

HOW LEARNING ENGLISH FACILITATES INTEGRATION FOR ADULT MIGRANTS: THE JARRAH LANGUAGE CENTRE EXPERIENCE

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Participant in the NCVET Building Research Capacity
Community of Practice Academic Program 2009

NATIONAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION
AND TRAINING RESEARCH AND
EVALUATION PROGRAM
OCCASIONAL PAPER



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About the research

How learning English facilitates integration for adult migrants: the Jarrah Language Centre experience

Meaghan Leith, Holmesglen

Building the research capacity of the vocational education and training (VET) sector is a key concern for the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). To assist with this objective, NCVER supported an academic scholarship program, whereby VET practitioners are sponsored to undertake university study at honours, master's, or doctorate level. NCVER then published a snapshot of their research.

Meaghan Leith received an academic scholarship in 2009 to assist with her doctoral studies at the University of Melbourne. Meaghan is an English as a second language teacher of adult migrants and international students at Holmesglen in Melbourne. Her research explores how studying English as a second language can help adult migrants to integrate into Australian society.

A survey was distributed to migrants at the commencement of their English studies at the Jarrah Language Centre to gather demographic data. Fourteen were selected from this group to be interviewed four times over a period of approximately two years to garner a sense of their post-course experiences, their level of integration and any changes to their circumstances during that time.

Key messages

- Not being competent and confident in using English was seen by migrants and language centre teachers and staff as the biggest barrier to integration.
- Most migrants undertook English as a second language classes to improve their spoken English and valued the speaking opportunities provided in their classes, but they would like more opportunities to speak everyday English in class.
- Migrants found undertaking English language classes valuable in helping them to move into mainstream study and employment. By the time of the last interview, most migrants were either in full- or part-time work or were continuing with mainstream study.
- English as a second language programs, on their own, are not enough to ensure gaining permanent employment. Instead, they are a pathway to further study or low-level jobs. Having a language centre located in a TAFE institute also encourages movement into further study.

Tom Karmel
Managing Director, NCVER

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Introduction and context

The Australian Government considers learning English one of the most important steps migrants ... can take towards successfully settling in Australia. Learning English equips new arrivals with the language skills needed for employment and helps build the social connections necessary for successful integration into the broader Australian community.

(Ferguson, cited in Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2008a, p.5)

Australian governments have funded English as a second language (ESL) instruction for adult migrants for over 60 years. The Commonwealth-funded Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), which commenced in 1948 as part of the nation's post-war migrant settlement program, is one of the earliest models of free host-language provision for large numbers of adult migrants in the world (Burns & de Silva Joyce 2007; Martin 1999). In Australia, the states and territories also fund and deliver English as a second language instruction to adult migrants, and hundreds of millions of dollars are spent each year by both levels of government on these programs. The principal reason for funding such provision is to assist migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds to integrate into Australian society.

Integration is ...?

The term 'integration' is often used in discourse about migrants, and various definitions exist (Ager & Strang 2008; Entzinger & Biezeveld 2003). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO 2011) acknowledges that integration is a 'rather elusive concept', and researchers like Vasta (2007) concur, describing integration as a 'vague concept that can mean whatever people want it to mean' (Vasta 2007, p.6). The multitude of usages of this term, as well as the seemingly interchangeable use of others, such as 'settlement' (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2011), 'adaptation' (Entzinger & Biezeveld 2003; Shakespeare-Finch & Wickham 2009), 'mutual adaptation' (UNESCO 2011), 'absorption' (Jakubowicz 2009) and 'incorporation' (Inglis 2007) add weight to Vasta's argument.

In the Australian context, integration was official public policy from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, resurfacing in policy rhetoric and public discourse early this century. Jakubowicz (2002, cited in Leuner 2007, p.83) states that integration is based on the notion that 'individuals can retain their group cultures while the group is accepted into wider society'. More recently in Australia, the term 'integration' has been perceived negatively by some academics (Jakubowicz nd; McPherson 2010) and also by some policy-makers who suggest it carries considerable 'freight' (Abbott 2006). Although integration is no longer policy, the term has continued to be part of public discourse.

The Australian Government's public policy is currently one of inclusion. As a result, the term 'integration' has been increasingly replaced by the broader concept of 'participation and inclusiveness'¹ (Lundy 2011). However, 'integration' is employed in the current study because it was prevalent in political and public discourse at the time this study commenced (July 2007), and is still widely used. In this paper, the term integration does not carry negative connotations. It reflects

¹ 'The Australian Government states [that] its vision of a socially inclusive society is one in which all Australians feel valued and have the opportunity to participate fully in the life of our society. Achieving this vision means that all Australians will have the resources, opportunities and capability to learn, work, engage in the community and have a voice' (Commonwealth of Australia 2008).

Jakubowicz's previously cited definition, as well as Inglis's conception of *incorporation*, which 'refers to the way in which migrants become part of their societies of residence' (Inglis 2007, p.187).

Integration is perceived as vital in maximising the social (including cultural and political) and economic benefits to the host society and to its migrants (Carrington, McIntosh & Walmsley 2007; Gurriá 2009; Lo Bianco 1987). The receptiveness of the host society towards migrants is seen as a crucial factor in integration (Liebig 2007; Murray 2010), with the notion of reciprocity frequently featuring in definitions and discussions of integration (Ager & Strang 2008; Entzinger & Biezeveld 2003; Vasta 2007). Host-language proficiency is perceived to be one of the biggest barriers to integration.

Integration and host language proficiency

Language is a source of individual, personal identity ... group and cultural identity ... national identity ... human identity. (Lo Bianco 1987, p.1)

Proficiency in a country's host language is seen to be fundamental to achieving 'full participation' (Ager & Strang 2008; Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2008a) or 'full integration' into a new society (Putman 2004, p.7). Psychosocially,² host language skills are viewed as 'absolutely vital' to building social cohesion by creating bridging and bonding social capital (Carrington, McIntosh & Walmsley 2007, p.xii); fostering a sense of shared values; increasing migrants' sense of self-worth; and reducing ethnic enclaves (Gurriá 2008). Insufficient host-language skills are seen as a major barrier to economic integration, especially in relation to addressing inequity and securing employment (Carrington, McIntosh & Walmsley 2007; Gurriá 2008; Liebig 2007). Various governments and researchers (such as Lo Bianco 1987, 2009; Norton 2008) make the point that language, culture and identity are linked. Put simply, the ability to understand and use a host country's language is seen by politicians and wider society as pivotal in improving social cohesion and facilitating migrants' sense of belonging.

Formally learning the host language

Formal language instruction is seen to be valuable in psychosocial terms by enabling the transference of cultural knowledge (including the social norms of the host society), increasing learners' self-esteem, self-confidence and social networks (Balatti, Black & Falk 2006), and in helping migrants negotiate new identities (Faine 2009; Lo Bianco 1987; Martin 1999; Norton 2008). Formal host-language provision is also seen as supporting economic integration by facilitating migrants' articulation into further study and providing pathways to work (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2008a; Entzinger & Biezeveld 2003).

Considerable extrinsic motivation forces are at work on adult migrants to learn the language of the host country. Over the last decade, these extrinsic factors have grown, particularly in Europe. Within the context of the European Union, Entzinger and Biezeveld (2003, p.49) contend that the desire of member states to encourage the 'adaptation' of migrants to their new country has resulted in acculturation³ featuring more strongly in integration policies. They suggest this emphasis on acculturation in Europe is evident 'by the large-scale introduction of language classes for immigrants, often of a mandatory nature' (p.45). The implementation of compulsory host-language instruction in

² The use of the term 'psychosocial' in this paper relates to 'the psychological development of the individual in relation to his or her social environment' (Webster's 2010).

³ Entzinger and Biezeveld (2003, p.9) define acculturation as 'the phenomenon that immigrants gradually take over certain major elements of their surrounding cultural environment, without completely abandoning their original cultural identity. Although the term 'acculturation' is used in some contexts, including in Australian psychological research (Murray 2010), it does not appear to be widely used in general discussions about migrants in Australia.

some countries serves to further highlight this policy goal and is seen as addressing perceived or existing concerns related to migrant integration.

