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Trauma and Adverse Childhood
Experiences (TrACE)-informed training for
English for Speakers of Other Languages
(ESOL) practitioners in Wales:
understanding current provision and gaps

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1. Background

In Wales, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision is for adults who have for various reasons come to live in the UK. Through ESOL, learners whose first language is not English or Welsh are able to develop their English language skills. ESOL is delivered by a range of public, private and third sector organisations. Lessons are delivered in a variety of settings including educational institutions, charitable organisations and public venues such as community centres.

The ESOL policy for Wales aims to support individuals to rebuild their lives and integrate within communities [1]. ESOL learners come from diverse backgrounds, including those who have experienced forced migration and/or are immigrants from non-English-speaking countries [2,3]. ESOL has been found to play a pivotal role in promoting learner independence and integration, and in increasing education and employment opportunities [4].

ESOL learners may have experienced prolonged and complex trauma and may continue to face a range of challenges, including, but not limited to, racism and discrimination, precarity in terms of their migrant status, employment challenges, and financial instability [4–7]. The emotional, social and cultural needs of learners may represent complexities for ESOL practitioners beyond the scope of other language teachers. However, few studies to date have explored the impact of ESOL learners' trauma within the adult ESOL classroom with ESOL practitioners [8–11]. Findings from an online survey with ESOL providers in Wales identified that trauma was thought to affect learners' capacity to learn and that ESOL learners require additional support [4].

It is important that ESOL providers are trained to understand the potential difficulties that ESOL learners may face and how their experience of trauma may affect the learning environment. The ACE Hub Wales has been funded by Welsh Government to develop a trauma-informed approach to further education, starting with Coleg Cambria, Coleg Gwent and Pembrokeshire College, and now extended across the sector in Wales [12,13]. However, this approach is yet to be extended to ESOL within all Welsh colleges and outside of the further education setting. Recommendations from a Welsh Government review of ESOL policy, published in 2023 [4], include the need to embed ESOL-specific trauma-informed practice (Recommendation 27) and that Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (TrACE) training resources may provide a useful tool in developing trauma-informed training for ESOL settings (Recommendation 17).

This qualitative study aims to support ESOL policy in Wales by providing an understanding of the availability of trauma-informed training for ESOL practitioners in Wales and identifying their additional training needs.

2. Methods



Initial scoping work was undertaken to understand the current availability of trauma-informed training for ESOL practitioners provided in Wales. Researchers contacted individuals involved in ESOL delivery in Wales via email and telephone to identify current provision of ESOL training. This process also helped to identify organisations and individuals for inclusion in the study.

Twelve semi-structured interviews were undertaken with ESOL practitioners in Wales to understand if they had received any trauma-informed training and to identify further training needs. Interviews also sought to understand practitioners' perceptions of how student/learner experience of trauma can affect learning in the classroom and the impact of this on teachers, particularly in terms of their training needs. To be included in the study, participants needed to be working as an ESOL practitioner in Wales at the time of data collection. Recruitment and data collection were undertaken between July and September 2024.

Participants were recruited using a convenience sampling approach, with individuals and organisations connected to ESOL contacted via telephone and email and invited to participate in the study. Potential participants were provided with a study information sheet detailing the study aims, its anonymous and confidential nature, and the potential benefits and risks of participation. Sampling sought to include ESOL practitioners across Wales covering a range of providers,

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including colleges, charity and third sector organisations, local authorities, and adult learning centres. Where relevant, contacts were asked to cascade the invitation to interview to other ESOL practitioners in Wales.

Participants were offered the opportunity for the interview to be conducted in person, by telephone or online at a convenient time and date. Electronic informed consent was obtained prior to participation. Prior to the interview commencing, the researcher summarised the information sheet to the participant, provided an opportunity for any questions and obtained verbal consent to record the interview.

Interviews were guided by an interview topic guide designed to explore key areas of interest, including: the training participants had received and if this was trauma-informed; practitioners' perceptions of how their students' experience of trauma affects their learning in the classroom; the support and supervision practitioners receive in their role; awareness of the Trauma-informed Wales Framework and TrACE-informed Organisations Toolkit; and any unmet training needs. Interviews did not enquire directly about students' or practitioners' own lived experience of migration or trauma (see limitations). Further, participants were not provided with a definition of trauma, or an explanation of how trauma may impact learning.

