



Approaching
language learning
with adult L2
learners with
emergent literacy

An enquiry into the progress and strategies used
for L2 literacy acquisition by former refugee
adults in New Zealand.

Jenny Field




- 
- Introduction and background to 2-year study
 - Methods
 - Results and discussion
 - Suggestions for teaching approach
- 

Background

- “Almost all the learners studied in SLA research have been literate. There has very little research on the cognitive process of illiterate low literacy adult L2 learners.... They have been left out of the SLA database” Tarone, Bigelow and Hansen (2009) p. 1.
- There is a gap in the research literature about language learning for adults with no experience of alphabetic print literacy. Tarone et. al, University of Minnesota
- Minnesota project with Somali adolescents and adults
- “language processing skills that have been assumed to be universal human traits appear instead to be a product of the learner’s experience with alphabetic print literacy.”
- Conclusion: “older language learners who lack alphabetic print literacy are using the linguistic input they receive orally in different ways from those who are alphabetically literate.”

- 
- **LESLLA** publications suggest that:

- ... the process of developing literacy to the level of native speakers may take much longer than if the individual were literate upon arrival.

- 
- A Tertiary Education Commission report on ESOL gaps and priorities (TEC, 2008, p. 6) acknowledged in particular that ‘learning progress for pre-literate learners is extremely slow.



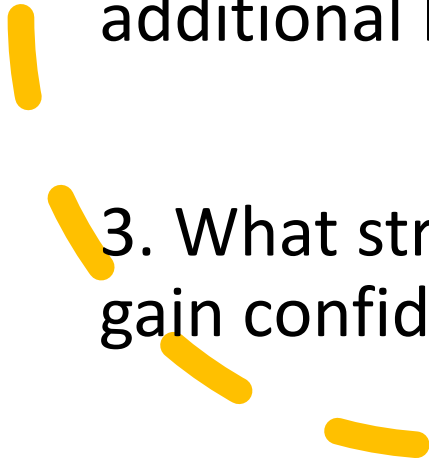
Traditional assumptions about stair-casing to higher level programmes need to be challenged in the case of pre-literate learners.’

Benseman (2012)





Research questions

1. What does the TEC online assessment tool reveal about learners' progress over two years?
 2. Are there other affordances and / or constraints that are contributing to learners' development of literacy in their second or additional language?
 3. What strategies do learners consider help them to learn well and gain confidence?
- 

Participants drawn from government funded ESOL - Literacy classes

								Total	
0-2 years of prior education	Dari	Pashto	Khmer	Somali	Spanish	Afar	Lingala		
	19	7	5	5	2	1	1	40	
8+years of prior education	Dari	Spanish	Somali	Urdu	Lingala	Khmer	Arabic		
	4	5	4	2	1	2	1	20	

Mixed methods

Instruments:

Quantitative TEC Literacy and Numeracy Assessment Tool
4 collections Nov2017 - June 2019

Qualitative

Classroom observations
2 collections (3 x 2 weekly)