Adult migrant English as a second language programming in Australia

Although English as a second language programs are not compulsory for adult migrants to Australia, the importance of migrants having, acquiring or, indeed, formally learning English, is evident in other public policy domains. For example, some applicants for skilled migrant visas and/or permanent residence visas are awarded 'points' towards their immigration according to their proficiency in English.⁴ The Adult Migrant English Program surcharge (or fee) embedded in immigration visas for some migrants with limited English also emphasises the importance of English skills. In addition, the language test component of the 2007 Citizenship Test also exemplifies the value placed by the government on migrants possessing, or developing, basic or *functional* English.⁵

Considerable research has been undertaken by the Australian Government into the integration process of recently arrived migrants (Continuous Survey of Australia's Migrants [Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2009, 2010]; Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia [Department of Immigration and Citizenship nd]). These studies have examined migrants' general experiences, including their workforce participation, as well as their views of their English proficiency. Other research has focused on the integration of particular groups of migrants; for example, Shakespeare-Finch and Wickham (2009) examined recently arrived Sudanese refugees' psychosocial 'adaptation' from a qualitative perspective, while Murray (2010) used a mixed methods research design to examine Sudanese refugees' 'resettlement' experiences. Migrants' general workforce integration has also been researched (see, for example, Liebig 2007), including, more specifically, refugees from visible minorities (Colic-Pseiker & Tilbury 2007). The importance of the role played by English as a second language teachers in explicitly assisting adult migrants plan for their possible future employment (Hanrahan 2009) has also been investigated. In relation to further studies undertaken by migrants, Miralles (2004) examined migrants' engagement in and their views of vocational education and training (VET) and uncovered negative perceptions of stand-alone English as a second language programs and their preference for English language support integrated into their mainstream VET studies.

Extensive research has been undertaken into English as a second language provision for adult migrants, particularly into the Adult Migrant English Program, which is a highly scrutinised program. This includes research into client satisfaction (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2008b), and how the programs can better meet the needs of particular groups of learners (see, for example, Burgoyne & Hull 2007 on Sudanese refugee learners). Much research into the Adult Migrant English Program was carried out by the former Adult Migrant English Program Research Centre and the National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research, including studies that examined various stakeholders' experiences and perceptions of adult language learning (see, for example, Wigglesworth 2003). Many of the findings of these studies have been applicable to the English as a second language delivery funded by the states and territories. The rationale and methodology of these and other studies such as: research into Australian adult migrant English as a second language learning strategies (Lunt 2000); Balatti, Black and Falk's examination (2006) of the social capital outcomes of learners who participated in literacy (and numeracy) programs conducted in the VET sector; and research

⁴ In Australia, the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is the test used by the government to determine some migrants' English proficiency for immigration purposes.

⁵ The Australian Government defines 'functional' English as having 'the basic language skills necessary to deal with everyday social situations and some work situations in English' (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2008b, p.5).

undertaken in New Zealand into adult student, teacher and provider perceptions of English as a second language learning (Walker 2005; White, Watts & Trlin 2002) have informed the scope of the current study.

This study

This paper presents findings from a longitudinal case study into the government-funded English as a second language provision for adult migrants. This research sought to examine one setting and its participants, over time, and present a nuanced description of adult English as a second language learning. Central to this study was an examination of migrants' experiences and perceptions of English as a second language programming, with particular emphasis on migrants' opinions of its role in facilitating their integration. The views of some of the specific centre's English as a second language teachers and program managers were also investigated, as these stakeholders have a significant influence on how migrants experience English language programs and the ways in which government policy objectives are translated into practice. As a result, this paper also discusses the relationship between language policy-in-intention, policy-in-implementation, and policy-in-experience (Guba 1984). The longitudinal approach adopted for this study enabled me to examine migrants' own, personal process of integration (Murray 2010) post their English language instruction.

Conceptual framework

This study shares the belief that 'language policies are not neutral statements but, rather, espouse particular values and goals' (Lo Bianco 1987, p.5). In adopting a sociocultural theory framework (Cross 2009; Lantolf & Poehner 2008), this paper reflects the view that one of the aims of language policy analysis is to 'better understand the broader social, cultural, and historical processes and contexts from which, and within which, language policies are produced and promulgated' (Cross 2009, p.23). Within this framework, the role of English proficiency in facilitating integration is primarily discussed in social and economic (specifically workforce participation) terms. This paper, therefore, considers stakeholders' perceptions of the psychosocial function of English as a second language programs and its economic impact in relation to migrants' articulation into further study and work.

In the following sections the methodology adopted for this study is explained, and the findings and conclusions are discussed.

Methodology

This case study adopted a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods approach (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner 2007). In so doing, it shares the qualitative researcher's belief that all 'research is value-bound ... and that knower and known cannot be separated because the subjective knower is the only source of reality' (Guba 1990, paraphrased in Johnson & Onwuegbuzie 2004, p.14). This research was informed by my professional experience as an English language teacher of adult migrants in Australia and, more recently, my experiences and perceptions of learning French as a government-funded migrant learner in Québec, Canada. At the time this study was undertaken, I was employed as an English as a second language teacher at the research site.

This study was undertaken at Jarrah Institute, a large multi-campus TAFE (technical and further education) institute in an Australian capital city. Its language centre, Jarrah Language Centre, is a large, profitable and entrepreneurial department. Since the late 1990s, the Jarrah Language Centre has delivered English as a second language programs to three types of students: state government-funded migrant learners (hereafter, called migrants), Commonwealth-funded Adult Migrant English Program clients, and full-fee-paying international (ELICOS⁶) students. These three student types are regularly combined in the same class.

At the time this study commenced (July 2007), there were 1202 learners studying in week-day English as a second language classes at the three Jarrah Institute campuses. Primary data for this study were collected only at the principal and largest of the three language centre campuses.

Of the 646 students enrolled in the centre's English as a second language programs, one-quarter (N = 163) were migrants (full-fee-paying international N = 449; Adult Migrant English Program⁷ N = 34). Due to the English language demands of this research, only intermediate and advanced level English language students were recruited to participate. Students were drawn from 15 full-time classes: ten classes had a general English focus, four were further study (mainstream) preparation programs, and only one was a work-specific course: Certificate III English for Office Administration. The teachers of these classes were also included in this research, as were two of the four Jarrah Language Centre managers. Three main methods were used to collect data: document review, surveys, and individual interviews.

Document review

A wide variety of documentation was analysed for this research, including government policy literature related to immigration, integration and, more specifically, English proficiency and English as a second language learning. In addition, newspaper articles, television programs, letters to editors, blogs and YouTube videos were examined to gauge the political ethos and public opinion relating to immigration, integration, migrants and adult English as a second language learning (Jakubowicz 2009; Markus 2010; Murray 2010). Consequently, contemporary issues that emerged in the policy and public domain were pursued with the participants; for example, notions of integration and 'Australian values' were discussed with migrants.

⁶ English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students.

⁷ AMEP clients were not recruited to participate in this research.

Historical and contemporary Jarrah Institute documents were also analysed. The language centre provided me with de-identified demographic data on all English as a second language learners enrolled in July 2007. These were valuable in assisting me to situate the researched group within their larger English language learner cohort. In addition, Jarrah Institute data, subsequently collected on the surveyed migrants, were also made available to me (in March 2011).

Student and teacher surveys

In July 2007, start-of-class surveys were disseminated to the 100 language centre migrants in levels 3, 4 and 5 (intermediate and advanced level) full-time English as a second language classes and their teachers. Sixty-one migrants (61%) completed the surveys (46 females and 15 males), and 26 of the 29 teacher surveys (90%) were collected (20 females and six males).

Broad migrant demographic data

The 61 migrants who completed the survey came from 17 different countries; Chinese-born migrants dominated (44%), with Korean-born migrants representing the second largest group (16%) (see appendix 1). Migrants ranged in age from 19 to 59 years old, with an average age of 35 years. The largest number of migrants was in the 31 to 40-year-old bracket (N = 24, 39%). Three-quarters of the learners in this study were women (N = 46), and female students dominated all age groups.

In terms of level of education, two-thirds of the group had completed degrees; nine of these had master's (seven females and two males), and one female had a PhD. Eight learners (13%) had vocational qualifications, and nearly one-fifth of the group had not completed post-school qualifications, including one migrant who had not finished high school (see appendix 1). This group's profile was generally representative of the Jarrah Language Centre's migrant cohort.