Following the interview, participants were provided with a written debrief containing contact details for relevant support services in Wales. All recruitment and study materials were available in Welsh and English language.

Interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams, audio recorded, then transcribed and anonymised (e.g. names and any identifying information removed) by the research team. Interviews lasted between 20 and 50 minutes. Data were analysed thematically using NVivo version 14. General themes across interviews were identified inductively through analysis by three researchers, with themes discussed and agreed during analysis. The final themes agreed by the researchers and explored here include: practitioners' trauma awareness; practitioners' perceptions of the impact of trauma on learners in the classroom; the impact of trauma on teaching practices in the classroom; the importance of experience and shared learning for current trauma-informed practice; the need for trauma-informed training specific to the ESOL setting; the importance of creating safe spaces and safeguarding learners; and the requirement for additional support for ESOL practitioners.

Ethical approval for the study was granted by Bangor University Medical and Health Sciences Academic Ethics Committee (Reference number: 0360).



2.1 Participant characteristics

Eight of the twelve participants worked in further education colleges, three in adult community learning and two in charitable organisations (one practitioner worked for two organisations). Some participants taught ESOL in multiple settings, with eight teaching in colleges, six in the community, two in charity settings and one online.

Most participants taught ESOL across multiple grades, ranging from pre-entry (lowest grade) to level two (highest grade). Participants had been teaching ESOL for between two and 41 years. Eleven participants were based in South Wales and one in Mid Wales. No ESOL practitioners in North Wales participated (see limitations). Participants were not asked about their own experience of migration and trauma (see limitations).

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3.1 Current provision of trauma-informed training in Wales for ESOL practitioners

- Participants were asked if they had ever received trauma-informed training as part of their role. Interviews suggested that little trauma-informed training was available to ESOL practitioners in Wales.
- The scoping exercise identified some examples of trauma-informed training specific to ESOL, most of which were provided in England but accessible to Welsh practitioners (see Box 1).
- Some interview participants had completed mandatory trauma-informed training provided via their employer, but this had not been specific to the ESOL setting. One participant had voluntarily completed the Trauma-Informed ESOL for Refugees training provided by the University of Leicester (see Box 1), whilst two had voluntarily attended seminars or workshops on trauma through the National Association for Teaching English and other Community Languages to Adults (NATECLA; see Box 1).

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Box 1: Examples of trauma-informed training specific to the ESOL setting identified

The scoping exercise aimed to identify ESOL-specific trauma-informed training available to Welsh ESOL practitioners. The following were identified, however, we are unable to comment on the effectiveness of such training, or its applicability to the Welsh ESOL context.

- The University of Leicester Sanctuary Seekers' Unit has developed [Trauma-Informed ESOL for Refugees training](#). The training has been designed to meet ESOL practitioners' needs and seeks to build awareness of how trauma can affect students with refugee backgrounds. The training includes practical strategies for ESOL practitioners which aims to mitigate the effects of learners' refugee trauma and to promote recovery and growth. Training is freely available in a self-led format or can be paid for via a live online workshop (the workshop is available in two formats: follow-up to self-led training or standalone).
- A workshop on the impact of trauma in the ESOL classroom was delivered by Lora Agbaso at the National Association for Teaching English and other Community Languages to Adults (NATECLA) 2024 national conference. Similar sessions have also been provided as online webinars. NATECLA Cymru, a recently established network, hold monthly online sessions for ESOL practitioners in Wales to meet and can provide a platform for information sharing to ESOL practitioners in Wales.
- The ESOL Forum Network (Learning and Work, Wales Strategic Migration Partnership ESOL Coordinator, Adult Learning Wales and South Wales University) plan to hold 'development' sessions before the end of March 2025. It is hoped that one of these sessions will cover trauma-informed ESOL.
- In 2024, The University of South Wales began to offer a [Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages \(ESOL specialism\)](#). The programme covers three core modules:
 - ▶ participatory approaches to the ESOL classroom
 - ▶ the politics of migrant language education, and
 - ▶ teaching basic literacy and trauma-informed pedagogy.

