



# An Analysis of ESOL Provision in the UK and Its Potential Future Development

ZHANG Zhilong<sup>[a],\*</sup>

<sup>[a]</sup>Lecturer, School of Foreign Languages, Guangdong Polytechnic College, Zhaoqing, China.

\* Corresponding author.

Received 4 April 2020; accepted 21 July 2020

Published online 26 August 2020

## Abstract

ESOL provision plays an important role in immigrants' settlement in the UK. Through previous research, it is found that ESOL provision is influenced by community, funding, immigration policy, learners' needs for survival, and the current view of worldwide language. With the aim to study the correlation among these factors and the potential future of ESOL development in the UK, the author has reviewed relevant history and current concerns of ESOL provision and found that the need for ESOL provision is still increasing but that demand always exceeds provision and the inconsistency of funding results in learners' lack of support. The major issues of ESOL provision are still the range of learners and consistency coherence of funding.

**Key words:** ESOL Provision; Historical Development; Current Concerns; Funding

Zhang, Z. L. (2020). An Analysis of ESOL Provision in the UK and Its Potential Future Development. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 21(1), 22-28. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/11829>  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/11829>

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

In contemporary society, with the situation that an increasing number of refugees, immigrants, and asylum-seekers come to settle in the UK, more emphasis and resources, including, funding, tutors, and policy, have

been developed to help their living in this country. ESOL, as a "Skill for Life" (Simpson, 2008, p.7), has met great challenges for its huge demand. ESOL provision has been developing for over a hundred years in the UK, but is still reputed to fail to meet the languages of adult learners. "The proportion of provision that is good or outstanding has not increased and remained too low" (Ofsted, 2008, p.5).

There are many issues relating to ESOL provision. Government's policy affects learners' opportunity for learning. The complexity educational backgrounds of learners leads to the complication of ESOL provision. In addition, the government's funding on adult education plays a part in this complicated situation. The current lack of funding has resulted in some learners joining literacy classes to learn ESOL, according to Scottish Further Education Funding Council, 2001. "Strong concerns" (NATECLA, 2013, p.3) still persist in the future development of ESOL provision. Therefore, it is appropriate to investigate the historical development of ESOL provision and its current issues.

This essay, firstly, provides an overview of ESOL provision. Then, it analyses the current problems. Finally, it proposals for its future development.

### 1.2 Aim of the Study

With the purpose of investigating ESOL provision, the essay is designed to answer the following questions:

- What is the historical development of ESOL provision?
- What are current problems of ESOL provision?
- What aspects of ESOL provision influence the current issue?

Also, in this paper, the author will put forward some suggestions as to how to improve ESOL provision, based on historical analysis.

### 1.3 Literature Review

The acronym of ESOL is English for Speakers of Other Languages. ESOL is used in the Britain to describe

English language provision for learners “who have come to settle permanently in this country and who attend government-funded provision” (Schellekens, 2007, p.1). Jordan (1992, p.7) emphasised that ESOL was for adults, whose mother tongue was not English and its provision was initially to “meet the need of immigrants”.

However, ESOL does not have only one meaning. Through the historical study of English language teaching, Howatt (2004) discovered that ESOL provision stemmed from the 1960s, when ESOL was viewed as an umbrella term covering all types of English language learning, such as “EFL, EAL, and ESL” (Schellekens, 2007, p.2). In the past, ESOL was also related to the terminology English as a Foreign Language (EFL), which means the study of English by non-native speakers living in a non-English-speaking environment. It is aimed at “people who come on a short term basis with the main purpose of learning English because of its use as an international language” (Jordan, 1992, p.8). On the other hand, the fundamental aim of ESOL is to help adults learning English for everyday use. Therefore, ESOL provision has been determined to be a “Skill for Life” (Callaghan, 2006, p.30).

From the late 1980s, the term was used as “English as a Second Language (ESL)” (Cooke & Simpson, 2008, p.5), which had similar meaning to the term people use today. Also, EAL (English as an Additional Language) has certain relationship with ESOL. EAL refers to “young learners” (Schellekens, 2007, p.1) under the age of 16, whereas ESOL relates to post-16 adult learners.

In summary, the purpose of ESOL is for learners, whose mother tongue is not English, and who have come to settle permanently in the UK and learn English as a second language for everyday use.