These migrants arrived in Australia between December 1998 and June 2007. The vast majority had some experience of learning English before immigrating (N = 52, 85%), ranging from three months to more than 20 years. Two-thirds of the group had studied English as a second language in Australia prior to their current course (N = 41). Of these, nearly two-thirds (N = 26/41, 63%) had previously undertaken English as a second language instruction at the centre. This retention rate would seem to suggest that these migrants held positive views of the English language programs offered at the centre.

Follow-up student interviews

Data from the 61 migrant surveys assisted me to select 16 migrants to interview at the end of their current English language course (December 2007). Purposeful sampling was used, and effort was made to select learners who presented with unique attributes, but who were also broadly representative of the centre's migrant cohort in terms of age, gender, and country of origin.

Although two of the four language centre managers were interviewed (one female, one male), migrants were the principal focus of this study. Fourteen⁸ migrants (11 females, and three males) were interviewed over two years (December 2007 to January 2010) (see appendix 2). These interviews were held four times at approximately eight-month intervals, the first interview occurring at the end of their Semester Two (July–December) 2007 course. This tracking sought to uncover:

- any changes to migrants' circumstances (for example, study or employment status)

⁸ Two of the 16 migrants (two young Chinese females) were not able to be contacted after their first interviews.

- migrants' post-course experiences in general and, more specifically, their experiences in using English
- migrants' sense of their own integration and their opinion of their English proficiency
- any possible shifts in migrants' perceptions of the value of their English as a second language course, particularly in terms of facilitating their integration.

Pseudonyms have been used in this paper to protect the identities of participants.

Limitations of the study

Even though the migrants selected to participate in this research possessed intermediate to advanced level English proficiency, I acknowledge that requiring migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds to express their beliefs, feelings and experiences in English has the potential to limit their ability to articulate precisely what they want to say. In addition, in reflecting its predominantly qualitative case study methodology, this paper does not suggest that the findings can be generalised and applied to other settings, particularly as the number of participants included in this research was not large. However, the findings from this study may resonate with individuals in other settings.

The following section discusses the findings from this study in terms of psychosocial and economic integration.

Findings

A variety of reasons were nominated by Jarrah Language Centre migrants for undertaking their English as a second language courses and, in general, their reasons reflected the government's – and the centre's – psychosocial and economic integration aims of adult English as a second language provision. The majority of comments made by language centre stakeholders were positive to very positive in terms of the effectiveness of the centre's programs in improving students' English and, thus, supporting their integration into Australian society.

Psychosocial integration

Many migrants commented on the positive impact of studying English as a second language in terms of their sense of self. They described the benefits of studying English as a second language as helping them to experience 'less anxieties' and feel 'more comfortable' in Australia. Nearly two-thirds of the group stated that they were undertaking their English classes to develop their confidence to use English (N = 39, 64%), which was the second most popular answer. This was seen to be beneficial in terms of assisting them to negotiate their lives in Australian society.

Learning English as a second language was perceived by both students and language centre personnel as an identity-challenging experience. The students saw their teachers to be a significant force in developing their skills and confidence in English, commenting favourably not only on the professional attributes of the centre's teachers, but also on their interpersonal skills. Yana summed this up stating, 'When teachers are friendly, it's help to study English'.⁹ In addition, a small number of migrants mentioned the relaxed and informal relationship that existed between them and their teachers (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2008a). Swarna, for example, described language centre teachers' 'easy way' of teaching by comparison with her experiences in India, where teachers taught in a 'very theoretical way', adding, 'Here [at the centre] we talk, we just laugh ... so that's a good way to improve our English'. Several teachers also suggested that the dynamic between students and teachers at the centre was potentially different from some migrants' first countries, and that this was psychosocially beneficial to learners.

Very few migrants nominated praise from teachers as an aspect of their language learning that they liked (N = 3, 5%). However, it seemed that praise from other groups of people was valued by migrants in terms of their self-concept and was seen by them as a positive force in their psychosocial integration. For example, in Yana's first interview, she commented on her daughter's criticism of her spoken English. By contrast, in her second interview, Yana recounted how she had felt 'very good' after receiving the following positive feedback on her improved spoken English skills from her daughter:

Ma! You improve your English very high because you speaking with me for fifteen *minutes* – with *me!* With *me!* Not your English teacher at [Jarrah Language Centre] because they wanted to understand you. But ... with *me!*

It may be that migrants perceived praise from individuals other than their teachers as more genuine, more believable, and, thus, a truer reflection of their linguistic competence.

⁹ All quotes from migrant students are as given.

The capacity of English as a second language programs to provide migrants with information about Australian life and culture was perceived positively by migrants and their teachers. In describing their reasons for studying English at Jarrah Language Centre, 44% of the group stated that they wanted to learn about Australian life (N = 27), and more than half of them stated that they liked learning about Australia (N = 33, 54%). Migrants commented that 'We are not only learning English, but also learning Australian culture', 'politics and Australian people as well', which were seen as important in helping migrants to 'get used to new life'. Migrants described the ways in which their English language programs had helped them to understand Australian society and enabled them to ask questions that would not be possible outside the classroom, a point also made by some centre staff.

Moreover, a number of migrants commented on the value of learning about Australian history. Yoko, for example, stated that learning about Australia's immigrant heritage in English language classes had highlighted to her the egalitarian nature of Australia and the opportunities that it afforded everyone:

We learnt lots of history of Australia ... [for example] about convicts ... It helped me to understand the culture more ... I think people [here] ... can start from zero. Like, anyone can start from zero point and achieve something.

It was clear that many migrants shared the view expressed by the government and some centre personnel: that formally learning English was one way of helping migrants to live an 'easier' life, and this included increasing their sense of security and protection. Several migrants specifically commented on the ways in which learning English had also increased their sociopolitical power, which is seen as a key aspect of integration. In his third interview (mid-2009), Sudanese-Australian Manut spoke in some detail about criticisms made in the media in 2007 by the federal Minister of Immigration, in relation to the perceived 'failure' of some Sudanese migrants to integrate (see also Jakubowicz 2009; Murray 2010). Manut commented that formally studying English as a second language was one way of empowering migrants through language, which would enable them to advocate on their own behalf:

You know, if you don't know a language ... you can't defend yourself and you can't even know your right[s] ... So, if the Minister say not good [things], how could I defend myself ... if I don't know the language? ... [So] I have to learn it.

Manut's comments serve to highlight the point made by the government and some language centre personnel: that studying English as a second language is a way of equipping migrants with the skills to undertake, as one of the teachers stated, more 'complex' tasks in society, which assist in, and are reflective of, migrants' integration. In Manut's case, learning English may have represented the opportunity to be empowered in a way that was not afforded to him in his country of birth. It seemed that it was important to him to claim this right by developing his English.

The centre's English as a second language programs were perceived by some migrants and centre personnel as valuable in providing an environment in which migrants were able to expand their social network (see also Balatti, Black & Falk 2006; Shakespeare-Finch & Wickham 2009). Over one-third of the migrants (N = 22, 36%) nominated one of their aims in undertaking their English language courses was to meet new people and make friends. Although this number does not seem particularly significant, all interviewed migrants commented on the psychosocial benefits this afforded them. Nearly half of the teachers thought that 'networking' was a reason for their students undertaking their language programs (N = 12, 46%).

Jarrah Language Centre students and teachers also highlighted the ways in which English language courses enabled migrants to mix with learners with similar experiences. This solidarity of experience

was perceived to offer migrants support and guidance, with one stating, '[we] suffer from same problem [so we] feel comfortable and better'. This capacity of English language programs to enable migrants to meet, as one teacher stated, 'people in similar situations as themselves' was seen by language centre stakeholders as a meaningful psychosocial aspect of undertaking English language instruction.

