

# Second Language Refugee Learners in Egypt: Needs and Challenges

May Soliman

*The British University in Egypt*  
*may.soliman@bue.edu.eg*

Received 12 May 2023 | Received in revised form 19 May 2023 | Accepted 01 June 2023

APA Citation:

Soliman, M. (2023). Second Language Refugee Learners in Egypt: Needs and Challenges. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Linguistics*, 8(2), 2023, 197-209. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21462/jeltl.v8.i2.1059>

## Abstract

*The act of leaving one's country, home, friends, and family seeking a haven in another country is a traumatizing process that has a long-lasting impact on humans. Refugees always face a lot of challenges concerning the cultural, psychological, and educational aspects of the countries in which they seek refuge in. The case of refugees in Egypt is rather different from any other country. Egypt is the refuge for many neighboring Arab and African countries experiencing political and civil turmoil. Many of these refugees succeed in blending in Egyptian society, while others keep struggling. This paper aims at understanding the learning goals of refugees from different countries in learning English as a second language though English is not the first language in Egypt. The paper also aims at understanding the different needs of the refugees when learning English as a second language and the challenges they face. In addition, the paper seeks to understand whether the nationality of the teacher differs in the refugees' perception of success in learning a second language. The paper employs both qualitative and quantitative methods in collecting data from displaced learners of English as a second language and the instructors who teach them to achieve a comprehensive view of the needs and challenges of refugees from different origins, nationalities, and circumstances. The results of the present study indicate that refugees in Egypt mostly learn English for relocation purposes which entails being keen on learning specific language skills more than others. In addition, both the views of the learners and the instructors differ regarding how effective they see the nationality of the instructor in the process of learning a second language. These results should be considered by curriculum developers, instructors, and NGOs to accommodate the refugees' needs in learning a second language.*

*Keywords: Challenges of learning English by Refugees, EFL, Egypt as a refuge, ESL, Refugees in Egypt, Teaching English for Refugees*

## 1. Introduction

The study of second language acquisition is a very broad field that encompasses different kinds of learners who have different types of learning motivation, whether intrinsic or extrinsic. Refugees as learners have a very special nature. According to the Office of The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), a refugee, by the definition of the 1951 Refugee Convention, is "someone who

is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion". There are around 89.3 million displaced people worldwide who were forced to flee their homes because of persecution, wars, struggles, breach of human rights, or major incidents threatening their safety. Out of the 89.3 million, 53.2 million people are internally displaced, while 27.1 million are refugees (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2022). Egypt, as a big country, is a refuge for about 270000 people from about 65 different countries. Most refugees come from Syria, Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Yemen, and Somalia.

The living conditions of refugees, in general, are not pleasant. Whether settling in developed or developing countries, refugees face many challenges daily. According to the International Labour Organization (2023), refugees in Egypt are mostly located in Cairo, Alexandria, and Damietta. Refugees mainly dwell around the areas where they can find jobs. Only 41% of the refugees are employed, while the rest are either searching for a job, idle because of a medical condition or a disability, or are unemployed but are not searching for a job. Among those who are employed, almost one-third work fewer than 40 hours per week, which in fact, cannot be considered full-time employment. Most refugees are employed by wages, which means that there are no contracts that protect their rights as employees/workers. This also means the absence of social security and health insurance and often the presence of unfair conditions and long working hours.

In many cases, refugees are not paid fairly. Around 70% of the refugees in Egypt, live on financial assistance from NGOs. Refugees mostly rent the apartments where they live, and they pay expensive prices as rents for these apartments whether they live alone or in a shared apartment. About one-third of employed refugees have landed a job with the help of their contacts, whether family or friends and more than half of the refugees have complained that they receive no help from NGOs with regard to securing a stable job. Most of those who used to work in highly skilled jobs in their home countries are working in different low-paying simple jobs now. These simple low-paying jobs that refugees usually suffer to secure are, in fact, among the main reasons for their financial hardships (International Labour Organization, 2023). According to Norman (2017), male refugees, in general, mostly find jobs related to selling clothes and food, or simple craftsmanship, or jobs as workers in the industrial zones or private drivers, while women majorly work in rich households as helpers, janitors, or caretakers. All these jobs are part of the informal economy and, again, with no benefits, subjecting them to all sorts of exploitation.