3.2 Practitioners' trauma awareness

- Participants were not directly asked if they felt their students/learners had experienced trauma, or how they personally understood and defined trauma. However, it was evident from discussion that participants' understanding of trauma predominantly came from their own experiences of working with ESOL students, their own independent research, or awareness of trauma gained from outside of their ESOL role.
 - Few participants were aware of the Trauma-Informed Wales Framework and the TrACE toolkit. Further, most participants who were aware of these had little understanding of them or their relevance to ESOL.
-

3.3 Practitioners' perceptions of the impact of trauma on learners in the classroom

- All participants perceived that many ESOL learners have experienced trauma and are considerably affected by it.

"Yeah. They're significantly affected by trauma and I, I would say almost to saying 100% are affected by trauma."

Interview 12

"Obviously like in an ESOL classroom, a lot of your students are going to be asylum seekers or refugees umm, who yeah, will have sort of varying degrees of trauma depending on where they've come from and like what they've been through. And umm, like definitely it is a thing. Like it's in, there's almost no classes in which there won't be at least one or two people that definitely have kind of, yeah, they've had like, had really shitty things happen to them."

Interview 5

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- Participants were asked if they felt like students' experience of trauma affects student learning in the classroom. The majority of participants indicated that they felt trauma impacted learner cognition, emotion and behaviour. This included cognitive effects such as a lack of focus, engagement or motivation (n = 11 interviewees), emotional responses such as crying or anger (n = 8), conflict or tension between students (n = 3), and poor learner attendance (n = 4). Examples given by participants when discussing how trauma appears in the classroom included:

"I've had learners stand up and walk out crying." Interview 9

"Very often you'll see an adult staring off into the middle distance, and it's not that she or he is just bored. It's maybe because that, that, you know, their thoughts are with their family or friends in a war zone or whatever it may be." Interview 1

"I didn't realise how much it would impact their learning and it, it does in terms of like their... them retaining information, umm, even their attendance sometimes, due to them struggling with mental health or personal struggles." Interview 8

- Two participants explained that they felt their learners were resilient. Three participants acknowledged that their learners had a desire to progress, which at least one participant linked to their experience of trauma.

"A lot of the ESOL learners are very resilient. They, they're very determined. They're very motivated umm, and it, it, it's, it's, you know, it's a breath of fresh air to, to teach them I would say, yeah." Interview 8

"In a lot of ways, I think it [trauma] drives them." Interview 2

- Some participants were generally aware of the types of trauma people might have experienced depending on where the learner had come from. Others noted that learners had directly disclosed their trauma to them.

"I know some of what the trauma is, knowing where someone comes from gives you an idea of uh, but the individual traumas can be, you know, very extreme, so you know. But you get, you get an idea when you know where someone's coming from, of what kind of thing they might, might have had to put up with. But a lot of them, a lot of them want to tell you and a lot of them don't." Interview 6

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"...you have to kind of be aware that the people you're going to have in your classes have kind of had these like really, you know, like overwhelming experiences that you have no way of actually understanding yourself, but you do know that's happened." **Interview 5**

"...it's interesting sometimes how you'll kind of, you'll be doing something in class and people actually really want to tell you about this horrible thing, they want to tell everybody about this thing to kind of, to get it out, and that's always kind of risky." **Interview 5**

- Although some participants stated that part of their role included being able to talk to their students about their trauma, others felt that it was not part of their role, or it was beyond their ability to talk to their students about their experiences.

"...I kind of feel like it is part of my job to make a space to listen to it" **Interview 5**

"...they can come and talk to me about anything they need to, whether that's in the classroom or they come, or quite often they'll come and find me in my office, or I put a WhatsApp group together." **Interview 7**

"...accepting that these people have been impacted, are being impacted, will probably always be impacted and there's not a lot I can do to change that. But I can sit with the discomfort if I'm, if that makes sense. You know, if someone's upset to try and tell them everything's OK and you're safe now, you know that that wouldn't be appropriate for me to do that. I should just sit with the discomfort and be silent, not try and make it better. Not trying to change anything and I think, I think, that, I think that promotes a sense of safety for students who might be upset or, or needing to say something about it. You know, it's just not to judge, not to try and change anything, but just to sit with it." **Interview 11**

"I think it's being aware of certain situations that I, I don't know how to deal with, scenarios of what you do in certain scenarios where people are burdening themselves to you and how do you then set the boundary of. I really can't. I don't have time to listen to two hours of you telling me this story. I don't know where to signpost you." **Interview 3**

"I tend not, tend not to go into any of it and to avoid it, trying to find out about that." **Interview 6**

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- Some participants acknowledged difficulty in communicating with their learners about their trauma. For some this was because trauma was not actively spoken about by learners, whilst other individuals felt that they couldn't discuss trauma due to language and communication barriers, which also posed barriers for onward referral to support services.