Pre and post interviews
(Bilingual interpreters)
July 2017 July – Sept 2019

Analysis: Thematic : Coding and categories emerging

Literacy and Numeracy for Adults Assessment Tool

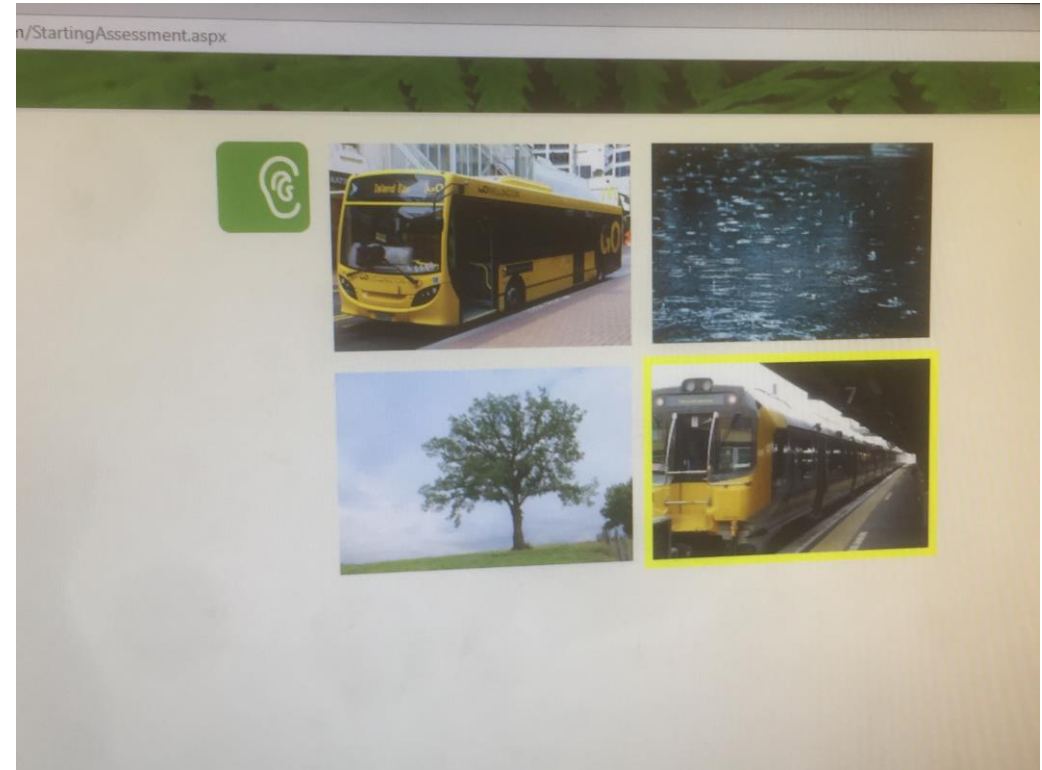
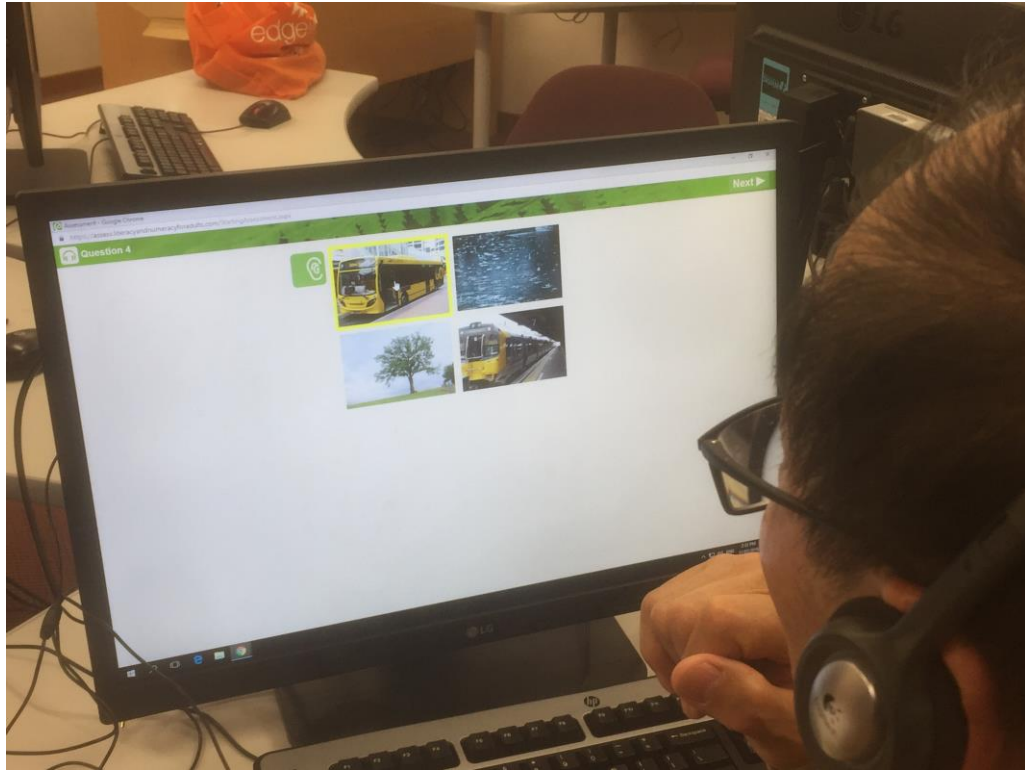
An online adaptive tool primarily

- designed to provide robust and reliable information on the reading, writing, numeracy and vocabulary skills of adults.
- the Assessment Tool was developed for the TEC by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research The Assessment Tool was developed for the TEC by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) (NZCER)