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## 2. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF ESOL PROVISION

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The development of ESOL stems from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when Huguenots, “the first refugees to be identified” (Howatt and Widdowson, 2004, p.18), arrived in this country. According to Rosenberg (2007), most refugees at this time went to London and the South-East for ESOL education. However, ESOL has thrived since 1870, a time when “state-funded education started in England and Wales and multiple adult education classes began” (Rosenberg, 2007, p.1). He also (2007) divided the history of ESOL development from 1870 in his book, *A Critical History of ESOL in the UK, 1870-2006*, which include six periods, namely 1870-1930, 1930-1940, 1950-1970, the 1970s, the 1980s, and the 1990s. In the following sections, the author will analyse and discuss these periods individually.

### 2.1 1870-1930: The New Epoch

Apart from the Huguenots, the proportionately groups of refugees, who were marked as second-language speakers,

“came into the UK during the period 1870-1930” (Rosenberg, 2007, p.5). Among these groups, the biggest two were the “East European Jews” (Winder, 2004, p.25) and the “Belgians” (Rosenberg, 2007, p.24), most of whom spoke Yiddish or Hebrew. Therefore, “Yiddish/Hebrew and English” (Gregory and Williams, 2000, p.13) were thought to be modern scholarly language. In terms of Gartner (2001), at that time, many immigrants had great pressure to acquire English, and were offered the provision of “evening classes” (Devereux, 1989, p.29) or “private tuition” (Gregory and Williams, 2000, p.83).

“The Jews regarded their stay as long-term and they learnt English as a survival language, whereas the Belgians considered themselves as temporary residents and felt that their French and Flemish were more significant than English”

(Rosenberg, 2007, p.41).

Nevertheless, these groups both had the need to preserve and protract their own language. This period also witnessed the main changes of English language teaching, both as a foreign language and to indigenous speakers, which influenced the provision made for newcomers to learn English. For these refugees, ESOL provision was provided both in their community and in the adult classes. Special focus was given to the “oral approach” (Howatt and Widdowson, 2004, p.189).

### 2.2 1930-1940: Refugees and Armies

According to Taylor (1975), refugees continued to arrive in the UK, in order to fight alongside their allies and seek for a temporary place to live in. In 1939, World War Two resulted in a large number of refugees coming into the UK, who were mainly from “Germany and Spain” (Rosenberg, 2007, p.51). Provision was made for these refugees (especially children), in the form of “English classes” (Bentwich, 1956, p.68). For adults, “There was no centrally organised provision at all for the new adult refugees before 1939” (Rosenberg, 2007, p.53). They had to arrange their own English learning, by attending private institutions or “evening classes” (Bentwich, 1956, p.106).

Because of the war, there was a need for the troupes to be able to follow instruction and communicate in English. “Considerable attention was given to the teaching of English” (Hawkins and Brimble, 1947, p.243) in that there was an assumption that the training of English language would help the war and would improve the status of Britain the post-war world with regard to the government’s view on English as an “international and administrative language” (Gordon, 1990, p.50). ESOL provision was made based on this situation and became part of foreign policy. However, the war enhanced the complexity of language teaching in the UK, and many refugees lost their “national and linguistic identity” (Rosenberg, 2007, p.83) in that they had to learn English for life and neglected their mother tongue.

### 2.3 1950-1970: New Commonwealth

After the Second World War, the establishment of the New Commonwealth resulted in a number of immigrants coming to settle in the UK. "There were about 900,000 immigrants from different parts of the New Commonwealth" (Rosenberg, 2007, p.84). Those, who "required help in learning English" (Elsdon, 2001, p.26), generally started working in the public and private sectors. Owing to this situation, the government was faced with new challenges for immigrant settlement. Special provision (Bagley, 1992, p.1) was made for settlers from New Commonwealth, including "adults and their children" (Rosenberg, 2007, p.90).

ESOL teachers at that time had a leading role in adult education, directing and helping newcomers to settle. "The number of ESOL teachers was increasing nationally and internationally" (Rosenberg, 2007, p.97). The government sent English teachers to teach overseas students, and even in other countries. Teacher training became popular. "Voluntary teachers and the provision of teaching materials" were encouraged (Mobbs, 1977, p.3). In the late 1960s, more ESOL learners (from different parts of Commonwealth) settled in the UK. ESOL provision was developed to meet the need of these settlers, refugees and migrant workers.

### 2.4 The 1970s: ESOL Expansion

The 1971 Immigration Act "admitted applicants from the Commonwealth if they had at least one grandparent born in the UK" (Rosenberg, 2007, p.114). According to Kushner and Knox (1999), the newcomers received help from local and national institutions, like trade unions, and were welcomed by particular local councils, this situation led to more settlers staying in the UK. Therefore, the demand of English provision always exceeded its provision. Some of the learners were recognised as "transient residents" (Rosenberg, 2007, p.120). They learnt English for special purposes rather than day-to-day living.