"...we've got learners who umm definitely their, even if they've not disclosed things to me, their physical responses in the classroom show me, their body language shows me that they're not OK." Interview 9

"...actually this person has been going through quite a lot, but because sometimes of the language barrier, we find that if they're not always able to convey the type of trauma that they might be feeling or how uncomfortable some of the topics make them feel." Interview 2

"...the demands of the teacher are, especially for ESOL learners, is that when people have low levels of language is to get support in the college that other learners access, so that the language is such a barrier, the, the inability to, to express yourself, it put, it puts you in the situation of being a child or feeling helpless or hopeless." Interview 3

"...there are some people there who, I mean, I don't know 'cause often it's the people with lower levels of English who aren't really able to explain, but I have had a sense that there have been umm, there's maybe post-traumatic stress or other things." Interview 4

- Participants highlighted the emotional demand of teaching ESOL, particularly where students had disclosed their trauma.

"...sometimes you do get told and you know, I know that happens to other teachers as well, they get told and to be quite honest, sometimes you wish you hadn't been told." Interview 6

"...sometimes like, it can be quite stressful, emotionally, if people do decide [to disclose a traumatic experience], like sometimes you're like the only link that people, like you're the only like person they know in the country and stuff, and they really do want you to know and understand like what's happened to them." Interview 5

- One participant noted that they experienced vicarious trauma (see also The requirement for additional support for ESOL practitioners)

“...vicarious, is it vicarious trauma? Is it when you, when, when you experience something, someone else’s trauma? Is that, I think that’s, I think it’s vicarious trauma. Umm, I don’t think there’s enough attention paid to that because you can come out of a classroom feeling like quite emotional and upset. I don’t know if I’d use the word traumatised, you know, it’s quite a wide term, isn’t it? Umm but you can come out feeling a little bit like, ‘what, did I handle that right? Was that, OK?’ They’ve left the classroom now and there’s nothing I can do’. You can, you can come out feeling like that.” **Interview 10**

3.4 The impact of trauma on teaching practices in the classroom

- Practitioners explained that learners’ trauma influences their teaching practices and described the need to be flexible in their teaching based on students’ needs. In particular, participants noted difficulty in anticipating topics that might be triggering to students and indicated that this can affect lesson planning.

“I introduced the terms North, South, East and West, and the student burst into tears. When, when she was feeling able to talk later, when, when you know when we, we obviously changed the subject, and you know, helped her out with her emotions but when she was able to talk later, she described being physically beaten for not knowing North, South, East and West in her school. I could never have known that.” **Interview 9**

“...you just tend to kind of feel your way and try avoiding anything that you know is going to trigger, alright. But you know, there are things you never know is going to trigger and you just have to put up with it and basically give them space to deal with whatever it is, because the odds are you don’t know.” **Interview 6**

“I had a lot of resistance with my level two class last year because they did not want to talk about the topic of home. It was just, you know, it was just too raw for them. Umm, and so of course then it meant that I had to readjust everything in terms of a two-week sort of program to just sort of try and make sure that what I was covering was, was gonna give them the language they needed, but without hitting that exact topic over and over again.” **Interview 2**

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"You talk about family. Now the learners say, 'please don't ask us about family', because you know they haven't seen their family. Their, their, their family might be missing, umm you know. So we've actually had learners saying, 'no, don't talk, please don't ask us about this. Don't ask about that'."

Interview 3

- Some participants expressed difficulty managing the rest of the classroom if an issue arises with one student.