Starting Points

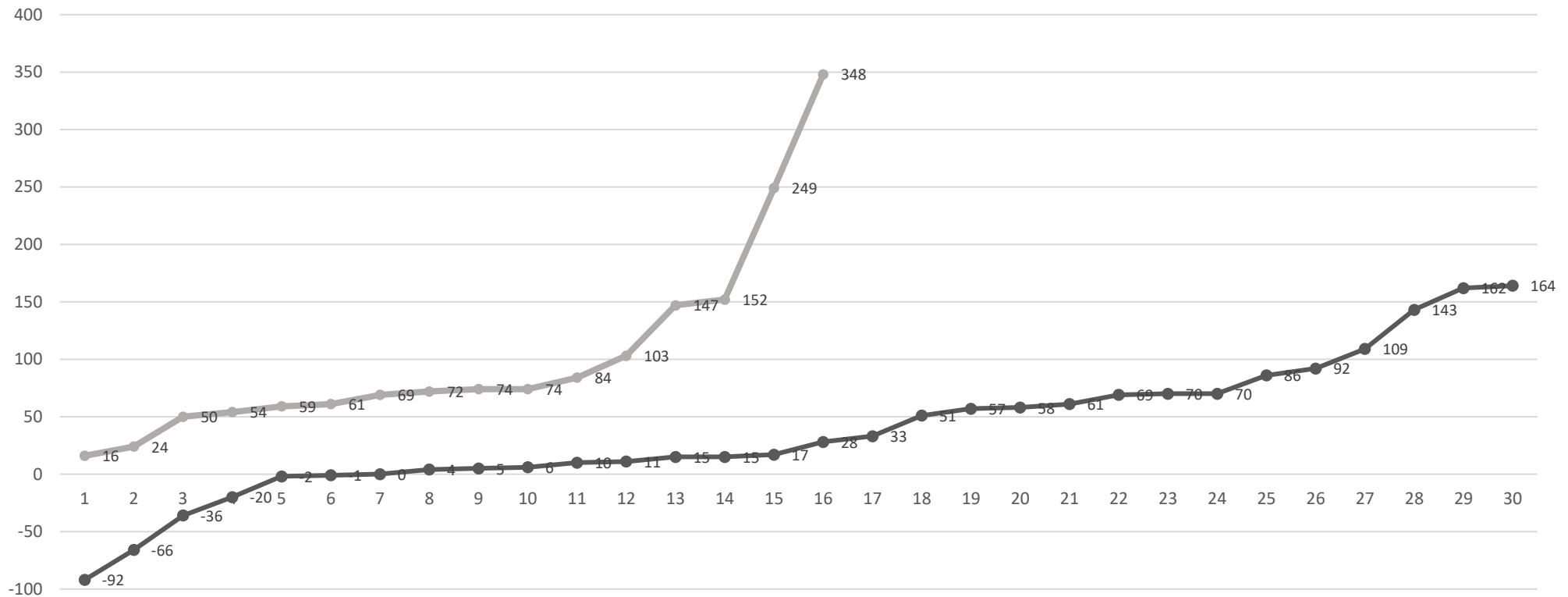
- Starting Points Listening is suitable only for beginning English language learners (ESOL), particularly those new to Aotearoa/New Zealand. It assesses a learner's ability to understand basic, everyday words in spoken English. The main focus is listening.
- Starting Points Listening assesses a learner's ability to understand basic, everyday words of spoken English. It is therefore only suitable for learners who are at very early to early stages of learning English

Online assessment



Scale
Score

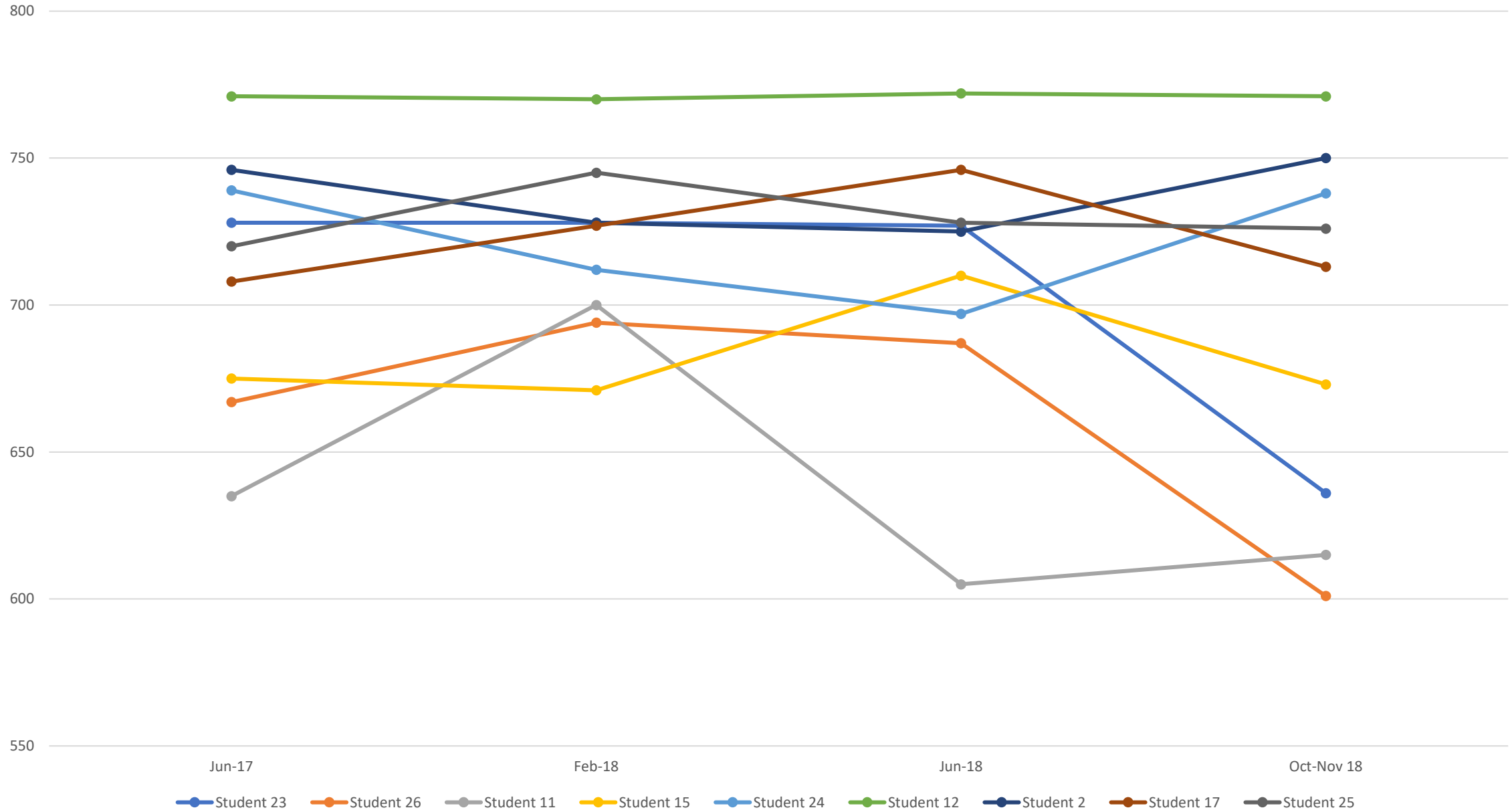
Results from online LNAAT learning tool over eighteen months