This phenomenon of lack of provision brought the distinction between English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL), which helped develop ESOL materials and "teacher training" (Rosenberg, 2007, p.121). The new ideas about English language continue to influence ESOL provision, supported by NATESLA (National Association of Teachers of English as a Second Language to Adults). The teaching of ESOL spread into certain environments, such as, "workplace" (Roberts et al., 1992, p.383), "colleges" (McAllister and Robson, 1984, p.17), "communities, and voluntary sectors" (Rosenberg, 2007, p.109).

### 2.5 The 1980s: Consolidation and Retrenchment

During the 1980s, new immigrants (asylum-seekers and economic migrants from Middle East and Asia) arrived in the UK because of regional "conflict or persecution"

(Rosenberg, 2007, p.145). Those settlers presented a need for language support, which, according to Rosenberg (1982), was considered to be "too little or too late". Therefore, they also had to depend on their individual learning through private provision.

To control the number of immigrants, more legislation was made, including the 1988 Immigration Act, which required "male Commonwealth immigrant to prove they could accommodate and maintain their families independently" (Rosenberg, 2007, p.149). This situation contributed to a consolidation and extension of ESOL provision. With reference to the NATESLA Survey (1981b), ESOL provision was imbalanced and inadequate, and there was a considerable shortfall in funding, especially in adult education. In terms of Clyne (2006), the cutbacks of public section funding resulted in an increasing concern and retrenchment over ESOL provision nationally. Also, the way of evaluating ESOL learners remained to be an unknown future as Rosenberg (1988) found out that ESOL teacher were looking for appropriate accreditation and assessment schemes.

### 2.6 The 1990s: Funding and Concerns

In the 1990s, the government took a "fair and firm control" (Kushner and Knox, 1999, p.362) over the immigration policy to control the number of immigrant entry in the UK and influenced the ESOL provision. The government established national funding in England and Wales. However, despite help from the government, provision was still insufficient to fulfil the language needs of ESOL learners with more immigrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers coming into Britain.

"Most of the ESOL students need English in their everyday life" (Kambouri et al., 1996, p.20) but "insufficient funding and qualified teachers" (Rosenberg, 2007, p.195) were provided to the new settlers. The fact that the demand failed to meet the requirement became a "real problem for providers" (Sunderland, 1991).

This resulted in the Home Office starting to take the refugees' language needs into account. The Moser Report (1999), had the national aim of reducing the number of illiterate adults. It also created a new curriculum and system of qualifications, which provided better opportunities for learning. In terms with Kambouri et al. (1996), some students did not have the availability to use computers to assist their learning.

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## 3. CONCERNS OF ESOL PROVISION IN THE 2000S

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Over the last 50 years, ESOL provision had received numerous challenges and subsequent improvements. However, according to Ofsted (2003), there is still necessity for improving the quality of ESOL provision. What happened to ESOL provision in the 2000s?

### 3.1 The Quality of ESOL Provision

In survey of Ofsted (2003), it was found that compared to other adult education, literacy, numeracy, and ESOL provisions were weaker, owing to a lack of qualified teachers, an increase of learners, and the delay of new teaching qualifications. Most ESOL providers did not improve the quality effectively. Language support was poorly planned and delivered, and became disparate.

Despite the fact that learning resources, personal support and teacher training were developed, “the lack of qualified tutors continued to persist” (Ofsted, 2005, p.2). There was a strong need for more voluntary help and better learning resources. According to a learner evaluation of Ofsted (2008), students presented a strong need for more available access to computer, more accommodation and learning hours, and mixed learner attainment.

### 3.2 ESOL Provision across Britain

In the 2000s, ESOL learners had located throughout the United Kingdom. The policy for asylum-seekers of the Home Office and the recruitment of migrant influenced the ESOL provision. However, in different areas, the ESOL provision was different because of different policy and funding.