Furthermore, migrants stated that they liked learning with students from other countries and suggested that their courses afforded them direct experience of the multicultural fabric of Australian life. Several interviewed migrants described the monocultural makeup of their countries of birth, and, thus, their limited experiences of different cultures. They explained how undertaking their English language courses had helped them to gain greater insight into various cultures, something that they (and their teachers) believed may not have been as readily available to them without this opportunity. One migrant encapsulated these psychosocial benefits of studying English as a second language at Jarrah Language Centre, stating:

It makes people feel good ... [because we] can understand other countries' migrants ... So when I meet ... migrants ... from [other] countries, I don't have any prejudice or discrimination; make [me] feel familiar with them. [So, the language centre] was a very good place to meet other countries' people. [Migrants often] live in Australia in a very restrict[ed] community ... but [English as a second language classes] gave ... opportunity to meet another country's people so it was good.

Studying English as a second language was perceived by migrants and centre personnel, as well as policy-makers, as beneficial in providing an opportunity for migrants to mix in this wider multicultural social sphere. More generally, one migrant suggested that it is easier to integrate in Australia than in her Asian country 'because everyone is different here'. The centre's English programs were perceived as valuable in highlighting this reality and in giving migrants direct and meaningful experience of it.

As previously noted, Jarrah Language Centre had three types of English as a second language learners: state-funded migrants, full-fee-paying international students and Commonwealth-funded Adult Migrant English Program clients. All but one of the interviewed migrants (N = 13/14) in this study supported combining student types in the same class, as did nearly all centre personnel. Learning English with fee-paying international students was seen to have had a positive impact on migrant learners. Migrants perceived these classmates as good role models, with three migrants stating that 'international people is more work harder', so '[we] get motivation', and, as a result, 'You even push yourself harder, harder'. A number of migrants described how the fee-paying international students at Jarrah Language Centre had influenced their post-course further study goals, with Gizem suggesting:

International people ... paying money so they quickly wants to learn [English] and go to their course ... They coming and studying [and] they go to uni ... I say [to myself], 'Maybe why not? Maybe I can do that. If they do ... I can do [it], too.'

Reflecting these views, most centre personnel saw fee-paying international students as exerting a positive influence in terms of increasing migrants' 'motivation', and 'migrants tend to learn faster when [full-fee-paying international students] are mixed in the class'. Several teachers described the ways in which 'the mix' 'lifts the standard' of the class. Others commented on the positive "'can do" attitude' of the fee-paying international students and how, in their experience, this 'probably inspires [migrants] on to undertake more mainstream courses than they might otherwise have done'.

More generally, centre staff and some of the interviewed migrants suggested that the 'enthusiasm' and 'energy' of the younger fee-paying international learners were positive influences on the centre's

migrant learners. Certainly, the fee-paying international cohort at Jarrah Language Centre made a significant contribution to broadening the age range, gender mix and spread of nationalities represented in the centre's total English as a second language learner population and which the centre endeavoured to reflect in each class. Some migrants in this study stated that it was this diversity of cohort which had initially attracted them to studying English as a second language at Jarrah Language Centre.

A small number of students made some suggestions about how the centre's programs could be improved, such as including more Australian content, more homework, a greater focus on explicit error correction, and more volunteer tutors. However, one recurring suggestion which emerged from a number of migrants was the need for the classes to focus more on equipping migrants with English that related to their daily lives, especially via spoken activities.

Real-life English

The most popular reason given by students for undertaking their English as a second language course (July 2007) was to improve their spoken English (N = 49, 80%). Only one-third (N = 21, 34%) of the group stated that they practised English outside the classroom because, as a number of migrants suggested, they 'have not environment to speak English'. All but one teacher commented that they believed their students were studying English as a second language to increase their speaking ability. Language centre stakeholders clearly agreed that developing better spoken English was crucial to facilitating integration and that the English as a second language classroom was the best environment for migrants to achieve this.

However, the notion of knowing English, but not being able (or confident) to speak in English, emerged as an issue for a number of migrants. One student summarised this problem, stating, 'Because, in my heart, I know English, but I just don't know how to use it'. Consequently, even though some migrants commented favourably on the opportunities they had to speak English in class, a number of them – including those who were undertaking further study in the English language – stated during and after the course that they wanted more occasions to speak English in their classroom. One surveyed student contended that teachers were operating from a false assumption in relation to learners' preferences, 'Because in the classroom the teacher thinks that writing is important but immigrants want to know the way how to speak in English'. A number of migrants stated that their teachers needed to include more opportunities for students to use, what we came to call, 'real world' or 'real life' English, with some of the core group of migrants repeatedly making this suggestion in several of their interviews.

Migrants argued that they valued learning real-life English related to 'Aussie English', including Australian slang, idioms, and pronunciation, as well as more polite forms of spoken English. However, in discussing their desire to learn to use real-life English, migrants more often stated that they wanted to improve their general conversation skills for 'everyday living'. One migrant, for example, stated that she was 'very weak at everyday ... casual conversation', and could only participate in 'very short conversation, [because] I can't continue'. She expressed the view that 'most migrants need real-world conversation', and her view of the worth of this type of speaking activity was borne out by the comments of other students.

Other occasions for using language in speaking activities suggested by migrants included 'scenario[s]' or role plays. One migrant, for instance, spoke enthusiastically of a teacher with whom she had studied at another migrant language centre who had regularly set pair role plays, such as talking with

their child's teacher, or a new neighbour. She spoke of the benefits of such activities, as well as their application to real life:

It was very good exercise ... and real situation ... [because] some vocabulary, I know vocabulary, but I can't use them properly, but role playing make me use that properly ... [So this speaking] exercise make me feel more comfortable.

She was not the only migrant who spoke of the integrative benefits of speaking activities that, in effect, functioned as 'rehearsals for life'.

The survey showed that, for some migrants who had dependent children in Australia, maximising their speaking in class was important. These parents suggested that because they wanted their children to maintain their first language(s), they had limited opportunities to use English at home. Furthermore, for some migrants with school-aged children, there was a sense that the formal learning of English in a classroom, particularly its ability to develop their speaking skills, was important in assisting them to fulfil their responsibilities as parents. Ten students (16%, all female) nominated the desire to help their children to develop good English as one of their reasons for participating in their July–December 2007 English language course.

Of the 14 interviewed migrants, nine were parents and eight of these had infant or school-aged children. Most of these migrants also spoke of the importance of spoken English to their roles as parents, specifically in terms of assisting their child academically and socially. Several migrant mothers contended that their English language studies at the centre were important to them in relation to their children's acceptance within their peer group. This view of the psychosocial integrative benefits to migrant parents of learning English was echoed by one of the centre teachers who suggested that some migrants formally learn English to help them to 'especially [deal with their] children as they get older and their children's friends'.

Another migrant mother, Sunny, seemed to lament the extent to which her limited speaking skills had inhibited her ability to interact with other 'Australian' parents at her daughter's netball matches and training sessions:

so it's a little bit pressure for me because [they are] Australian girls and ... during the games and ... practice, most mums stay there, so it's really difficult for me to stay there. Just a 'Hi', then something, then finish.

She explained that her daughter had now left this netball team, and Sunny believed her own inadequate spoken English skills were implicated in this decision, something that appeared to trouble her. It seemed, to some extent, that Sunny's self-assessed limited real-life English had had negative integrative consequences for her and her daughter, and had challenged Sunny's self-concept. She and other migrants expressed the view that the inclusion of more real-life speaking tasks in classes would have been beneficial in helping them deal with such real-world social situations.

More broadly, several interviewed migrants spoke of the ways in which their own English language studies had facilitated an interdependent English language learning relationship with their children, which these migrants found advantageous in terms of their own integration process. Xi, for instance, spoke positively of the dynamic between her and her senior secondary school-aged son regarding their studies, and how this was mutually beneficial for them, stating, 'Actually, we help each other!' To some of the migrant parents of school-aged children, formally learning English seemed not only central to their own integration and, as a result, their psychosocial wellbeing, but also by association – and, perhaps, more importantly – to that of their children.

Another aspect of real-life English that emerged in this study related to students' understanding of Australian swear words, and its importance to migrants' integration. Ping enthusiastically described a 'swearing lesson' her teacher had conducted in her advanced English language class. She explained that the formal classroom environment had enabled her to learn a form of real-life English that she believed was important to her psychosocial integration, one that, otherwise, would have been inaccessible to her:

It's a very special thing what she told us. We should know about some Australian bad words! It's very important because if she, if nobody teach us, we don't know. [So] maybe when someone swear something, we just laughing or give him smile, so it's not good. So when she taught us, 'Oh! ... Oh, yes, yes!' [Then, we understood] ... Before [this teacher], nobody, no-one, teach us this.