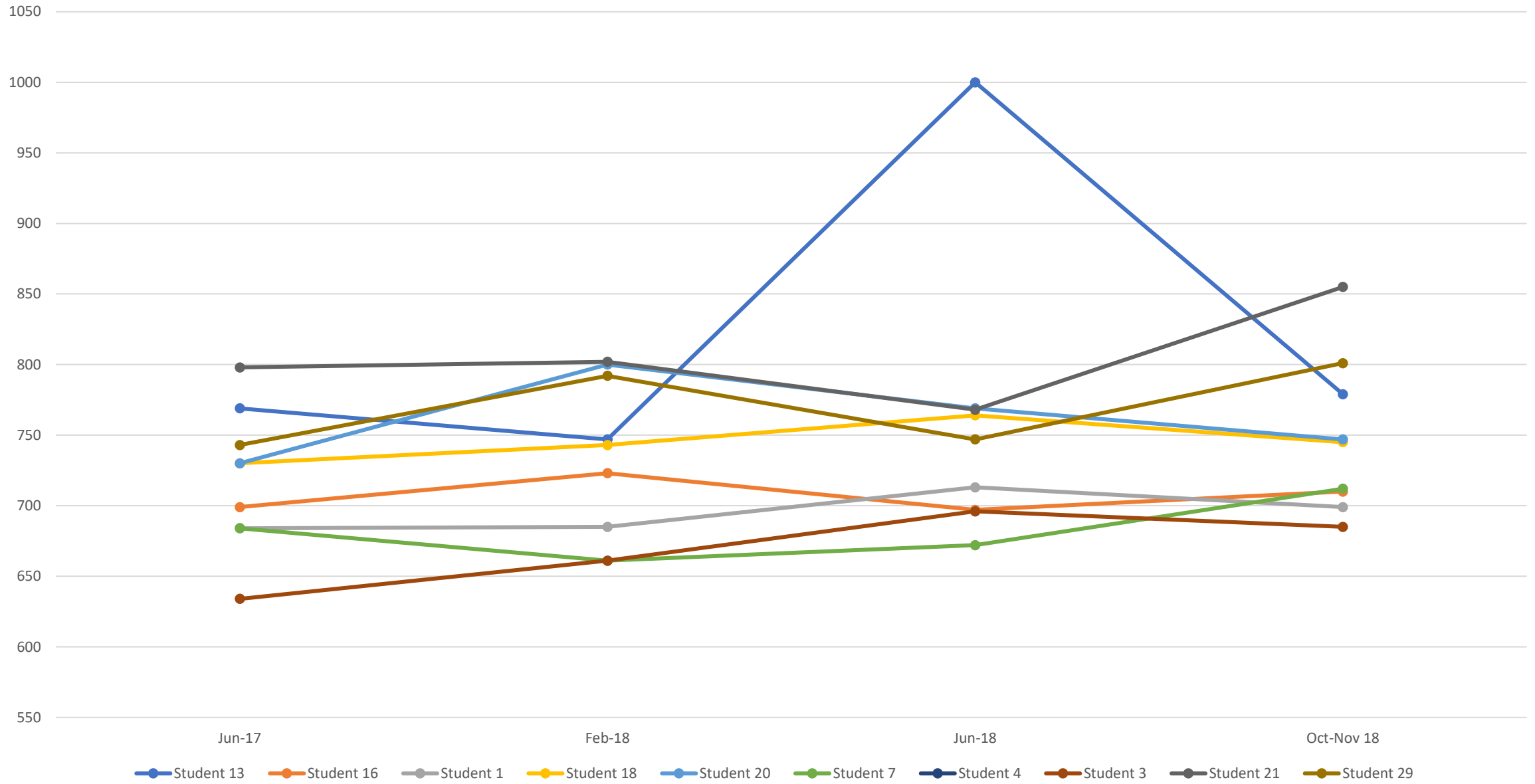
● 0-2 years prior education
30 learners

● 8+ years prior education
16 learners

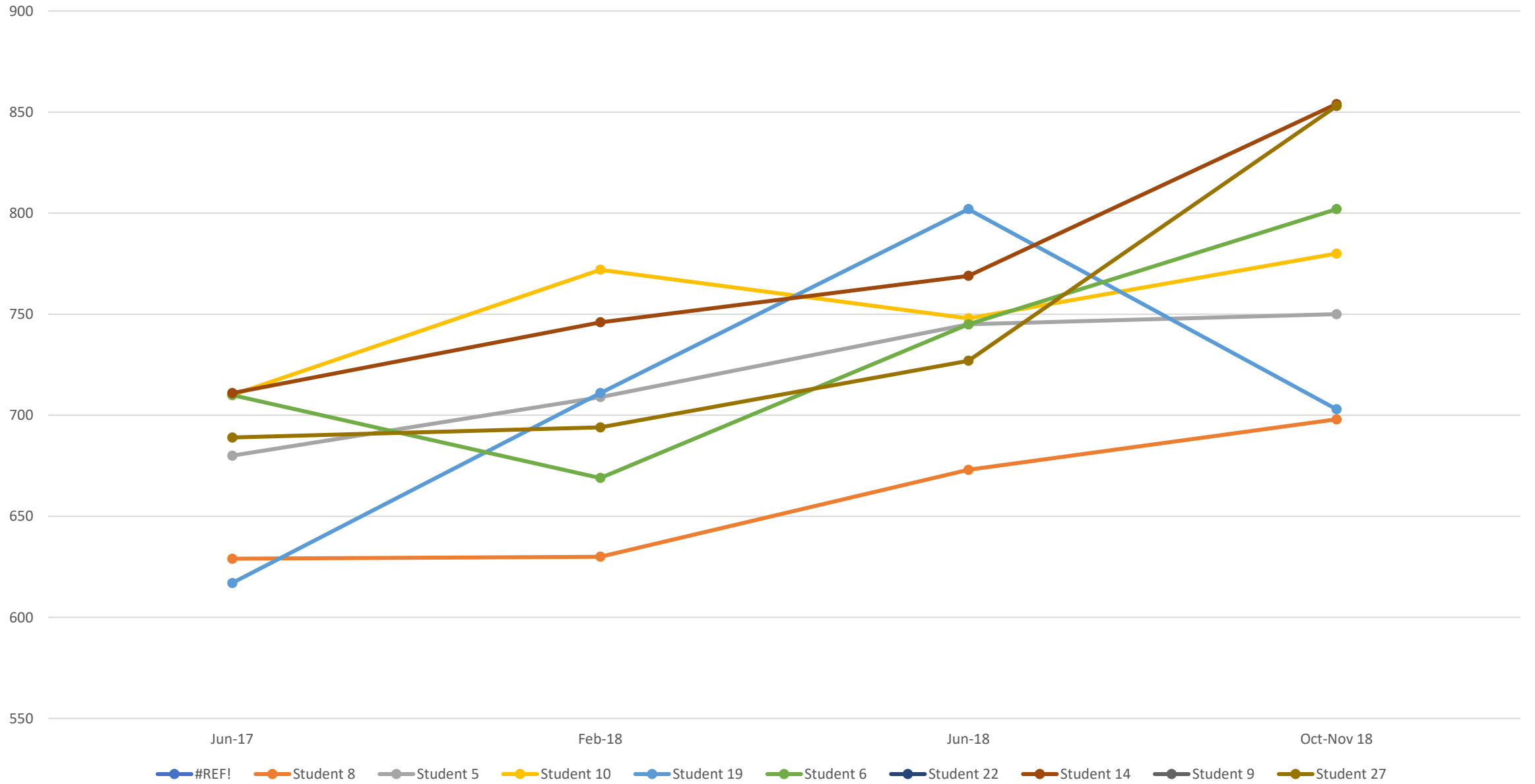
Year 0-2 Group 1



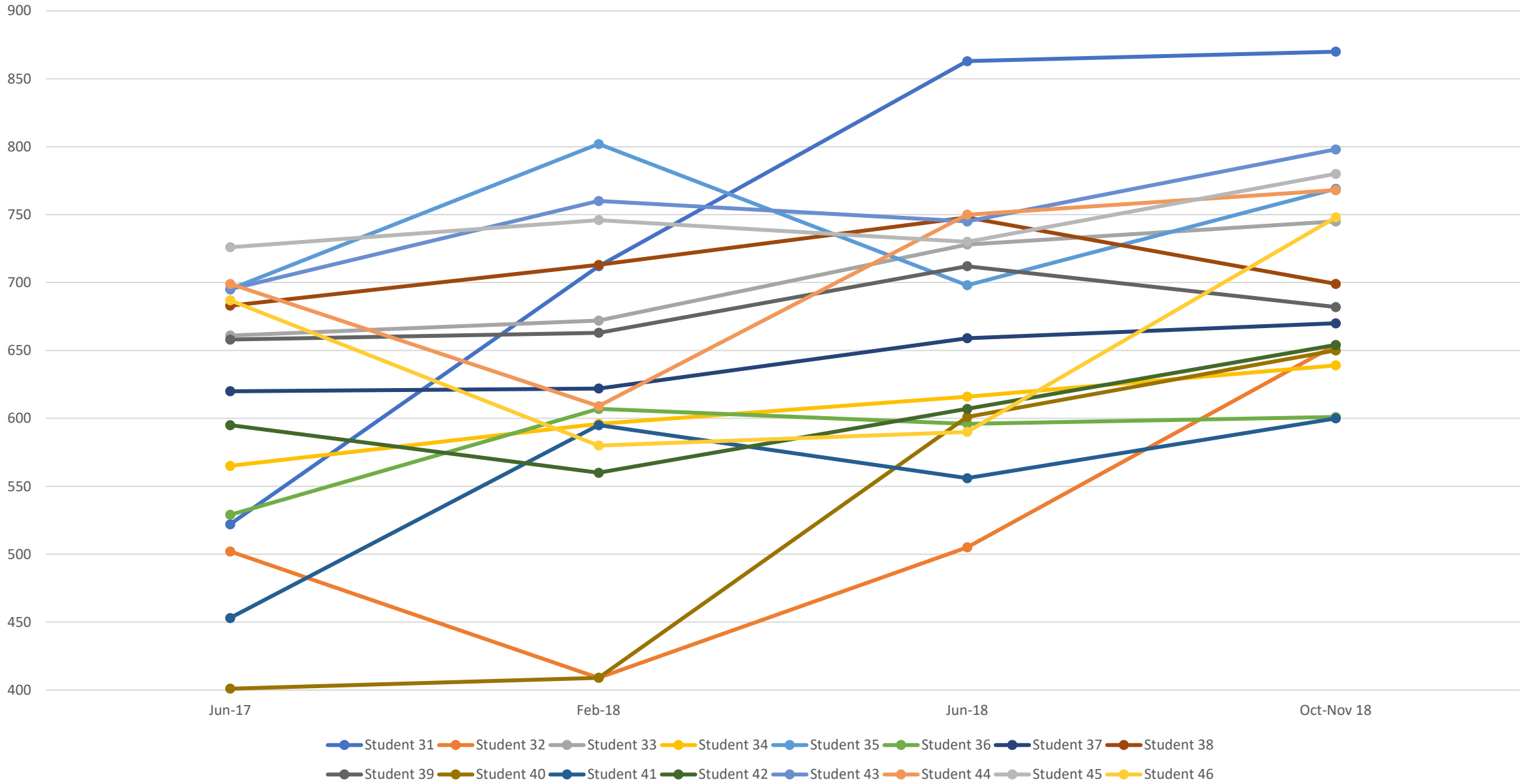
Year 0-2 Group 2



Year 0-2 Group 3



Year 08+



Results: Classroom observations

- Participants cooperate with others and support each other.
- Initially construct meaning through L1
- Later seek clarification of L2 meaning through L1 and L2
- Actively listen. This may be followed by clarification of meaning with another learner or assistant
- Use repetition and imitation to learn new words and phrases
- Copy (write words and phrases already met). They then often read them (vocally).
- Use memory looking up words already met
- Use phones for pronunciation or to find the meaning of a word.