#### 3.2.1 Scotland

From 2001, a major decision to waive the three-year residence rule for refugees, asylum-seekers and other ESOL learners in Scotland broke the practices in other areas. ESOL learners needed to pay for their fees for the courses. They had access to ESOL literacy class unless they were literate in their mother tongue (Scottish Further Education Funding Council, 2001, para 5-8). This phenomenon resulted in a number of ESOL learners attending literacy classes, when they had not passed the ESOL level. The funding from Adult Literacy and Numeracy (ALN) could not often provide appropriate ESOL tutors in that they may have wider ranges of teaching certificates (Rice et al, 2005, p.2). In 2007, the Scottish Executive made an influential strategy for ESOL (Scottish Executive, 2007). Approximately 5 million pounds was allocated to support ESOL, and extra 4000 classrooms have been made for this. Fees were still waived for asylum-seekers.

#### 3.2.2 Wales

Funding (provided by adult education service) has been available for ESOL learners in Wales since the 1960s. There was a similar problem to Scotland as too little provision and too many students happen in Wales. Owing to the fact that Wales had two national languages, people living in Wales had a bilingual society. Most of the ESOL teachers in Wales were also Welsh-speakers. They could use Welsh in the classes as a second language to assist ESOL learners. In 2001, the Welsh Assembly awarded the Basic Skills Agency the responsibility for managing the

National Basic Skills Strategy for Wales, with the aim to raise achievement in people’s basic skill, including ESOL (Wales National Assembly, 2001). The need of ESOL learners had been highlighted by the 2005 Basic Skills Strategy (Welsh Assembly Government, 2005). However, they were still in the weak position of receiving adequate ESOL help.

#### 3.2.3 Northern Ireland

Compared to other countries in the UK, Northern Ireland had fewer adult ESOL learners. Nevertheless, providing English tuition for students of other countries had long been a tradition in the Northern Ireland, especially with the arrival of refugees, asylum-seekers (from Middle East) and migrant workers (from the Commonwealth). Funding provided from the Department of Employment and Learning did not cover ESOL. Most of the ESOL classes were run by further and higher education colleges. Asylum-seekers had immediate access to classes while other ESOL learners had to be residents before attending the ESOL classes (Northern Ireland Government, 2005, p.12).

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## 4. CURRENT SITUATION OF ESOL PROVISION

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Through the historical development, ESOL provision experiences a series of reforms, like funding policy and national curriculum. What is the current situation that presents to us? According to Kings and Casey (2014), the major issue of ESOL provision continues to consist of the difficulties of the complication of ESOL learners and funding.

### 4.1 ESOL Learners

Nowadays, ESOL learners vary in number and regions. “The population of ESOL learners is extremely diverse” (Kings and Casey, 2014, p.9). It is likely that they have a wide range of educational, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. For example, there are learners who have learnt literacy and also those who are not able to read or write.

Allemano (2013) distinguished these learners into three groups. The author named these groups as advanced, intermediate, and basic levels.

a). Advanced Group: learners are well-educated and highly literate in their own language, and can use the Roman alphabet.

b). Intermediate Group: learners have similar education background as in group one but cannot use the Roman alphabet.

c). Basic Group: learners have little or no experience of school or formal education, and can merely or may not to be able to read or write in their first language.

The variation of ESOL learners presents a complicated and complex situation in that it is difficult to determine

a suitable curriculum to satisfy those who have different language proficiency level. Also, this situation influences the funding. "Funding an average between those who have no literacy and those with highly developed study skills can easily result in something that meets the needs of neither extreme" (Kings and Casey, 2014, p.11). Therefore, it is very hard to balance the provision for learners with multiple backgrounds.

## 4.2 Funding for ESOL Provision

Funding has a close relationship with ESOL provision, which influences learners' opportunity of education. The 2012/13 funding on ESOL "allowed providers to cater for the diversity of the ESOL learner cohort" (Kings and Casey, 2014, p.31). However, ESOL qualifications were not listed in the funding rate and in the workplace, no funding was available for ESOL training.

According to the 2013/14 ESOL funding, however, "ESOL will no longer be calculated on Guided Learning Hours (GLH). Instead, ESOL will be listed on the Qualification Credit Framework (QCF)" (NATECLA, 2013, p.1). This change gave ESOL providers opportunity to develop flexible programmes. It can be seen from "2013/14 ESOL Funding in Qualification" (NATECLA, 2013, p.2) that the funding of ESOL provision was distributed in an unbalanced situation. More funding was given to GCSE, Adult Certificates in ESOL, and Functional Skills in English and maths, whereas others received low funding support.

In terms of NATECLA (2013), a learner was supposed to receive delivery of ESOL tuition from 101 to 196 hours. However, with regard to the 2013/14 funding, a fully funded institution would offer a maximum of "100 hours" (NATECLA, 2013, 2) to each individual. In other words, learners were not able to receive adequate support. In August 2014, the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) posted new principle funding for ESOL qualifications. There is huge change between 2013/14 and 2014/15 funding of qualification.

