these three challenges matched to the barriers to learning that Altinkaya and Omundsen identify: women's responsibility within the family, such as taking care of children and elder members of the family (Altinkaya & Omundsen, 1999, p. 35). A sign of learning success for Afghan women was that they were able to play an active role in teaching other students in the class who have difficulties in understanding material. This allowed the women's active participation in conducting their learning as well as practising the language.

After learning in the ELP's ESOL-literacy class, most of these women decided to move to a higher-level English provider, English Teaching College (ETC) which is an advanced English class. In other words, research question two has been addressed. However, their decision to move to ETC was not always supported by their ELP teachers who considered that they were not all ready for the move. The teachers' assessment of the five Afghan women to move to a higher level was that only two of the women were capable to move to ETC, while the other three still needed intensive assistance.

### *6.2.3. Key Issue 3: Moving on from ELP*

After two years of resettlement in Palmerston North, Afghan women and their families have come to a point where they were more adjusted to life in New Zealand and were becoming more motivated to go to English class. The women realised the importance of attending English classes to enhance their knowledge and skills. The women's needs in acquiring English fits with Papen (2005), who suggested that an immediate need of refugees is to acquire literacy with sociocultural context (Papen, 2005, p. 6). In addition, Papen's suggestion fits one of the women's explanations that she has learnt almost all of her English skills from ELP.

As these women enhanced their English proficiency, they are now aiming at a higher and more formal English class where they can study full-time. In addition, these women are also fully aware of their entitlements as women refugees in New Zealand. By moving to ETC, the women benefit financially from their full-time student status. As a tertiary education, ETC offers women an entitlement to a child care subsidy. The women who enrol in ETC also receive the “Go Card” facility which enables them to travel within the city without paying any bus fare. Therefore, these women and their families can gain more economic benefits, as boost their confidence in a wider social interaction, even though it is unlikely for them to reach employment levels. Women, however, will likely to become more competent householders while adjusting to New Zealand.

In terms of women’s relationships with their husbands, having said that receiving a weekly income from the Work and Income Department of New Zealand makes these families financially reliant on this government income. As explained by one of the women’s husbands, due to his wife’s low-level skills in English, he feels obliged to take many household responsibilities, especially communicating her thoughts when she needs to go shopping or conducting her first months in learning at the ESOL-literacy class. Because of this, it was impossible for him to apply for a job. He also explained that many men he knew were in a similar situation. Thus, there was no other income to support this family. However, as the women’s literacy skills improved and the women’s were able to move to a higher education, other benefits also could be gained.

Improving women’s literacy enables them fulfil their roles at home without assistance from the English-speaking husbands, which frees the men find paid employment. Furthermore, this improve situation will enhance families economy. As suggested by Bartlett (2008) it can take a long time for economic benefits to be manifested through English language acquisition (Bartlett, 2008, p. 742). In addition, the networks that women built with their classmates and teachers in the ESOL classes have provided social contacts which are needed for economic success.

After discussing the Afghan women refugees' experiences during resettlement process, the final sections of this research project will conclude with a discussion of how these women have come to utilise their English language as a tool to facilitate their resettling in New Zealand.

### **6.3. Research Report Conclusions**

This research project has looked at the learning experiences of a group of Afghan women refugees in Palmerston North. These women started off with pre-literate status, they have demonstrated their interest to learn the language and have set of goals for their learning outcome.

The results have revealed that women have come to realise their own strength and that they use all opportunities offered during their resettlement process. The women explained that they have personally gained in that they value themselves more than they used to before learning English. Women's explanations fit to Fairdeal's project of identifying signs for personal empowerment (Fairdeal, 1991, as cited in Neville, 2004, p.24). In addition, they felt positive about the changes in gender roles since moving to New Zealand. Their husbands supported their wives becoming more independent. Husbands hoped their wives would be able to take over full responsibility within the family while they are working. Therefore, in the light of this study, some of the empowerment signs have been identified and these women felt good in achieving these changes.

This research report argued that women can be empowered by giving them opportunities to enhance their skills, especially English language skills. The narratives given by these women on their first time experiences in learning English at ELP's bilingual ESOL-literacy class revealed how these classes have helped them not only acquiring basic English skills but also gaining literacy skills. Women's ability using language has given them more confidence in communicating with other people within the New Zealand community, and as a consequence had made it possible for themselves and their husbands to be more engaged within New Zealand society.