On the educational level, refugees in Egypt show variation. An estimated 12% were never schooled, while 44% received some sort of primary or middle school education. Only about 24% attended secondary school. A very small percentage of 3% of the refugees had vocational education, while 16% only received post-secondary education. It is also notable that males had better chances of education. Refugees from different origins show variation in respect of the amount of education they received. Yemeni refugees, for example, show better educational standards, while more than half of the refugees from Ethiopia and Eritrea are uneducated at all (International Labour Organization, 2023).

In general, refugees share common characteristics. The majority struggle with the stability of sufficient income. Many of them depend on humanitarian assistance to cover their basic needs. Many lack access to formal education. Another common characteristic among refugees in the present study is that most of them speak some variation of Arabic as their first language though a small number of them are non-Arabic speaking who struggle with the language barrier. Surprisingly, the vast majority of the refugee population in Egypt seek to learn English. They try to get enrolled in English language programs in an attempt to master the language. The study of English as a second language by refugees in Egypt is different from the study of any other second language in other host countries since English is not the formal language spoken in Egypt. Yet, access to good opportunities is closely related to how good one's English is.

## Research questions

This paper aims to answer the following questions:

1. Why do refugees in Egypt seek to learn English?
  - a) Do refugees prefer instructors of their own nationalities?
  - b) From a teacher's perspective, do refugees of different nationalities have different needs?
2. What challenges do refugees as learners of English meet?

## 2. Literature Review

Refugees, as learners, generally have many things in common. They have limited time to study, their previous education affects how successful they can be in learning English. They also have psychological needs that require attention. Therefore, many factors help refugees achieve success in learning a second language, which is English in the present study. According to Van Tubergen (2010), the mechanism that governs the acquisition of L2 in the case of refugees includes the amount of exposure to L2, the financial incentive of learning L2, and the learner's capability of learning a new language. This, in general, summarizes all the major factors that lead to the successful acquisition of a second language.

Another important factor that contributes to the success of L2 learning is motivation. Motivation is not easy to measure or categorize. Dörnyei (1998) important discussion of the significance of motivation demonstrated that "Motivation has been widely accepted by both teachers and researchers as one of the key factors that influence the rate and success of second/foreign language (L2) learning. Motivation provides the primary impetus to initiate learning the L2 and later the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process; indeed, all the other factors involved in L2 acquisition presuppose motivation to some extent". The categorization of motivation into different types provides an explanation to why there are varying levels of success in learning a second language. According to Gardner and MacIntyre (1991), instrumental motivation is the type that is usually related to a certain task where the second language is a tool to obtain a job, a promotion, or even a higher grade on a test. On the other hand, integrative motivation is the type of motivation that relates to the desire to blend in with a certain culture and is closely associated with the learner's attitude toward the second language and its speakers. Thus, integrative motivation surpasses instrumental motivation, because it comprises attitudinal aspects crucial to the whole process and the success of second language learning, which agrees with the views of Balboni (2012), suggesting that by living in an L2 country, the learner becomes more motivated by the need to blend in the new country, and thus the motivation becomes more of integrative. Balboni (2012) also suggested that there are three key sources of motivation: "il dovere" (the obligation), "il bisogno" (the need), and "il piacere" (the pleasure). In the case of the refugees, it is mostly the duty or the need that directs their drive for learning L2 which is again instrumental in a way (as cited in Cobo, Kralik, & Bianco, 2020). Other characteristics definitely play some role in the success of learning a second language, such as age, gender, intelligence, aptitude, attitude, learning styles, and beliefs (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). In an attempt to examine personal differences and their effects on language learning, Oroujlou & Vahedi (2011) conducted a study that investigated the relationship among second language learning, motivation, and attitude. They argued through the results that personal attitude and motivation play crucial roles in increasing SL learners' competence and proficiency, which makes complete sense.