This lesson highlights not only this teacher's 'brave' classroom content but, more importantly, the potential real-life psychosocial integrative benefits to students of teachers doing so.

Despite some migrants stating that they wanted to participate in more real-life English and more speaking in class, a few commented on how they equated the development of their English skills with explicitly learning grammar. One of these migrants, Yoko, who was undertaking a level 5 class after completing three lower-level courses at the language centre explained:

I felt I was doing more when I was learning grammar; like, more studying; [I] felt like [I was] studying, but now it feels more like everyday thing.

It may be that this comment not only reflects her preferred learning style (something she acknowledged), but also that her advanced-level English as a second language course was no longer as effective for her. Perhaps, her psycholinguistic needs might have been better served by leaving the English as a second language classroom environment and articulating into further study or work.¹⁰ Moreover, this example highlights the potential difficulty for teachers in meeting the various learning styles and needs of English as a second language students, and striking the right balance between real-life 'everyday' English and more grammar-focused language content. It may suggest that teachers need to combine both elements, as well as explicitly contextualise English as a second language activities more often to their students.

Even though some students stated that learning correct grammar was important, it seemed that migrants generally believed that increased practice in using spoken English in the classroom, especially real-life English, was more important to their psychosocial integration. They expressed the view that the classroom was an environment in which they could – and should – have more chances to speak English than, it would seem, most had in the *real world*. Including more speaking tasks in classes was perceived by migrants to be beneficial in increasing their confidence and competence in speaking in English, which as a result would support their integration.

The question, then, relates to *why* migrants were not wholly satisfied with the opportunities they were granted to speak English in class. The discrepancy between perceived learner preference, teacher awareness of learners' expectations, and what was included in English as a second language classes prompts further questions. Were the teachers aware that according to some migrants they were not including enough opportunities for students to engage in speaking tasks? Did teachers, in fact, believe they granted their students many (and sufficient) occasions in which to use spoken English? In discussing my initial findings with a number of the centre's teachers, they were not surprised that migrants had recommended that classes incorporate more speaking activities. It may be

¹⁰ Yoko did not enrol in another English as a second language program after this course.

that the centre's teachers need to have more discussion with students to clarify students' needs in relation to how to include more opportunities for migrants to learn about, and practise, 'real life' spoken English.

In general, studying English as a second language was perceived by migrants and centre personnel as a challenging experience, including in terms of learners' self-concept, but ultimately a linguistically, psychologically and socially rewarding one. In many instances migrants and teachers saw the courses as the best opportunity migrants had for improving their English, and their confidence to use English.

Although migrants' general psychosocial integration is one factor in the funding of English as a second language courses, it does not appear to be the dominant focus of government. The following section analyses the ways in which adult English as a second language programs were perceived as assisting migrants in terms of their economic integration, principally in relation to migrants' work and further study pathways.

Economic integration

[Jarrah Language Centre] can offer you pathways to further study or employment.

(Centre publicity literature, January 2011)

Further study

Moving into mainstream study was a significant short-term goal for the majority of the 61 surveyed students at the language centre. In explaining their reasons for undertaking their July–December 2007 English language program, two-thirds of the learners (N = 40) stated they wanted to improve their English in order to move into further (mainstream) study; this was the second most popular answer.

Migrants were also asked what they wanted to do immediately after their current (July–December 2007) language course. Slightly more than half of the group (N = 33) wanted to articulate into mainstream study, and/or nearly two-fifths (N = 23) wanted to enrol in another English as a second language course¹¹ (see table 1).

Table 1 Migrants' immediate post-2007 English as a second language course goals, July 2007

Post-2007 English as a second language course goals	Gender		Total	
	Female	Male	Number	%
Undertake a mainstream course	26	7	33	54.1
Do another English as a second language course	17	6	23	37.7
Get a paid job	16	2	18	29.5
Do voluntary work	1	2	3	4.9
Take a break from studying	2	0	2	3.3
Other: 'Look after family'	1	0	1	1.6
Other: 'Run my own business'	0	1	1	1.6

Notes: Multiple answers possible. N = 61 students.

It is not possible to ascertain the mainstream study pathways of language centre migrants who subsequently undertook further study with other educational providers. However, data collected by Jarrah Institute in March 2011 show favourable articulation statistics by the language centre's

¹¹ Simultaneously undertaking an English as a second language course and a mainstream program was possible at Jarrah Institute.

migrants into the institute’s mainstream courses. Nearly one-third (N = 19) of the 61 migrants enrolled in certificate, diploma or degree level mainstream courses in Jarrah Institute after undertaking English as a second language programs at the centre. Another four migrants undertook short courses at the institute, and six had undertaken mainstream study at the institute either during or prior to their July–December 2007 English language course (see table 2). These statistics seem to confirm not only the advantages to students of providing pathways to further education but, also, the potential economic benefits to the language centre and Jarrah Institute of migrants doing so.

Table 2 Migrants’ mainstream study pathways at Jarrah Institute, March 2011

Jarrah Institute mainstream study pathways	Gender		Total
	Female	Male	
Post-2007 English as a second language course (certificate and above qualifications)	16	3	19
Post-2007 English as a second language course (short courses)	2	2	4
Pre- or during July–December 2007 English as a second language course	5	1	6
Total	23	6	29

The majority of migrants in this research were focused on moving into further study as a pathway to paid employment. More than half of the group (N = 30/54, 56%) nominated undertaking mainstream study as necessary in helping them to secure paid employment, and two-thirds of them stated that their English language course was important in assisting them to build their English skills to enable their subsequent articulation into further study. As a result, it seems that migrants perceived the centre’s English as a second language program as playing a significant role in facilitating their longer-term economic integration goals, a view shared by the language centre and its personnel.

It seems reasonable to conclude that the location of the language centre within Jarrah Institute had some impact on migrants’ uptake of further education at the institute. This view was expressed by several teachers participating in this study, who specifically commented on the institute’s educational articulation arrangements. One teacher praised the ‘clear pathway[s] offered’ to students, stating that ‘students get a good deal here in that both [fee-paying international learners] and migrant students can make the transition from a language course to a mainstream course’. Furthermore, the English language proficiency requirements of many of the institute’s mainstream courses¹² may also have been perceived by some migrants (as it was by a number of their teachers) as an advantage of studying at the language centre. Moreover, as previously mentioned, some migrants described the impact of studying with other English language students, some of whom encouraged them to aim higher in terms of further study goals. These factors were perceived positively by a number of the language centre stakeholders in relation to migrants’ economic (and psychosocial) integration.

One of the centre’s managers commented that the migrants studying there tend to move in and out of English language programs, as a result of personal or work commitments, and the data suggest that such movement did occur. It may be that the centre also acted as a safety net, one which migrants could return to, and/or one that simultaneously supported their mainstream studies. It seems that the centre’s English as a second language courses were seen by a majority of centre stakeholders as a

¹² For most institute mainstream courses, migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds need an English as a second language entry score of 2+ (‘Social Proficiency’) on the International Second Language Proficiency Ratings (ISLPR), which can be achieved by undertaking language centre courses.

stepping stone to further study which, in turn, functioned as a pathway to future employment, thereby reflecting government goals.

Work

As previously described, the migrants were a relatively highly educated cohort. In terms of their pre-immigration professional work experience, most of them had been employed (N = 49, 80%), and the majority were in middle-to-high-status professions in their areas of qualification (N = 42/49, 86%). When surveyed, one-third of the group stated that they had been in paid employment in Australia. Eight types of work were described, with most migrants having been employed in entry-level jobs (see table 3).

Table 3 Migrants' paid employment post-immigration, July 2007

Type of paid work	Gender		Total
	Female	Male	
Factory/packing work	3	2	5
Hospitality	2	2	4
Teaching	3	0	3
Retail	2	0	2
Cleaning	0	2	2
Self-employed	2	0	2
Personal care assistant	1	0	1
Driver	0	1	1
Total	13	7	20

Note: N = 20 (33%).

