

Supporting migrants in low-paid, low-skilled employment in London to improve their English

Alexander Braddell, Language for Work Network

Linda Miller, Institute for Employment Studies

England, UK

Research

Commissioned by Greater London Authority, 2013

Investigate English language learning experience of migrants in low-paid work in London

Identify barriers and enablers to inform new approaches to support

Talk to migrants

- In low-paid, low-skilled jobs
- With low-level or no English

Migrant = non-UK-born resident

Low skill = EQF L3 or below

Low pay = ?

UK median = £13 (€16, \$20)/hr, UK Nat Min = £6.50 (€8.15, \$10)/hr

London Living Wage = £8.55 (€10.70, \$13.50)/hr

Drivers for research

‘Huge unmet demand’ for English language learning in London

- Participation in English language learning provision = 60 000 (2012)
- Need estimated at 300 000 to >600 000 (+ constant new arrivals)

Migrants in low-paid work = **important ...**

- 500 000+ migrants in low-paid work in London
- Migrants in low-paid work **more likely to stay** in UK than high-paid migrants
- Migrants with limited English clustered in low-paid work
- Language skills linked to full-time work, participation in vocational learning, utilisation of existing higher level skills
- Migrants in low-skilled jobs + better language skills = **added value** for migrants, employers and economy

...but hard-to-reach group

- ‘**Disproportionately disadvantaged**’ by funding arrangements, long work hours
- **Unlikely to attend classes**

Approach

Semi-structured qualitative interviews with 60 migrants

- 50 interviewees in low-paid, low-skilled jobs
 - 15 fully interpreted, two part-interpreted
- 10 interviewees in jobs requiring intermediate level skills

Recruited via employers, trade unions, migrant support organisations

Interviews explored migrants' skill levels, experience of learning English, views on meaningful support

Desk research: practice related to linguistic integration of adult migrants, including workplace language development programmes

Informants

50 migrants (19 male, 31 female) in low- paid, low-skilled jobs

- Care work, cleaning, hospitality, retail, construction, etc.
- 23 countries
- 20 first languages
- 30 % of interviews fully interpreted

10 migrants (3 male, 7 female) in intermediate-skilled jobs

- Admin, community work, HR & training, reception
- Seven countries

Age: from 17 to 65

Resident in England: from 3 months to 40 years

All phases of migration from 1950/60s to now within sample

55% in **full-time** work, 45% **part-time** **Qualifications:** from zero to post-graduate

70% intending to **live permanently in UK**, 30% unsure

English: mostly CEFR level A1 to B1

Median wage = £6.50/hour

Note: London Living Wage = £8.55 (€10.70)/hr

Nat Min Wage = £6.50 (€8.15)/hr

Areas of investigation

1. Why don't migrants in low-skilled jobs access provision?
2. What barriers to language learning do they identify?
3. What support do they want?
4. What support do they need?
5. What support is practical?

Why don't migrants in low-skilled jobs access provision?

Dynamics

Migrant arrives → seeks work, seeks friends (support network)

→ Work = *job suitable for person with limited English = low-paid, low-skilled = long hours + problems of low income*

→ Friends = *people who speak migrant's language(s)*

Migrant starts English course → finds job, friends → stops course

No time, energy, money, etc + no need: is working, has friends

Result = **low-pay, limited-English trap**

→ Limited exposure to English at work, at home

→ Study in **non-working hours** difficult, unattractive

What barriers do migrants identify?

Barriers to learning

- Limited **contact** with English-speakers
- Lack of confidence to **interact** in English
- Not knowing how to find **suitable language tuition**
- No **time, money** for tuition
- No **learning support** at or outside work
- No effective **personal learning strategies**
- No **motivation** to persist with language learning

Addressing barrier = enabler

What support do migrants want?

[Note: *all* informants wanted to improve their English]

Guidance to help them learn effectively, efficiently

Motivation to help them **persist** with learning

Opportunity to extend their exposure to + use of English

Personalised feedback

Requirements

Accessibility (location + time + cost), relevance to own learning needs

Access to learning when 'mentally fresh'

Preferences

Structured, teacher-led learning (familiarity, feedback, motivation)

Speaking + listening, pronunciation (lower levels)

Writing + pronunciation (higher levels)

Key findings

[Note: all (50+10) felt their English limited them & wanted to improve it]

Q. Where do you **use** English most?

A. At work [*no matter how narrow the job*]

Q. Where would it be **most convenient** for you to study English?

A. At work

Q. Do you use the **internet** on a daily basis in your personal life?

A. Yes

What support do migrants need?

- **Encouragement** and **support** to learn English
- **Exposure** to authentic English, spoken & written
- **Opportunity to interact** in English, spoken & written
- Help to **understand the form** of the English language
- Help to develop **effective personal learning strategies**
- Rewards that encourage **persistence**

In other words – exactly what every other language learner needs

Some observations

Insufficient English language teaching **capacity** to meet demand/need

Language acquisition is about **learning**, not teaching

Language is learned through communication

Workplace offers **structured opportunities to communicate** (linked to role & task, team work, customer service, safety & quality etc) + support (management, supervision, team)

Support for workplace communication = **support for learning**

Communication is a key issue in the low-paid workplace (basic skills)

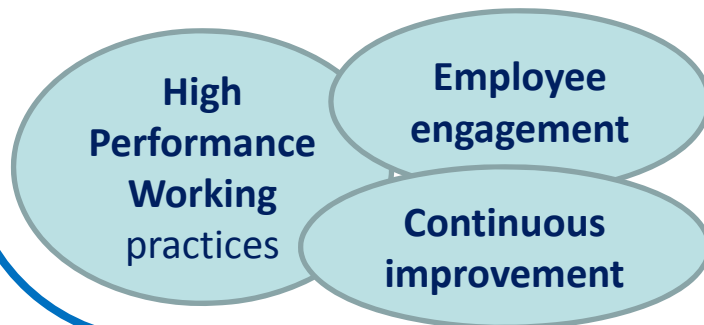
Support useful to **all present**: migrant/non-migrant, manager/worker

Indicative approaches: **workplace learning** **self-directed learning**

Implications

Focus **support** on

**Workplace as
collective learning
space**



**Self-directed
learning for
individuals &
groups**

What might that look like in practice?

Internet-enabled scaffolding programme to support learning

Help for employers to support communication in a way that enables language development at work (without expensive classes)

- Guided learning materials, coaching & mentoring, work organisation, supervisory feedback, peer learning groups etc

Help for staff to form **self-directed study groups**

- Curricula, resources for self-directed learning programmes

Help for individuals to develop **effective learning strategies**

- Apps etc to help personalise and support learning

Incentives for learners & employers to **engage & persist in learning**

- Reward schemes

Expert support and facilitation from **workplace learning service**

- New role for learning providers – or an old one resuscitated?

Contact for Alexander Braddell: abraddell@gmail.com

Language for Work network

European learning network for professionals

Find out more at <http://languageforwork.ecml.at/>

Supported by European Centre for Modern Languages