Results from pre-interviews

0-2 years

All participants reported that their main goal was **independence**

“I want to be independent. I don't want to depend on others. Just I want to go to the doctor without an interpreter” Najila

8+ years

Participants wanted to improve their communication skills and literacy skills
They had goals for further training and employment

“..to know what's going on at school. I want to know how they're going, shopping, doctor. I want to do things by myself.” Khadija

45% of **all** participants mentioned that sickness , ill-health, emotional stress resulting from separation from family members was impacting their learning and was often resulting in absences from class.

“I have a cyst which is painful and is annoying me a lot” Blanca

“At school we learn something, but when we go home we forget. We are thinking of our families back home when we go home and so our memory is affected. We don't remember things we learned.” Fatima.

Results from post-interviews

- Participants narrated learning milestones they had achieved in the 2-year period
- Positive about assistance from bilingual assistants, teachers and volunteers
- Felt more confident about their ability to participate in simple conversations
- Felt more independent; answer the phone and answer the door
- Some continued to come to class despite constraints.
- Were forming plans for the future
- Sickness and health issues were mentioned fewer times than in the pre-interviews, however concern for families in country of origin still evident
- Some learners able to talk about strategies that helped them to learn; using their phones, reading with children, communicating in L2, watching the news on TV
- **“When I hear a new word and I can understand inside, then I can answer. Or I use my phone and listen to the word in my language, I listen to the English word and I put the word in English” Tara**
- **“I am sick, but I still come because if I sit at home nothing will change.” Soraya**