Table 4 shows that in July 2007, only one-fifth of the group was in paid employment (N = 12): eight part-time and four full-time, and in work similar to that described in table 3. Thirty per cent of the group stated that they were looking for work, and proportionally more males were in or seeking work (N = 9, 60%) than females (N = 21, 47%). Half of the group stated that they were not looking for paid employment. It may be that some of these migrants had no need to secure employment and/or had family commitments, including caring for children, which made paid work too difficult. Likewise, some may have been receiving welfare payments; thus, employment may not have been a necessity for them.

Table 4 Migrants' paid employment status by gender, July 2007

Employment status	Gender		Total	
	Female	Male	Number	%
Working full-time	1	3	4	6.6
Working part-time	6	2	8	13.3
Not working, looking for work	14	4	18	30.0
Not working, not looking for work	24	6	30	50.0
Total	45	15	60	100.0

Notes: Missing data N = 1. N = 60.

In describing their reasons for undertaking their current (July–December 2007) English language program, two out of every five migrants stated that they wanted to improve their English to get a job (or a better job: N = 27, 44%), which was the fourth ranked answer (equal with learning about

Australia). This was considerably less than the two-thirds of the group who nominated further study as a reason for undertaking their current course at the language centre.

The previous section showed that articulating into further study immediately after their July–December 2007 language class was a goal for just over half these migrants. Moving into paid work, however, did not seem to be immediately pressing for the majority of migrants. Regarding the post-course goals of the July–December 2007 group, slightly less than one-third (N = 18, 30%) wanted to be in paid employment, and nearly all of them were female (N = 16/18) (see table 1). The comments of some of these women suggest that they wanted to secure paid employment (including low-skill-level work) as a way of facilitating their economic (and social) integration, while practising their English in the real world.

One aspect of the program that I had wanted to investigate was whether migrants were as focused on articulating into work as government policy wanted them to be.¹³ It appeared that a significant number of migrants in this study did want to secure work in the longer-term, but not as many in the short-term. It seemed that, while migrants and some of their teachers saw paid employment as an important aspect of integration, formally learning English – and later undertaking further study – was viewed as one way migrants could pave their way to *better* employment.

In fact, over the last decade, the Jarrah Language Centre has significantly increased the number of English for employment courses it delivers at the institute's second largest campus in response to government labour market policy aims and industry demand for employees in particular fields, such as the engineering and health professions. These courses, most of which required upper intermediate-level English proficiency on enrolment, have been in high demand with migrant (and fee-paying international) learners, popular with employers and government, and have been deemed as producing favourable work outcomes.

'Achievable' employment expectations

An occasional concern expressed by centre staff is that some of the centre's migrants appear to hold unrealistic post-course employment aspirations; the need for realistic goals is alluded to in a government report¹⁴ (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2008a). Migrants were asked in July 2007 to describe the paid work they would like to do in the future. In general, these migrants aspired to securing work which seemed achievable in terms of the level of English required. In comparing the 61 migrants' pre-immigration qualifications and professional experience with their stated preferred future paid employment, in some cases the migrants' nominated future work was quite different from the paid employment they had undertaken in their first countries, and, most often, at a lower level.

Students were asked what they believed they needed to do to secure their preferred future job.¹⁵ Not surprisingly, English proficiency was seen as the biggest 'problem' in terms of economic integration. The most frequently nominated response by migrants was improve their English skills (N = 44/54, 81%), followed by undertake further study (N = 30/54, 56%), with 37% of the group (N = 20/54) describing Australian work experience as an important factor in getting their preferred job. Four surveyed migrants commented on the lack of attention paid to their pre-immigration work experience

¹³ The Commonwealth-funded Adult Migrant English Program tender contracts which were announced in 2010, for example, placed greater, and more explicit, emphasis on English as a second language programs articulating migrants into work as quickly as possible.

¹⁴ The Adult Migrant English Program 'helps (migrants) ... to achieve *realistic* goals such as employment, further study and social participation' (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2008a, p.7, my emphasis).

¹⁵ This question allowed for multiple answers.

by employers in Australia, and how this – and their lack of Australian work experience – made securing paid employment difficult, a point raised in the literature (Colic-Pseiker & Tilbury 2007; Liebig 2007). It seemed that some migrants perceived undertaking English courses and subsequently moving into mainstream studies (particularly those that included a practical placement component, such as childcare, IT, and hospitality) as an effective way of creating a bridge to paid work.

Although voluntary work is recognised as a pathway to paid employment (Volunteering Australia 2010), such work did not rate highly with migrants as a post-course goal (N = 3), with centre teachers correct in assuming that future voluntary work was a low priority for the centre's English language learners (N = 3). Several migrants described volunteering they undertook within their first language community, and the bonding social capital benefits this afforded them, reflecting the research findings of Volunteering Australia (2007). Some of them also commented on the potential advantages of undertaking voluntary work that required them to speak English. One learner commented that the language centre's programs could be improved if '[they] give ... opportunities to do some voluntary works [so we can] use English', and three other females suggested that a voluntary work-placement officer at Jarrah Institute would be a valuable way of helping students to engage in such work.

Jarrah Institute did provide some information to help all students to pursue voluntary work themselves. However, it may be that it is difficult for migrants to move into English-speaking voluntary work without tangible assistance. In light of the government's increased push to get migrants into employment (as evident in the increasing number of English language programs that have an explicit work focus), it may be that the language centre is well placed to advocate for and provide a bridge to voluntary work for migrants outside their language/cultural groups.

Interviewed migrants' work and further study experiences and outcomes

The majority of the 14 migrants who were researched over a two-and-a-half-year period achieved favourable further study and work outcomes. By mid-2008, six of them (all female) had moved into mainstream studies, five at Jarrah Institute, and one had enrolled in another English language course at the language centre. Three other females had taken a break from study and were not working, while the remaining female had found paid employment (full-time contract). Two of the three males had secured full-time casual employment by mid-2008, and the other male was undertaking a literacy course. Interestingly, for half of these migrants (N = 7), these short-term, post-course outcomes were different from those they had articulated in mid-2007 (see appendix 3).

In the longer-term, by January 2010, 11 of the 14 migrants were in paid work, and nine of them were satisfied with their current type of work and level of employment (that is, part-time or full-time). In relation to the nine migrants (all female) who had undertaken further study, by January 2010 six of them had completed Jarrah Institute certificate or diploma qualifications; four of these stated that they were satisfied with their employment in their chosen field of study.

In terms of the impact of the centre's English as a second language courses, all 14 migrants believed that the Jarrah Language Centre program had been beneficial in preparing them for moving into further study and/or work. They commented that these courses had equipped them with some of the academic skills necessary to undertake further study, as well as some of the general skills needed to function in the workplace. In addition, several of the group who undertook mainstream studies at Jarrah Institute also commented favourably on the academic support they had received through the Jarrah Language Centre's Learning Skills Unit. These migrants described the ways in which the English

as a second language-qualified teachers in this unit assisted them to negotiate the academic requirements of mainstream study at the institute.

Staying too long in an English as a second language classroom was seen by some participants as potentially stifling migrants' integration. Several migrants stated that, at a certain point, they felt they had needed to leave this environment and extend their English in the 'real world' of work or further study, a view also expressed by some language centre personnel. For some migrants, this desire to move beyond English language instruction seemed to be primarily driven by a desire to earn money. However, some also viewed it as significant in terms of enabling them to mix with a wider group of people, including 'Aussies', which they perceived as valuable in facilitating their integration. Several migrants who completed further study suggested that their academic achievements – particularly by comparison with local students – contributed to an increase in their sense of achievement and self-worth.

In discussions with the interviewed migrants over time, it appeared that most of them were satisfied with the paid employment they had secured. Most of those who, pre-immigration, had achieved a high level of qualification and/or professional experience did not express concern about their loss of professional status. Their comments seemed to suggest that they accepted lower-level work as a reality of the migration experience, particularly in terms of their language proficiency and, for some, their age. Moreover, some migrants stated that they looked forward to trying to secure employment in a different occupation. Some of the younger migrants perceived their current entry-level work as a way of achieving their short-term integrative goals, which included home ownership, with several stating they believed they would achieve their longer-term career goals.