"...you also have to manage the rest of the classroom because depending on other students' responses to that it could snowball." **Interview 9**

"...then something had happened, and I'd have to sort of stop the lesson then like, you know, let everyone get a cup of tea and just calm down a little bit." **Interview 4**

"...what, all of a sudden they start arguing, something like that so that you can, you know, really get an idea of what an ESOL classroom could, you know, what could happen in an ESOL classroom, these types of scenarios where it's like you've got students from, you know, umm, two different countries that are kind of, you know, not, not on good terms. Then you've got two people in the same classroom and that can create a friction, and nobody's ever taught us like how to deal with that." **Interview 2**

"...there's been like, one once or twice when I've just felt like, I don't know what's going to happen if this guy starts chucking chairs around or that kind of thing. I don't know how I will manage that and keep the other students safe." **Interview 5**

- Some participants felt that having to teach a specific curriculum, with a focus on passing exams, is not beneficial for students or for themselves as teachers and highlighted the need for more flexibility in teaching content. However, other participants reported that they were able to adopt a more flexible approach to their teaching based on students' needs.

"So I think that you, that if we look at, look at the learner as an individual and rather than oblige him or her to do assessments, and that's, that's probably gonna be demotivational. You know, they don't want that pressure." **Interview 1**

"...the other one is that that need to show outcome and umm, so you may be trying to do some kind of unit of accreditation, umm, and actually to be honest, that particular day it's, it's not relevant and it isn't what they need." **Interview 10**

“So then I plan, I plan a, you know, kind of a scheme of work, but it, as I said, it’s very flexible. So I’ll look at who I’ve got and what I think they’ll benefit from and kind of pick Agored units that I could do throughout the year.” Interview 7

3.5 The importance of experience and shared learning for current trauma-informed practice

- Participants highlighted the importance of their own experience as ESOL practitioners in learning how to work with and respond to learner trauma. Due to a lack of trauma-informed training, most participants explained that their knowledge of trauma, its impact on learners, and their current approaches to responding to trauma, had been developed from their own experiences of teaching ESOL.

“...I know very little about that [trauma] other than I, you know, dealing with my students. But not through any formal training, just kind of dealing with them as one human to another.” Interview 7

“...it’s basically just teaching experience that’s given us as a team these strategies, it’s, it’s never been formally given to us as a, you know, as a teaching sort of tool.” Interview 2

- In general, participants placed an emphasis on the importance of informal shared learning with colleagues and peers for their knowledge of how to work with and respond to trauma in the classroom.

“...the tutors who know each other will also chat and share good practices, just on an informal basis.” Interview 4

“...I feel like that is probably the most useful support I have is just having that conversat, umm, having that conversation with my colleagues and umm, seeing things from a different perspective. Sometimes speaking to someone about an issue, you know, it, it provides you with umm, different perspectives or other solutions that maybe you couldn’t see from your own, your own angle, yeah.” Interview 8

3.6 The need for trauma-informed training specific to the ESOL setting

- Around half of participants reported that their training to date had not equipped them to work with ESOL students who had experienced trauma. The remainder thought their training had been beneficial to an extent, but that additional training would be helpful.
- Participants indicated that current teacher training qualifications do not consider the nuances of teaching English to mature adults who are often from a refugee or asylum-seeking background and who may speak little or no English.
- Where participants had undertaken trauma-informed training, they indicated that such training was generic and not specific or relevant to the ESOL setting. Participants highlighted that such training did not take into account the needs of the ESOL classroom.

"...although the trauma-informed uh UK presentation was very comprehensive and informative, umm I learnt an awful lot about neuroscience, I learnt some of the terminology that's being used, umm, in school environments, it wasn't, it didn't feel directly related to my students, it didn't feel directly related to my experience." Interview 9

"...in an ESOL situation you can't always have the same levels of communication with your students, like when you're doing training that is across the board for all tutors, they're like, 'oh, you could try this, you know, like feelings-based activity'. And I'm just like, it would take me like a month to teach all the vocab that would be needed for that activity." Interview 4

- Most participants expressed a desire and need for trauma-informed training and continuing professional development. It was evident that most participants self-directed their continuing professional development and the three participants who had attended trauma-informed training or seminars specific to the ESOL setting had actively sought it themselves.

"I'm very interested in uh finding out more about trauma." Interview 12

"It came from me rather than the actual college umm, because I felt that, you know, I felt that I needed that training [ESOL-specific trauma-informed training]." Interview 2

3. Results

- Participants noted the need for trauma-informed training specific to the ESOL classroom and that such training needs to include an understanding of the different types of trauma that refugee and asylum-seeking populations may have experienced, e.g. war trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), trafficking and displacement. One participant who has received ACE training noted that they didn't think this was relevant to the cohort.