The first few years during the refugees' resettlement program is considered a crucial time for these refugees. They need to be assisted in accessing services provided for refugees. The Afghan women were in a better situation than many refugees in that their husbands were already proficient in English. However, being bound by Afghan traditional culture that keeps women in the domestic sphere and under the responsibility of their husband has made these women reluctant to open themselves to changes at first. Over time, as the integration process continues, these women are undergoing a lot of changes that they have never experienced before in Afghanistan.

This report shall leave the last word to one of the women's husband who is proud of his wife's achievements: *My wife, now she can read many words and she can understand many things. I am really satisfied with her. [Thus] they can read many words and can understand easy words* (husband/interpreter. interview. 2014).

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Template Questions for Semi-Structured Interviews

#### Introduction of the Interviewer

Hello, my name is Erika Hermawan, and I appreciate being able to meet you in person for a short interview about my research on how Afghani women learners in a Bilingual ESOL-class perceive their language acquisition and their experiences living in New Zealand.

During the interview, I would like to discuss the following topics: types and methods used in teaching the class.

Q: Can you tell me what types of literacy are available for refugees during their resettlement process?

- *Q1: How did you identify which aspects are the most relevant to your students?*
- *Q2: Why do you consider them to be necessary/ relevant/useful for your students?*

Q: Do the existing guidelines for refugees' class provide the kind of guidance that your students' need?

- *Q1: Have you noticed any changes in the guidelines over the past few years?*
- *Q2: Which aspects of the current programmes would you recommend for your students? And how could it be taught?*

Q: Can you describe to me your classroom situation?

- *Q1: What challenges or opportunities does a mixed class pose? Does it raise any issues for the Afghani women?*
- *Q2: What challenges or opportunities does co-teaching offer?*
- *Q3: You seem to have different teaching styles. Can you tell me why you prefer the style you use?*

Q: In your opinion, have the students benefited from the programme? How?

- *Q1: Have the learners learned what they*

- *Can you expand a little on this?*
- *Can you tell me anything else?*
- *Can you give me some examples?*

<p><i>need to know to resettle in NZ?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Q2: Have you noticed any changes in these Afghani learners since they began the class? What changes?</i></li> <li>• <i>Q3: What are the main concerns that you have witnessed or heard about on the Afghani women learning process?</i></li> </ul> <p>Q: Are there any other types of literacy that we have not discussed and that you find quite intriguing to implement?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Q1: Do you have any recommendation both for types of literacy that can be used and for the Afghani learners' development?</i></li> </ul>	
<p>Q: MAIN QUESTIONS</p> <p>Q1;Q2;Q3, and so on : ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS</p> <p>*adapted from the interview plan on Safety Diagnosis Tool Kit for Local Communities. Guide to organizing Semi-Structured Interviews With Key Informants (Laforest, 2009).</p>	

**Appendix B: Template Questions for Focus Group Discussions**

Introduction of the Interviewer

Salam, Thank you for kindly agreeing to participate in my research project. My research is focusing on how Afghani women learners in a Bilingual ESOL-class perceive their English language learning and how learning English affects their experiences living in New Zealand. Today, I would like to discuss your experiences in your new neighborhood and some of your experiences in the ESOL-class. If you have any questions please ask them during our talk.

Beforehand, I would like to re-note some points, firstly, this focus group discussion is being recorded based on your consent, for those who disagreed to be recorded; I will hold the recorder while you are speaking, and will take note instead. A translator will assist me during the discussion; you are free to use English or Dari language. Secondly, all the information shared in this discussion will be kept confidential; your identity will be removed to ensure confidentiality. Thirdly, you can ask any questions during the discussion; you may refuse to answer a particular question; and you may withdraw in participating; Lastly, the preliminary result will be sent to your home address or email address, as you requested, and you are free to add to any information in regards to this discussion.

(ACTIVITY: show them the map of Palmerston North and colored pen and pin)

*1. Mapping your neighbourhood (using participatory techniques: “map your neighbourhood” (Pretty, Guijt, Scoones, & Thompson, 1995, p. 234) )*