However, two highly qualified female migrants struggled to make the transition into work. One of them, Xi, did not achieve her goal of securing paid employment after completing her only English as a second language course at Jarrah Language Centre (July–December 2007). Instead, she moved into mainstream study at Jarrah Institute, and later articulated into a degree at a neighbouring university. In January 2011, she contacted me, stating she was also undertaking voluntary work, which, she explained, 'makes me more confident and optimistic to the future'. Even though Xi had not achieved the level of economic integration that she repeatedly stated was her main objective throughout this study, she seemed to have maintained the drive and determination to reach her goal.

In contrast, Sunny seemed frustrated by her employment status in Australia, and her inability to secure paid work associated with her area of expertise (psychology). In her second interview (2008), she stated, 'I need to little bit adjust my hope ... I need to make my [employment] expectation lower ... [and find a job] in a different area'. In mid-2009, she commented that she intended to look for retail work, after deciding against her earlier intention of pursuing aged care work; however, by January 2010, she was still undertaking an Australian qualification in counselling. Although Sunny stated that this course had been valuable in increasing her understanding of Australian society, and she was glad her family had migrated, it was clear that she missed her previous career, and the professional – and personal – sense of fulfilment it had given her.

In summary, most of the migrants interviewed achieved their further study and/or employment goals in a comparatively short period of time, and all of them perceived these pathways as assisting their integration. For this core group, and for some of those surveyed, it seems that the Jarrah Institute VET environment itself exerted some influence on migrants' work and further study aspirations.

Perceived benefits of government-funded English as a second language programs

A number of migrants expressed their gratitude to the government for funding their English language courses. It was clear that some perceived the provision of their language instruction as symbolic of Australian Government commitment to supporting and valuing migrants. To some migrants, studying with full-fee-paying international students seemed to accentuate the financial ‘good deal’ afforded to the centre’s migrant learners. Several also stated that commensurate host-language instruction was not available in their first countries, further highlighting to them the financial commitment by the government to immigrant integration via the funding of English language programs. Some language centre staff members also commented positively on the government’s funding of English language instruction, with one teacher, himself a migrant, stating, ‘Compared to other countries, I think that our migrants are extremely lucky with the very generous funding that our government provides for their English as a second language classes’.

When asked why they thought Australian governments funded English language programs for adults, a number of migrants highlighted the reciprocal benefits of integration to both migrants and Australia. Some discussed the individual advantages to migrants of their English language instruction, and the collective benefits to society as a whole, including in relation to social cohesion. Some spoke of how undertaking these language courses helps Australia to be a more ‘peaceful’, ‘harmonised’ and ‘tolerised’ [sic] society. The classroom learning of English was seen by some migrants as a unifying force, therefore contributing to ‘less conflicts, less misunderstandings’.

Some migrants also commented on the financial benefits to their own lives in terms of securing work and the associated psychosocial benefits this afforded them. Jin, for instance, stated, ‘If I’m working, it make me money, it make me feel better [about myself]’. In addition, a number of migrants made the point that formally learning English helps them to ‘contribute more to Australia’. It seemed that, to some migrants, the notion of financially contributing (and, to some, not claiming welfare payments) was part of their conception of integration, thereby reflecting one of the implicit government goals in relation to migrant ‘participation’.

Furthermore, some migrants specifically emphasised the economic advantages to Australia in getting migrants into work, paying tax and, thereby, assisting the funding of social programs such as English as a second language provision. Ping encapsulated this in her comment:

I think government ... help the people to learn English ... and, after [migrants] get good language they can do some ... job ... support this country ... pay the tax and the government get you money back again! It’s a good circle!

Although a number of migrants discussed the broader social and economic advantages that English as a second language programs provided Australian society, migrants more frequently highlighted the benefits these classes afforded them.

Integration means ...? How migrants define and experience integration

I feel everything is OK here; I feel people talk with me nicely, accept me nicely, but integrate is a *big word*.
(Swarna, 2009)

The view that integration can be a nebulous concept (Entzinger & Biezeveld 2003; Jakubowicz nd; UNESCO 2011; Vasta 2007) proved to be somewhat true in this study. In their first interviews at the end of 2007, the interviewed migrants were asked if they knew of the term ‘integration’ and, if so,

they were asked to define it. Some stated that they had heard the term and several had an understanding of its meaning. Despite some difficulties with definitions, all 14 interviewed migrants stated that they felt integrated, or 'partly integrated', into Australian society, and all of them expressed the view that their connection to Australia had increased over time (January 2010).

Migrants described this in relation to how they felt 'comfortable' or 'more comfortable' in Australia, and how they 'half belong' or 'part belong'. Some migrants described their integration in terms of 'I feel like I'm Australian'; 'I always care about Australia[n] things'; and 'I used to this life'. Some also explained how Australia feels like their 'home', 'house', or '[It is] getting ... like Australia is my place', and how they missed Australia when visiting their countries of birth. Sudanese-born Australian Manut, when asked if he felt 'part of the community', agreed stating, 'Yeah, of course, of course ... There is no difference between me and Australian people.' It was clear that migrants believed participating in English as a second language courses had contributed to their sense of belonging.

Although English was perceived to be their biggest barrier to integration, those interviewed also described other ways in which their integration was limited. Reflecting Shakespeare-Finch and Wickham's 2009 research finding, several migrants stated that integration requires socialising with a broad cross-section of the community beyond the classroom, something which some felt they were not readily able to do. Swarna explained this when discussing her definition of integration:

I need to involve in social activity and communicate with other Australians ... to become a part of Australian society ... [and mix with] different nationality people ... for me, integration means other people ... different group of peoples.

As a result, formally learning English as a second language, undertaking mainstream study, and being in the workforce were perceived by both stakeholder groups as beneficial in providing an opportunity for migrants to mix in this wider social milieu. Moreover, a small number of interviewed migrants (all but one of whom were female) stated that they wanted to form friendships with people who did not speak their language, those whom several migrants defined as 'Aussies'. This, they suggested, would help them to feel even more integrated, and, also, was a sign of integration.

Migrants agreed with the government perspective that securing work is a significant step in integration. However, some migrants (and centre staff) perceived integration as more than just securing work. Although ten of the 14 interviewed migrants secured consistent paid work during this study, some of them explained that they still felt other aspects of their lives limited their ability to integrate. In addition, work per se did not necessarily assist migrants to feel integrated, especially if it did not require them to speak much English and/or if it was within their first-language community. One migrant who worked in a voluntary capacity in her language community expressed a level of frustration with this situation. Another female who was in paid employment was adamant that she did not want to take work that involved caring for those who spoke her first language, believing this would inhibit her integration into Australian society.

In their second-last interviews (2009), several migrants related other people's perceptions of these migrants' increasing 'Australianness'. It seemed that their integration was defined – at least by some others in the community – as not entirely dependent on their English proficiency. Magda, in explaining that she felt integrated, recounted a recent conversation between her and one of her 'Australian' clients:

Yesterday my client said, 'Oh, you look like Australian!' [Both laugh] ... and I said, 'Why?' [The client said] 'Because every Australian look like you.' But I said, 'Oh, but my English is not really Australian'. And she said, 'Oh, don't worry, don't worry!'

In relation to the value of undertaking English as a second language courses and their capacity to help migrants 'belong', Jarrah Language Centre stakeholders shared the Australian governments' positive views of these English language programs and their capacity to facilitate integration. As one migrant stated, 'If we study together we not only learn English, but also it make us become the part of Australia.'

Conclusions and implications

Jarrah Language Centre's migrant students, teachers and managers viewed English as a second language programs as valuable in facilitating migrants' psychosocial and economic integration. Migrants indicated their high levels of satisfaction with their English language courses, particularly in terms of the psychosocial benefits the programs afforded them. Their perceptions accord with the views of language centre personnel as well as with government policy rhetoric and evaluations (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2008b) in relation to the benefits of English as a second language provision. The classroom was seen by the stakeholders (students, teachers and managers) as providing an accessible, English-rich environment that was not available to most migrants in their 'normal' lives.