"So, the training needs that I have and that I suppose my team have are ESOL-specific trauma-informed training. That's, that's what we need."

Interview 9

"I think the ACEs studies are really, really interesting and they have a lot to say. Umm, but I don't think that PTSD is really covered umm, by, by this research, and if we really want to be trauma-informed and we want to be able to extend it to groups like the ESOL learners, we need to be more informed in terms of PTSD."

Interview 10

"...then you've got, you've got the trafficking and the different styles of trafficking, you know. I don't know enough about it."

Interview 6

"So I'm looking at people who have been displaced. So you know, so when I worked in [location], it was ethnic cleansing and I, you know, umm I wasn't involved in it, but there was training going on for other people. Umm that kind of thing would be, would be useful."

Interview 12

- Participants also emphasised the importance of continued awareness of global conflicts and disasters so that they could understand the unique experiences of students. Participants mentioned the importance of regular training due to the emergence of new conflict and disasters.

"I mean the other thing, the other thing is, it depends how much you know about what's going on in the world uh, and that varies, changes, it constantly changes."

Interview 6

- Participants highlighted that training should include information on how to recognise if someone has experienced trauma and understand the impact this may have.

"...and to recognise, I mean that's good, if you can recognise something in someone you know. Yes, I mean, yes, 'cause you're always looking at the students and thinking 'hmm, what's, what's going on here.'"

Interview 6

3. Results

"I do sort of think that perhaps they should have umm, and there should be umm, something in the qualification that sort of, or any qualification that's ESOL related that sort of allows you to look at what is trauma and then how to recognise it." Interview 2

- Participants noted the need for training to also cover the practicalities of how to respond to situations that arise in the ESOL classroom e.g. trauma disclosures, student anger or aggression.

"...because what do you say to somebody who's just found out that their daughter's in a flat that's been bombed that morning?" Interview 10

"I think that training on how to respond to situations that arise." Interview 4

3.7 The importance of creating safe spaces and safeguarding students

- Participants expressed the importance of providing a safe space for learners in the classroom. They indicated a desire to understand how to create safer and more supportive environments for students, taking into consideration the needs of learners from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

"...all those sort of practical things like, you know, establishing routines where that's possible and making learners feel kind of like safe psychologically in that space." Interview 5

"...how to prevent, how to create just a place in the classroom where people feel safe and supported." Interview 4

"I would say when it comes to maybe dealing with learners from different cultural backgrounds, what tools to use to maybe like not offend learners or to be more empathetic towards learners." Interview 8

- Participants expressed a need to better understand the practical ways that they can support learners. This included a better knowledge of the support services that they can signpost students to. Participants recognised that sometimes they had poor knowledge of how students could be best supported, or which services they could make onwards referrals to.

“...so I think, I think, I think we talk, we talk about signposting, but do we actually know what that means and where, where to go?” Interview 10

“...I don't know where to signpost you. I think maybe, maybe being aware of where to signpost people. What other support's available? Because again, it is this, we can't answer all the questions. We need, what are the agencies can help?” Interview 3

“...we tried in [organisation] to get as much information as we can of what's available so we can signpost people. So, but there was never really any, there's never a list. Do you know what I mean?” Interview 6

3.8 The requirement for additional support for ESOL practitioners

- Participants indicated that they have access to formal support (e.g. line managers, organisational counselling services and online resources) if they have concerns about their own wellbeing or safety. However, the majority of participants indicated that they were more inclined to seek informal support from colleagues or other ESOL practitioners, if they felt they needed support or advice. Participants noted that their peers were more likely to have shared experiences and a better understanding of their concerns.

“I think actually like what I would probably more naturally do is talk to like other teachers, like friends and colleagues and my partner and, umm, you know because they've all have had similar experiences and like know this happens. It's just, it's more helpful for me to talk to people that I know well than to, you know, ring a hotline and say, 'I'm having this', you know.” Interview 5

“...it's not quite a subject area a lot of people understand, umm, so talking about it to other people, they can't relate as, as well as, as my, as my colleagues do.” Interview 2

3. Results

- Participants indicated the need for opportunities to share their own experiences, including the impact of vicarious trauma. While many participants acknowledged that they do have access to formal wellbeing support, they expressed that the support could be more relevant to their ESOL roles.