<p>Q: Tell me a little about your picture?</p> <p>Q1: Where did you draw your house/your children school/market/mosque/ESOL-class on the map? Where do your friends live?</p> <p>Q2: How do you reach those places?</p> <p>Q3: Is there anyone who helps you with your everyday activities, such as shopping, going to ESOL class, picking up the children from school, and so on?</p>	<p>What do I want to know?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Are they familiar with their neighbourhood? To see their mobility in their new home</i> <input style="float: right; margin-left: 20px;" type="checkbox"/></li>   <li>• <i>Do they get any help from their family to do daily activities?</i> <input style="float: right; margin-left: 20px;" type="checkbox"/></li>   <li>• <i>How frequent they use their friends/family’s help? Where?</i></li> </ul> <p>Always, often, sometimes, etc. // making appointments, school interview, shopping, etc.</p>
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<p>Q4: Which part/ place of your neighbourhood that you like the most? Why? Can you give me some examples?</p> <p>Q5: Do you know your neighbour(s)/your children school teacher/ your ESOL-teacher? How often do you talk with them?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Is the new neighbourhood somehow fits their criteria of their ideal home? To see how they value the difference between home and new home.</i> <input type="checkbox"/></li> </ul>
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\*Thank you for sharing stories about your neighbourhood. Now, I would like to talk about your experiences in ESOL-Literacy class.

## 2. Experiencing the Bilingual ESOL-Literacy class

<p>Q: Tell me a little about your picture?</p> <p>Q1: Where did you draw your house/your children school/market/mosque/ESOL-class on the map? Where do your friends live?</p> <p>Q2: How do you reach those places?</p> <p>Q3: Is there anyone who helps you with your everyday activities, such as shopping, going to ESOL class, picking up the children from school, and so on?</p>	<p>What do I want to know?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Are they familiar with their neighborhood? To see their mobility in their new home</i> <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>• <i>Do they get any help from their family to do daily activities?</i> <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>• <i>How frequent they use their friends/family's help? Where?</i></li> </ul> <p>Always, often, sometimes, etc // making appointments, school interview, shopping, etc.</p>
--	---

Q4: Which part/ place of your neighborhood that you like the most? Why? Can you give me some examples?

Q5: Do you know your neighbor(s)/your children school teacher/ your ESOL-teacher? How often do you talk with them?

- *Is the new neighborhood somehow fits their criteria of their ideal home? To see how they value the difference between home and new home.*

**Appendix C: *Template Questions for Semi-Structured Interview with Husbands/Interpreter***

Introduction of the Interviewer

Hello, my name is Erika Hermawan, and I appreciate being able to meet you in person for a short interview about my research on how Afghani women learners in a Bilingual ESOL-class perceive their language acquisition and their experiences living in New Zealand.

During the interview, I would like to discuss the following topics: types and methods used in teaching the class.

Initial questions, interview questions can be generated from these questions:

About English Use:

1. *Do you encourage your wife to speak English at home?*
2. *How do you see your wife's English improvements?*
3. *Do you think most of Afghan women in your community are empowered by attending the English class?*
4. *How do they communicate in terms of their daily activities?*
5. *How often do you help your wife in terms of communication with Kiwi people?*

About Culture:

1. *Can you tell me about the Afghan culture? Can you elaborate how the gender relations based on Afghan views is?*
2. *Can you tell me the education system in Afghanistan?*
3. *What was different living here in New Zealand and living in Afghanistan?*

## **Appendix D: Information Sheets: English**



School of People, Environment and Planning  
Institute of Development Studies

### **Is survival English enough to live a life of choice in New Zealand? A case study of Afghani refugees' bilingual class experience in Palmerston North**

#### INFORMATION SHEET

Salam,

My name is Erika and I am a Master Student in Development Studies at Massey University. I am currently preparing my research project as a part of my Master's degree. I usually work as an English teacher back in my hometown, Indonesia, but I am currently on a study break. I am married to my husband, Sandy and also a full time mother with two sons, Mufti and Faiq.

My research is concerned with how Afghani women, who have just come to New Zealand through the new Zealand Refugee Scheme, experience learning English, how they find going to ESOL-Literacy classes, and also what Afghani Women regard as being self-sufficient. I would like to invite you to participate in my research. This would involve talking to you in a group setting and if you like also individually. I am also planning, if this would be convenient to you, to spend some time in the ESOL-Literacy classroom.

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. However, if you do wish to take part, your participation will take 45-60 minutes of your time, and you have the right to ask any questions about my research at any time during your participation. You can choose to be audio recorded, but if you do not wish to be recorded kindly inform me; you are free to withdraw from the research at any time and you can refuse to answer any particular questions. Information that you have provided will be kept private. I will if you like, provide you with a summary of the project when it is finished.

Thank you very much for your time.

Wassalam,

If you have any questions about this project, my contact detail and those of my supervisors are on the next page.

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“This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University’s Human Ethics Committees. The researcher named above is responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher, please contact Professor John O’Neill, Director (Research Ethics), telephone 06 350 5249. Email [humanethics@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethics@massey.ac.nz).”