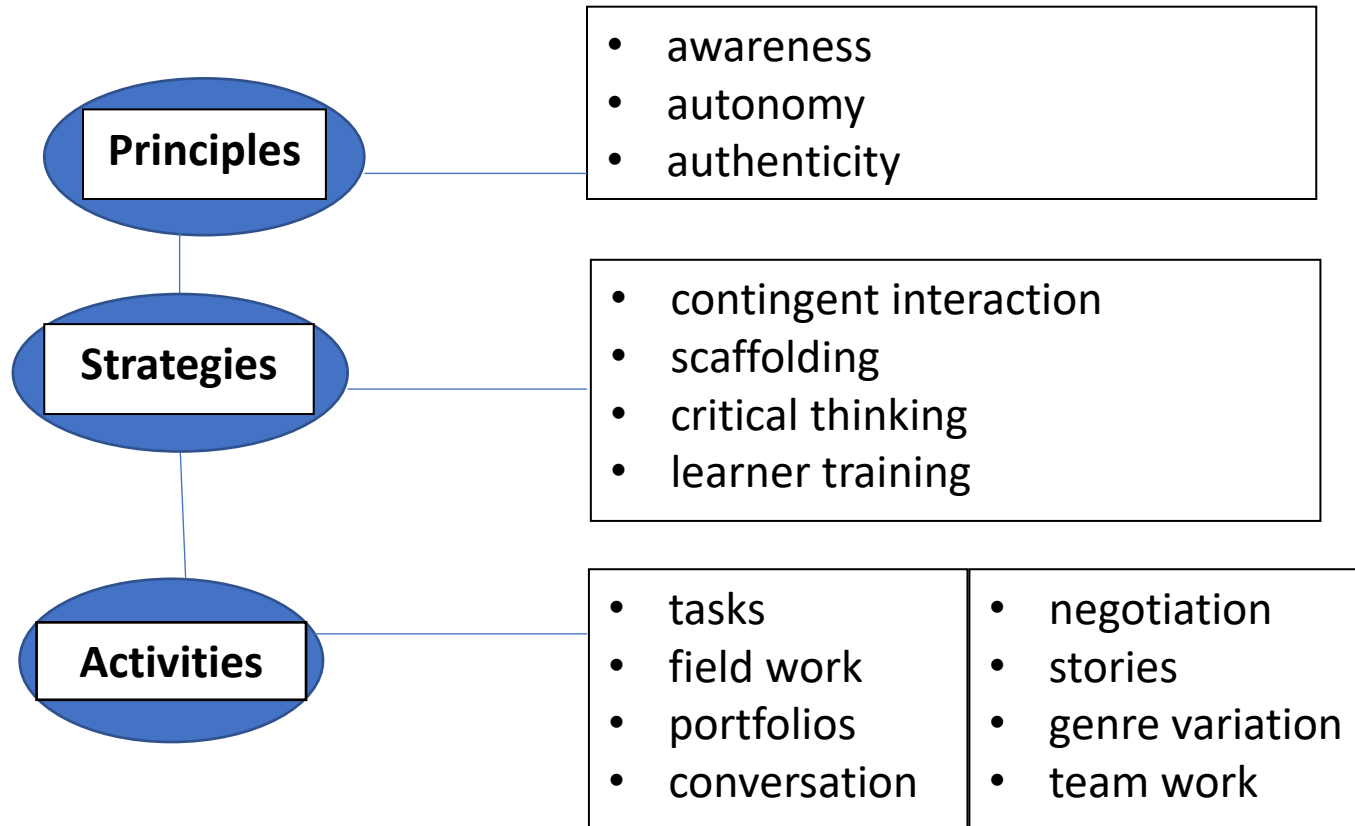
Discussion

- The results suggest that the extra education in their L1 assisted the learners with some prior education to progress more consistently and a little faster than those learners who have little or no prior education in L1
- Both groups are impacted by socio economic factors, physical and mental health, housing and impact of years in camps, so rate of learning may be further impacted
- 0-2 years learners bring much to the learning environment which can be built on. Initially they need support from their L1 to create meaning.
- Learners use memory, repetition, imitation, careful listening, copying and cooperation as strategies to learn. Their goal is some communicative competence in their new community.
- However their lives are complex and learning may be interrupted; orientation, health visits to professionals, child and elder care impact, transport to class, socio economic conditions can make attendance fragile.

Recommendations

- Teachers need to be aware of learners' backgrounds and aspects of their prior lives
- Make entry to learning free from barriers
- In class make learning real, interesting and relevant starting from concrete and known using oral means and pictures. Negotiate syllabus
- Suggestions for those with little or no prior learning in L1: limit formal teaching of letters and sounds until learners are ready; use noticing approach in early stages. Explicit teaching of sounds and letter when ready.

Suggested framework for teaching adults with limited L1 background education; adapted from Van Lier (1996)



Activities

Adapted from Curriculum Design
(Van Lier, 1996, p. 189).

Tasks: Based on real experiences, (Language Experience Approach) Learners dictate, T. writes. Noticing phonemic aspects of text then read text together. Explicit teaching of sound-letter connections may follow later. Use pictures to build meaning. Discuss, question, agree. Learners read own stories which are meaningful. Use repetition and patterns to build oral language. Use new language outside classroom. Use oral platform to build tasks; brainstorm, build vocabulary orally. Recycle and revisit tasks in the next lesson.

Fieldwork: Visits in community, visitors to classroom. Interaction with native speakers. Surveys to find out more about community. Discuss and record, and analyze findings.

Portfolios: Collection of work for own portfolio to read at home. Collection of naturally occurring evidence for assessment (if required).

Negotiation: Negotiation of syllabus, goals and outputs, methods, evaluations. Transparency with learners. Feelings of success Recognition and praise.