“So it’s not, it’s not that there’s an absence of support entirely. It’s just on the topic of the narrow, the relatively narrow topic of trauma, there’s nothing structured around it.” Interview 11

“So I think as an ESOL practitioner umm I, I, so there is, there is a lot of support in terms, within the college, umm in terms of like our wellbeing. But I do think there’s definitely a gap umm, when it comes to the, the, the type of students that we deal with and what tools, tools we need in order to support those students.” Interview 8

“...but I think sort of, more support systems more sort of holistically perhaps, or in terms of like, you know, are you listening to like really distressing stories often and like that, the more sort of wellbeing side is not terribly well, uh, catered to.” Interview 5

- Two participants also expressed the importance of receiving high-quality training delivered by an external provider rather than training being self-led.

“We would benefit from having external, uh, providers offering training within our ESOL department at the, at a high level rather than being asked to, uh, deliver training to each other where we might be still learning ourselves or not able to offer such high-quality training that external providers would be able to, uh, deliver.” Interview 9

4. Discussion



Findings from semi-structured interviews with ESOL practitioners in Wales indicated that current training for ESOL practitioners does not include how to deliver ESOL in a trauma-informed way. Most participants had not undertaken formalised trauma-informed training and only one participant had undertaken training which was specifically relevant to the ESOL setting. This training had been delivered by The University of Leicester (see Box 1). Such findings are in line with other research conducted in Wales, where a survey of ESOL practitioners found that 95% had not received training in working with trauma survivors [10]. Importantly, all interview participants indicated both a need and desire for further trauma-informed training specific to the ESOL setting. Similarly, in a survey of ESOL practitioners in Wales, 97% reported interest in receiving training on a trauma-informed approach as a part of their continuing professional development [10]. Interview findings here indicated that in the absence of formal training, participants relied heavily on their experience as an ESOL practitioner in developing strategies to respond to trauma in the ESOL classroom. Furthermore, participants shared learning informally with their peers. In line with recommendations from a review of ESOL policy in Wales, there is a clear need for the delivery of training to further develop ESOL-specific trauma-informed practice [4]. Despite some promising examples of the delivery of workshops to ESOL practitioners on trauma through NATECLA Cymru, such training has yet to be formalised in Wales.

4. Discussion

Interview participants highlighted numerous ways in which learners' experience of trauma was evident in the ESOL setting and how they as practitioners were required to respond to the symptoms of trauma. Participants indicated that learners' experience of trauma had widespread impacts on: learner emotional wellbeing and engagement; the learning environment, including teaching delivery to prevent re-traumatising (e.g. lesson planning) and safety in the classroom (e.g. dealing with aggression); and on practitioners' own emotional needs. Such findings are in line with other research identifying that ESOL teachers are likely to encounter the effects of trauma in the classroom [10]. It is important to note, however, that while this study explored ESOL practitioners' perceptions of the impact of trauma in the classroom, it did not explore participants' understanding of trauma. Thus, some examples provided by respondents of how trauma affects learning may be linked to other experiences such as socio-political or cultural differences, loneliness, or discrimination.

Interview participants noted an awareness that any topic within the ESOL classroom has the potential to be a trigger to ESOL learners. This affected teaching delivery, and some participants noted that training was needed to increase awareness of what may trigger some people in the classroom alongside practical ways to respond to students. Other research in Wales has also identified the need for ESOL training to increase practitioner awareness of possible triggers for learners [10]. These findings should be considered in line with the Nation of Sanctuary – Refugee and Asylum Seeker Plan, which seeks to address barriers which may prevent attendance at ESOL courses [14]. Research in Wales has also identified that not all language learning materials are suitable for an ESOL classroom [10]; only a few participants in this study raised the issue that materials and curriculum can sometimes present complexities for teaching.