## Appendix E: Information Sheets: Farsi



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### اطلاعات فرم

سلام با  
دانشگاه Development Studies رشته در لیسانس فوق مقطع دانشجویی و است Erika من اسم  
هستم مسی  
را من لیسانس فوق مدرک از قسمتی که خود تحقیقاتی پروژه سازی آماده حال در حاضر حال در و  
میگیرد شامل  
در ولی باشم می کار به مشغول اندونزی خودم کشور در انگلیسی زبان مدرس عنوان به من باشم می  
حاضر حال  
نام به پسر دو و است Sandy شوهرم اسم و ام کرده ازدواج من میبرم سر به تحصیلی مرخصی در  
های Mufti  
دارم Faiq و  
New طریق از تازگی به که که افغانی زنان که است موضوع این برگیرنده در من تحقیقاتی پروژه  
Zealand Refugee Scheme نظر دارند انگلیسی زبان یادگیری از ای تجربه چه اند شده نیوزیلند وارد  
در زنان این کلی  
دارند نیاز چیزهایی چه به افغان زنان همچنین و چیست ESOL-Literacy های کلاس به رفتن مورد  
در تا  
تحقیق این در که بیاورم عمل به دعوت شما از خواهم می من بکنند زندگی تر راحت نیوزیلند کشور  
مشارکت  
نمایید  
شما همکلاسی که گروه آموزان دانش دیگر و شما با گفتگو و مکالمات یکسری شامل تحقیق این روند  
می هستند  
و شما شخص با فقط و جداگانه صورت به را ها مصاحبه این توانم می من میدید ترجیح شما اگر باشد  
تنهایی به  
شرکت ESOL-Literacy های کلاس در مدتی خواهم می من نباشد مشکلی شما برای اگر دهم انجام  
و کرده  
باشم میگیرد صورت که هایی فعالیت شاهد  
تحقیق در این که کنید موافقت اگر هر چند نمایید مشارکت تحقیق این در که ندارید اجباری هیچ شما  
کنید، شرکت  
مورد در که سؤالی هر که هستید دارا را حق این شما و است دقیقه ۵۴ ۰۶ بین هر مصاحبه زمان مدت  
پروژه  
کنید انتخاب میتوانید شما بپرسید خواستید که مصاحبه از زمان هر در آید می پیش برایتان من تحقیقاتی  
که  
که هستید مجاز شما بدهید اطلاع من به لطفا ندارید موافقت موضوع این با اگر ولی شود ضبط صدایتان  
زمانی هر  
نیست شما مدنظر که سؤالاتی از کدام هر به میتوانید و دهید انصراف مصاحبه ادامه از خواستید که  
جواب  
و ماند خواهد باقی خصوصی کاهلاً صورت به میدید ارای تحقیق این طول در شما که اطلاعاتی ندهید  
شما اگر  
کنم ارای شما به را آن کلی گزارش رسید پایان به تحقیق که زمانی میتوانم من خواستید

متشکریم دادید اختصاص ما به که زمانی از  
والسلام  
بگیرید تماس مربوطه اساتید یا و من با میتوانید دارید تحقیقاتی پروژه این با رابطه در سؤالی هرگونه  
شماره  
اند شده قید بعدی صفحه در دیگر لازم اطلاعات و تماس

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If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher, please contact Professor John O’Neill, Director (Research Ethics), telephone 06 350 5249. Email [humanethics@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethics@massey.ac.nz).”

**Appendix F: Informed Consent Form: English**



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**Is survival English enough to live a life of choice in New Zealand? A case study of Afghani refugees' bilingual class experience in Palmerston North**

Participant Consent Form – Focus Group

The information sheet has been provided to me in Dari and English, and details have been explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfactions, and I understand that I can ask more questions at any time, or withdraw from participation

I agree to take a part in this study under the conditions explained in the information sheet.

I agree/ do not agree to the interview being sound recorded. Agree   
Disagree

I agree to participate in a focus group and understand that I will keep any information shared in this focus group will confidential

Signature.....

Date: .....

Full name - printed

.....  
Please send your research summary to: (please write your full address here)

.....  
Or email to



School of People, Environment and Planning  
Institute of Development Studies

**Is survival English enough to live a life of choice in New Zealand? A case study of Afghani refugees’ bilingual class experience in Palmerston North**

Participant Consent Form – Individual

The information sheet has been provided and I have had details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfactions, and I understand that I can ask more questions at any time, or withdraw from participation

I agree to take a part in this study under the conditions explained in the information sheet.

I agree/ do not agree to the interview being sound recorded. Agree   
Disagree

Signature.....

Date: .....