Compared to the 2013/14 funding, there is dramatic change of the qualifications in the 2014/15 funding policy, with only GCSE and Functional Skills English remaining. SFA (2014, p.1) states that it will "stop funding the existing ESOL qualifications from 31 December 2014" and "continuing learners will be able to complete their existing qualifications". Non-regulated ESOL learning is a new funding project. With new accredited ESOL qualifications, providers are able to organise and put emphasis on the delivery arrangement.

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## 5. CONCLUSION

Through the historical investigation of ESOL development, it is found that community, funding, immigration policy, learners' needs for survival, and the view of worldwide language all play a role in the ESOL

development. In most areas, ESOL provision was made both within community and in public classes. Political issue, like military training and war, increased the needs for English language. ESOL tutors and voluntary work play a significant role in helping newcomers settle. The needs for ESOL provision are still increasing but demand always exceeds provision. The issue of funding and the complication of learners is the major problem through the history.

In the 2000s, the issue of ESOL provision was the lack of "qualified teachers, a rapid increase of learners, and the delay of new teaching qualifications" (Ofsted, 2005, p.2). The focus of government funding on literacy and numeracy led to a number of ESOL learners attending literacy or numeracy classes, without passing their ESOL qualifications. More support was given to ESOL learners but they were still in the weak position of receiving adequate ESOL help. The government's emphasis on literacy and numeracy causes a number of ESOL learners to attend literacy or numeracy classes as ESOL classes are not freely available. More support is given to ESOL learners through the years but they are still lacking in sufficient ESOL help.

The current situation of ESOL learners is complicated in that they may have different language proficiency level and education background. It is difficult to determine a suitable curriculum to satisfy all of these learners. Also, this situation contributes to the imbalance of the funding. According to Kings and Casey (2014), ESOL qualifications were not listed in the funding rate and in the workplace, no funding was available for ESOL training. Compared to 2013/14 funding, the 2014/15 funding put great emphasis on new ESOL qualifications and cut the funding of the previous qualifications. Non-regulated ESOL learning becomes a new project. It can be seen that there is an inconsistency of funding. This inconsistency may cause difficulties for providers to make a suitable curriculum and for learners to adapt themselves in new ESOL qualifications.

## 5.1 Implications for Future Development

Considering the present situation of ESOL learners, it is needed to encourage those who have the ability of English language proficiency to join the voluntary team to help ESOL learners (Rosenberg, 2007). Since ESOL qualifications were not listed in the funding rate and in the workplace, no funding was available for ESOL training. It is supposed that teacher training and work place should receive funding help.

Additionally, the government should balance the funding for different qualifications of ESOL provision in case that learners in different levels join the same classes, resulting in a number of problems. With the government's focus on new accredited ESOL qualifications, providers should organise and put emphasis on delivery arrangement based on the current situation.

## 5.2 Limitations

Despite the interesting findings and their beneficial implications presented in this study, the research has certain limitations as follows:

a). The author only adopted data from NATECLA and the Skills Funding Agency. It is obviously not enough to cover all the adult learners. This, to a certain extent, affects its reliability and the validity of the data in the study. Therefore, a wider variety of assessment method is recommended in future studies, such as, interviews, observation, verbal, report and diaries.

b). In this study, the current issues and the historical development of ESOL provision are not discussed in a very specific way, which, in future study, need more investigation and analysis.

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## APPENDIX

### 2013/14 ESOL Funding in Qualification

Qualification	Funding band	Funding
GCSE	Certificate (13-24)	£724
Adult Certificates in ESOL	Certificate (13-24)	£724
Adult Certificates in ESOL (Speaking and listening)	Award (5-12)	£336
Functional Skills in English and maths	Certificate (13-24)	£724
Functional Skills in IT	Award (5-12)	£336
New Free Standing English Awards + Maths at Level 1 and 2	Award (1-4)	£148
New Free Standing Maths Awards at Entry Level	Award (1-4)	£166

Source: NATECLA, 2013.

### 2014/15 ESOL Funding in Qualification

Qualification	Level
GCSE English Language	2
iGCSE English	2
Functional Skills English	1, 2
ESOL Skills for Life Qualifications*	E, 1, 2
Units of ESOL Skills for Life Qualifications*	E, 1, 2
Non-regulated ESOL learning aims*	Pre-entry level, E, 1, 2

Source: The Skills Funding Agency, 2014.