Findings here, indicate that practitioner training should cover the complexities around the presentation of trauma in the ESOL classroom. Interview participants highlighted complexities in how trauma is identified, acknowledged and discussed. Furthermore, there were conflicting views amongst participants as to the role they should have as ESOL practitioners in acknowledging and discussing trauma. Although ESOL teachers should not be required to be therapists for their learners, interviews indicate that some learners openly discuss their trauma experiences. In Wales, 85% of ESOL practitioners surveyed indicated that they had been approached by their learners to talk about their trauma [10]. In this study, respondents indicated a lack of guidance and understanding of best practice for these discussions and navigating support for their learners. ESOL practitioners therefore need to be trained on how they can appropriately respond to such disclosures. Furthermore, practitioners need to be aware of the appropriate referrals and support systems that are available both to their learners and to themselves as practitioners. However, the language and communication barriers inherent in the ESOL setting need to be acknowledged in understanding best

4. Discussion

practice for these issues. It is evident that the presence of trauma in the ESOL classroom can emotionally affect ESOL practitioners; one ESOL practitioner here acknowledged suffering vicarious trauma. Other research has also recognised the need for such training to help protect educators from vicarious trauma [15]. As such, training should consider support for ESOL practitioners.

Research findings highlight the importance of tailoring training to the specific demands and needs of the ESOL setting, recognising the wide variety of trauma and adversity that the ESOL learner population may have experienced. Study participants emphasised their need for continued learning about global conflicts and disasters; such knowledge is important given the fluctuation in the diversity and demographics of ESOL learners in Wales as conflict and disasters emerge globally. We were unable to explore the perceptions of learners in this study (see limitations). However, the learner experiences will be integral to the development of this training to ensure it meets the needs of both ESOL learners and practitioners. Future research is therefore needed with ESOL learners to better understand their experience of ESOL and how practitioner training on trauma may be beneficial.

4.1 Limitations

There are several limitations of this study. Despite attempts to recruit participants from across Wales, no interview participants were recruited from North Wales and only one was recruited from Mid-Wales. Additionally, while participants' educational and work experiences varied, results cannot be generalised to all ESOL practitioners and settings across Wales. Further, interviews did not enquire about participants' lived experience of migration or trauma and individuals with lived experience were not explicitly targeted within the recruitment. We recognise that some ESOL practitioners may have such lived experience which may influence their teaching practices. Future research should consider the role of lived experience in the ESOL setting. However, findings here are in line with other research conducted with ESOL practitioners in Wales [4,10,15].

Data collection took place over the summer holiday period, which may have restricted participation. Recruitment efforts relied on ESOL co-ordinators and other individuals sharing information on the study to relevant practitioners within their respective organisations, therefore potential participants may have been missed. Findings are influenced by the positionality of the ESOL tutors who participated. As trauma was not defined, discussions are based around participants' own understanding of trauma. Furthermore, findings may be influenced by researcher

4. Discussion

positionality and bias, whereby the framing of interview questions and potential for subjective interpretation of data may impact the objectivity and validity of the findings.

To mitigate researcher bias, thematic analysis of data was independently checked by at least one additional researcher. Analysis of data focused on broad themes, resulting in the potential for detailed and complex aspects of individual responses to be overlooked or simplified. The current study does not take into consideration the voice of ESOL learners; future research should seek to understand the needs of ESOL learners in relation to trauma-informed teaching. We recognise the complexity of the ESOL learner cohort; the current study explored ESOL as a setting and therefore did not account for differences between learners, for example, those who are forced migrants. Future research could take this into consideration.

4.2 Recommendations

- 1.** Trauma-informed training for ESOL practitioners should be developed in order to improve ESOL-specific trauma-informed practice in Wales. Such training should be specific to the ESOL setting and its development should have input from those with experience of teaching ESOL and lived experience of migration and trauma.
- 2.** Training should seek to include the following factors specific to the ESOL setting:
 - a.** the complexities around the presentation of trauma in the ESOL classroom.
 - b.** guidance on the best practice for practically supporting ESOL learners, including how practitioners can appropriately respond to disclosures and safeguard learners
 - c.** guidance for ESOL practitioners in how they can look after their emotional wellbeing
 - d.** best practice for how organisations can take a trauma-informed approach to support both ESOL practitioners and learners.
- 3.** New and existing training should be appropriately evaluated to understand its suitability to the ESOL setting.
- 4.** Future research should seek to understand the needs of ESOL learners in relation to trauma-informed teaching.

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Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences
(TrACE)-informed training for English for Speakers
of Other Languages (ESOL) practitioners in Wales:
understanding current provision and gaps

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