Four out of every five migrants stated that improving their spoken English was one of the reasons for undertaking the 2007 course, with their teachers overwhelmingly expressing their belief that this was an aim of the centre's learners. However, even though migrants valued the speaking opportunities the language centre classes afforded them, a notable number of migrants stated that they wanted even more chances to learn about informal, real-world English and, in particular, to speak informal English. It seems that ongoing discussion is needed between students and teachers throughout their courses in terms of the types of speaking tasks migrants value, and how teachers can best meet learners' desire for more speaking activities in the classroom, especially in relation to assisting migrants' integration.

In terms of economic integration, stakeholders agreed that English as a second language courses were valuable in helping migrants to move into mainstream study and employment. In contrast to Miralles's research findings (2004), Jarrah Language Centre students appreciated stand-alone English language instruction, and valued the general and specific ways in which it developed their English skills in preparation for subsequent further study and work. The aspirations of other English language learners, including full-fee-paying international students, were perceived to have exerted a positive influence on migrants in the classroom and in relation to some migrants' post-course further study goals.

The location of the language centre within a large TAFE institute seemed to have had some impact on the uptake of mainstream study by migrants, and undertaking English language studies at the centre was perceived as helping some migrants to articulate into mainstream institute courses. Some migrants stated that studying at the Jarrah Language Centre had enabled them to develop an association with Jarrah Institute, which meant that they felt comfortable in pursuing mainstream studies at the institute. Moreover, centre stakeholders suggested that the institute had clearly articulated pathways, which it would seem assisted a number of migrants to make the seamless transition from English as a second language learning to mainstream study. This was not only beneficial to migrants, but also to the institute and, arguably, the government in terms of national and international educational participation targets.

Most migrants expressed seemingly achievable expectations about the future work they wanted to secure in Australia. Some of the core group considered that working in low-skilled areas, such as retail or hospitality, was a logical way for them to achieve economic and psychosocial integration. For some migrants, securing entry-level jobs was perceived as an interim step. For others, such employment – although significantly different from the professional work they had done in their first countries – was a longer-term proposition and did not seem to be problematic in terms of their identity and self-concept, but, rather, a reality of immigration. It may be that centre teachers played some role in influencing migrants' future employment goals; however, this is not clear from this study. Further

research could be undertaken (building on Hanrahan's 2009 work) to examine whether, and to what extent, English as a second language teachers actively influence migrants' further study and employment aspirations and pathways.

Although voluntary work was raised by only a small number of migrants, it may be that the language centre is well positioned to actively promote migrants' uptake of voluntary work in English speaking contexts. Perhaps, the centre's teachers – through classroom activities, excursions, or guest speakers – could do more to contextualise Australia's reported relatively high level of involvement in voluntary work (Volunteering Australia 2010), including by those from non-English speaking backgrounds (Volunteering Australia 2007), and advocate its integrative benefits to students. Likewise, the suggestion by several migrants for a voluntary work-placement officer at Jarrah Institute could be worthy of investigation. Although migrants need to show initiative, it may be that tangible support and guidance, at the centre level, could assist migrants who want to undertake English speaking voluntary work. Such work could help improve migrants' real-life English proficiency, increase their sense of social connectedness and 'personal satisfaction', and address the need for them to have Australian work experience (Volunteering Australia 2007).

A number of migrants expressed their appreciation of the financial investment Australia had made in them through the funding of their English language programs. Some of them commented that such provision was mutually beneficial to governments apropos getting migrants into work (and, in some cases, off welfare), therefore generating tax revenue for the country. Some language centre staff members also mentioned the considerable financial commitment by governments to assisting integration via English as a second language programs.

More broadly, although integration proved at times difficult to define and discuss, all 14 interviewed migrants stated that they felt integrated, or partly integrated, and more so with the passing of time. A lack of competence and confidence in using English was seen by all stakeholders as the biggest barrier to integration. However, migrants suggested that other factors – securing paid employment as well as their own social networks – also impacted on their sense of their own level of integration, reflecting the views of the centre's staff and government. English language programs were seen by language centre stakeholders as beneficial in providing this wider social sphere.

The findings from this study suggest that the commitment made by federal and state and territory governments to funding English as a second language provision for adult migrants is money well spent. Increasing the English proficiency of Australian migrants via formal English language instruction was highly valued by stakeholders at all three of the policy stages suggested by Guba (1984), and was perceived as contributing to the process of migrants' integration: psychosocially and economically. Sunny summed this up in 2010, stating:

The government give me the chance and the opportunity to develop myself. Thank you.

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Appendix 1

Table A.1 Surveyed migrants' countries of birth

Country of Birth	Gender		Total	
	Female	Male	Number	%
China	20	7	27	44.2
Korea	9	1	10	16.4
Vietnam	4	0	4	6.6
Cambodia	2	2	4	6.6
Russia	2	1	3	4.9
Afghanistan	1	1	2	3.3
Burma	0	1	1	1.6
India	1	0	1	1.6
Poland	1	0	1	1.6
Japan	1	0	1	1.6
Sudan	0	1	1	1.6
Turkey	1	0	1	1.6
Tajikistan	1	0	1	1.6
Sri Lanka	1	0	1	1.6
Argentina	0	1	1	1.6
Indonesia	1	0	1	1.6
Venezuela	1	0	1	1.6
Total	46	15	61	100.0

Note: N = 61.

Table A.2 Surveyed migrants' highest completed level of schooling

Highest level of education	Gender		Total	
	Female	Male	Number	%
University	32	9	41	67.2
Vocational	5	3	8	13.1
High school	9	2	11	18.0
Primary school	0	1	1	1.6
Total	46	15	61	100.0*

Notes: *99.9%; total rounded to 100%. N = 61.

Appendix 2

Table A.3 Interviewed migrant profile, July 2007

Name	Gender	Country of birth	Age	Highest level of education completed	Pre-immigration paid work	Date immigrated to Australia	Years learnt English before arrival in Australia (N)	Previous English as a second language courses undertaken at language centre (N)	Parent of children in Australia
Rui	F	China	38	high school	manager	Dec. 1998	1	4	✓
Ping	F	China	43	university	engineer	Apr. 2004	2	4	✓
Xi	F	China	46	university	engineer	Mar. 2007	10	0	✓
Thuy	F	Vietnam	29	university	na	Aug. 2003	.25	4	x
Diane	F	Vietnam	31	university	teacher	July 2006	4.5	1	x
Gizem	F	Turkey	28	high school	factory worker	1999	0	4	✓
Sunny	F	Korea	42	university	psychologist	Nov. 2000	10	1	✓
Swarna	F	India	28	university	na	2006	14	1	x
Yoko	F	Japan	36	university	admin. worker	Dec. 2004	2	3	x
Magda	F	Poland	48	vocational	disability worker	Sept. 2004	0	4	x
Yana	F	Russia	43	university	speech therapist	July 2006	0	2	✓
Manut	M	Sudan	31	high school	na	Aug. 2004	0	4	✓
Bo	M	Burma	24	high school	na	Feb. 2007	4	2	x
Jin	M	China	35	university	lecturer	July 2004	7	0	✓

Note N = 14.

Appendix 3

Table A.4 Interviewed migrants' post-2007 English as a second language course goals and outcomes, mid-2008 and January 2010

Name	Gender	Post-English as a second language 2007 goals					Outcomes (mid-2008)	Outcomes (Jan. 2010)
		Do another English as a second language course	Do a mainstream course	Get a paid job	Do voluntary work	Take a break from studying		
*Rui	F		✓				Break	P/T work
Ping	F		✓				Mainstream study	P/T work
*Xi	F			✓	✓		Mainstream study	Continuing mainstream study
Thuy	F	✓	✓				English as a second language study	F/T work
Diane	F		✓				Mainstream study	F/T work
Gizem	F		✓	✓			Mainstream study	P/T work
Sunny	F		✓				Mainstream study	Continuing mainstream study
Swarna	F			✓			F/T work	F/T work
*Yoko	F		✓	✓			Break	P/T work
*Magda	F			✓			Mainstream study	P/T work
*Yana	F	✓	✓	✓			Break	Commencing mainstream study
Manut	M	✓					Literacy course	F/T work
*Bo	M		✓				F/T work	F/T work
*Jin	M	✓	✓				F/T work	F/T work

Notes: 1 * denotes migrants whose mid-2008 outcomes differed from those they nominated in mid-2007.

2 P/T denotes part-time, and F/T denotes full-time paid work.

N = 14.



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