Refugees experience some major common challenges regardless of their origin or the host countries where they seek refuge. In addition to the many adaptations that refugees must go through, refugees have to confront three major types of stress as described in Benseman (2014) and Finn (2010). Both argued that refugees need to cope with many conditions and face many challenges, the most important of which are relocation, acculturation, and the trauma of their experience. Thus, it is crucial that the anxiety resulting from moving unexpectedly from one's home and trying hard to fit into a new culture be taken into consideration in the long and tedious process of learning a second language.

According to Al Masri & Abu-Ayyash (2020), Syrian refugees suffered from PTSD due to their traumatic experience, which caused them to experience fear of interacting with a new community. Added to that, those new communities, in some cases, consider refugees a source of terrorism leading to a more stressful situation that discourages learning a second language and inhibits blending into a new culture. Even in a community that saw refugees as no threat, such as Ireland, refugees still found it very difficult to engage and blend in the society and interact socially with other citizens or neighbors because of their different cultural backgrounds (Ćatibušić et al., 2019).

The classical role of a supportive other, as suggested once by Vygotsky (1978) in his idea of the proximal zone of development (ZPD), is also very important. Benseman (2014) argued that the presence of bilingual tutors (BLTs) could be very important as they act as role models not only of language. These BLTs are also aware of social or cultural issues. They sometimes offer support related to other aspects of refugees' needs, and they generally develop the educational experience of the refugees. This idea of a bilingual supportive other in a form of a mentor or a teacher was also confirmed by Dryden-Peterson et al. (2021) through the views of his refugee participants who expressed their gratitude to the translating services their instructors offered to facilitate their learning process.

Although refugees share some major similar characteristics when it comes to learning in general, they show many differences when it comes to specific aspects of second language learning. According to Miller et al. (2005), teachers find differences among groups of refugees from different countries, such as Sudanese and Somalis. In their study, teachers observed substantial cultural and linguistic variations within groups of students from each country related to language, religion, and prior education. Teachers argued that dealing with the needs of the refugees and trying to meet their expectations are huge challenges in terms of practicality and pedagogy. According to Adelman (2019) and Alefsha and Al-Jamal (2019), teachers in this respect need professional, social, and psychological support to be able to play their important roles effectively.

The aim behind learning a second language among refugees is substantially the same. There may be some variations depending on the situation of each refugee, yet, eventually, the aim is to improve their living conditions. In a study conducted to understand the reasons why refugees in Turkey seek to learn Turkish as a second language, it was found that the main reasons behind the refugees' desire to learn Turkish were socialization, acculturation, and fitting in (Nimer, 2019). Another study by Türker and Çelik (2022) investigating the needs of Syrian refugees in learning a second language, which is Turkish in this case, revealed that refugees wanted to learn Turkish to achieve stability by finding a good job, gaining access to education, health care, and good housing, in addition to coping with their surroundings. Similarly, Ćatibušić et al. (2019) showed that the Syrian refugees resettling in Ireland aimed to acquire English as a second language to be able to communicate effectively, land better jobs, and have access to more improved services. Huang (2021), on the other hand, argued that the Syrian refugee learners' situation in Canada was rather different concerning their needs. Their needs did not solely reside in the demand to speak conversational English fluently just to blend in and be able to make social connections, they expressed their need to develop vocationally. So, they needed programs tailored specifically to help them perform their jobs better, whether these jobs were related to craftsmanship or regular office employment.