Full name - printed  
.....

Please send your research summary to: (please write your full address here)  
.....  
.....

Or email to  
.....

Appendix G: Informed Consent Form: Farsi



School of People, Environment and Planning  
Institute of Development Studies

**Is survival English enough to live a life of choice in New Zealand? A case study of Afghani refugees' bilingual class experience in Palmerston North**

**Focus Group – دُ ک ضرکت آه رضایت فرم**

داد توضیح کاهل طور ب آی جسئیات و ضد ارای ب جُ ای ب گلیسی ا و دری زبای ب اطلاعات فرم است ضد.

پرسیذی ب قادر ک سُنن آگا هی و دُ ا ضد داد پاسخ ی روض ب پروژ ایی هورد در آهذ پیص سؤالات سؤالات

دارم را تحقیق از ای هرچل رُ در پروژ با وُکاری اداه قطع حتی و تحقیق ایی در هورد بیطنر

فرم در ضد داد توضیح ضرایط تحت تحقیقاتی پروژ ایی در وُکاری برای را خود هوافقت هی اعلام اطلاعات

نُ ک هی

نُ هیك اعلام هصاحب زهای در خود صدای ضبط برای را خود هوافقت عذم/هوافقت هی

هخالف هوافق

اطلاعاتی رُگو ک سُنن آگا و نُ ک هی اعلام Focus Group در هطارکت برای را خود هوافقت هی در ک

کُ بازگو دیگر جای در و کرد حفظ هحرها صورت ب باید را ضود هی صحبت آی هورد در گرو ایی

نُ

تاریخ ..... اهضا ههل

وَادگی ..... خا ..... أم ..... و ..... أم

را خود تْ سکو ههل کاهل ی طًا لطفًا) وَاپیذ ارسال آدرش ایی ب را خود تحقیق گسارش خلاص لطفًا (وِسیذ ب

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وَاپیذ ارسال آدرش ایویل ایی ب یا

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**Appendix H: Research Letter for English Language Partners (ELP)**



Date: 3 August 2014  
Jessica Yap  
[Manager of English Language Partners]  
PO Box 12 073  
Palmerston North 4444

**REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN REFUGEES'  
BILINGUAL ESOL-LITERACY CLASS**

Dear Jessica,

My name is Erika Hermawan, and I am a Master student in the Institute of Development Studies, School of People, Environment, and Planning, Massey University. I wish to conduct a research project for the completion of my Master degree which is concerned with how Afghani women, who have just come to New Zealand through the new Zealand Refugee Scheme, experience learning English, how they find going to ESOL-Literacy classes, and also what Afghani Women regard as being self-sufficient. This project will be conducted under the supervision of Dr Maria Borovnik (main supervisor) from School of People, Environment, and Planning, Massey University, and Dr Gillian Skyrme (co-supervisor) from School of Humanities, Massey University.

I am hereby seeking your permission to conduct interviews and observations to the AFGHANI WOMEN LEARNERS and also the class tutors in the bilingual ESOL-literacy class of Afghani women organized by Catherine Taylor and Chuda Ghimirey, and to have access to supporting documents used by English Language partners in teaching refugees. I enclose an information sheet giving details of the research project. If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me. This project has been provisionally approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter. I look forward to receiving your permission in due course.

Yours sincerely,

Erika Hermawan

**Appendix I: Permission Letter from English Language Partners (ELP)**

ENGLISH LANGUAGE PARTNERS PALMERSTON NORTH  
PO Box 12 073, Palmerston North 4444  
162 The Square, Palmerston North  
P 06 359 2332 F 06 0359 2332  
E palmerstonnorth@englishlanguage.org.nz  
www.englishlanguage.org.nz



6 August 2014

Erika Hermawan  
Institute of Development Studies  
School of People, Environment and Planning  
Massey University

Dear Erika,

**RE : RESEARCH IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE PARTNERS ESOL LITERACY CLASS AFGHANISTAN  
WOMEN REFUGEES**

Thank you for your letter dated 3 August 2014 requesting permission to conduct research in our Refugees' Bilingual ESOL Literacy class.

We are pleased to let you know that permission has been granted for you to conduct your research with this ESOL Literacy class. We wish you well in your studies.

Yours sincerely,



Jessica Yap  
Manager

Learning English for a life of choice in  
New Zealand : a case study of Afghan  
women refugees' bilingual class experiences  
in Palmerston North : a research project  
presented in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of  
International Development Development  
Studies, Massey University, Manawatu,  
New Zealand

Hermawan, Erika Soraya

2015

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