Genre variation: Start with oral discussion then move to written e.g. Forms, short recounts and descriptions.

Conversation: Simple and often. Pairs and groups. Every lesson starts with conversation, leading to enquiry. May use phones to record conversations.

Stories: Tell stories from own culture, and current experiences; share them, record them on phones or write them.

Team work: Inclusive practices in class so that learners feel welcomed. Recognition and praise. Transparency with learners and other colleagues.

References

Books

- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) *Using thematic analysis in psychology*. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3 (2). pp. 77-101. ISSN 1478-0887
- Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. (2018) *Immigration Factsheets. Refugees and Asylum Seekers*. Wellington: New Zealand Immigration.
- Ministry of Education. (2003) *The adult ESOL Strategy*. Wellington: Tertiary Education Learning Outcomes.
- Tarone, E., Bigelow, M., & Hansen, K. (2009). *Literacy and Second Language Oracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Van Lier, L. (1996). *Interaction in the Language Curriculum Awareness, Autonomy, Authenticity*. Routledge: New York.

Journal articles

- Benseman, J. (2012). Adult Refugee Learners with Limited Literacy: Needs and Effective Responses. *Refuge* 30, 1 93-103.
- Borer, L. (1999) Interaction in the Language Curriculum: Awareness, Autonomy, and Authenticity. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 56 (2), 372-374.
- Vinogradov, P. (2008). "Maestra!" The letters speak." *Adult ESL students learning to read for the first time. MinneWITESOL Journal*, 25.

Unpublished manuscript

- Shamem, N., McDermot, K., Martin Blaker J., & Carryer, J. (2002). *Through Language to Literacy: A Report on the Literacy Gains of Low Level and Pre-literate Adult ESOL learners in Literacy Classes*. Auckland, New Zealand: Unitec, AUT, ESOL Home Tutor Service.
[www.\[http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/tertiary_education/education-literacy/28063/section-5\]\(http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/tertiary_education/education-literacy/28063/section-5\)](http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/tertiary_education/education-literacy/28063/section-5)
- *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*. (2020). *Figures at a Glance*. Retrieved from <https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance>

Thanks for your attention

- Jenny.field@wintec.ac.nz