Most of the research done on refugees striving to learn a second language was done on refugees who already settled in a host country and were trying to learn the language of the country they settled in to be able to blend in and become part of their new "home". Examples of such studies are the studies conducted by Ngan et al. (2016) and AbuJarour & Krasnova (2018) on refugees settling in Germany trying to learn German and Türker and Çelik (2022) on refugees settling in Turkey trying to learn Turkish. However, the situation is rather different in Egypt since English as a target language is not the official language used in Egypt. It is not the first language of the Egyptians. Arabic is the native language

of Egyptian citizens and the language that is used in official documents and media. This requires an investigation of the case of refugees trying to acquire English as a second language in Egypt.

### **3. Research Methods**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This is an exploratory study that employed questionnaires as an instrument for data collection. Two questionnaires were used to collect data from different sets of participants.

#### **3.2 Participants**

This study was conducted at Saint Andrews' Refugees Service (StARS) campus in Cairo. StARS was founded in 1979 by the church of Saint Andrew's United Church. StARS is a center that provides different social, psychological, legal, and educational services for refugees to improve their living conditions. The Adult Education Program at StARS welcomes refugees from different nationalities, including South Sudan, Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Yemen, Iraq, and Syria. They offer different programs that aim at supporting refugees in different aspects of life. The English program is divided into 8 levels that target the four skills. They also offer Arabic classes for non-Arabic-speaking refugees. IT classes are also offered to support refugees who need to improve their IT skills to be able to find better employment opportunities. Vocational classes such as sewing, henna drawing, making accessories, and hairstyling are also offered for females to help empower them. StARS is considered one of the biggest entities serving refugees and displaced people in Cairo.

The participants of this study fall into two groups: refugees learning English and instructors teaching English classes at StARS. The first group consisted of 35 refugee learners, which constituted the two intact classes of an intermediate module: 16 Sudanese, 6 Syrians, 6 Somalis, 4 Eritreans, and 3 Afghans. The participants fell into 17 males and 18 females and were distributed across a wide range of ages from 17 to 45+ since these classes are offered to refugees based on their proficiency level. It is also worth mentioning that only 34% of the participants were single.

All student participants fled their home countries due to political strife, war, unstable conditions, breach of human rights, or political and security persecution by the government. The participants mostly did not live in any country before arriving in Egypt, with the exception of 11% who lived for a short while in Jordan, Turkey, Pakistan, or KSA, which did not allow them to learn any other language than their native language. All participants have been living in Egypt for more than a year, with the exception to 11% only. In fact, 34% of the participants have been living in Egypt for a period that ranges between six and ten years, and 97% speak Arabic. The participants are mostly not employed. Only 31% are employed in low-paying jobs that require simple skills. With regard to their educational background, 63% held a high school certificate, 8% held a bachelor's degree, and 14% had some kind of vocational training.

The second group of participants in this study consisted of five instructors hired by StARS; 4 females and one male. The instructors' nationalities varied; two were Sudanese, one was Yemeni, and one was Egyptian. They all fell in the age group between 20 and 40 years old and had some experience in teaching refugees that ranged between one and five years, except for only one instructor who had more than 5 years of experience teaching in the field. They all received training from StARS when they were hired. The training included topics such as how to deal with adult refugees in the class, different styles of teaching, methodology of teaching, classroom management, types of students, and managing cultural differences. They all dealt with refugees from different countries.

#### **3.3 Instruments**

Data collection was done through the administration of two questionnaires. The first questionnaire was designed to collect data from refugees from different countries. The questionnaire consisted of 49 questions and fell into four sections. Section one targeted demographic and personal information. It consisted of 15 questions: four open-ended and eleven closed-ended. The second section targeted the educational background and consisted of four closed-ended questions. The third section was the major

one and consisted of 21 questions: seven open-ended and fourteen closed-ended questions. It mainly targeted the reasons behind being keen on learning English and what needs refugees sought to fulfill concerning their strife to learn English. The final section investigated the refugees' preferences concerning the nationality of the instructor. This section consisted of nine questions: two open-ended and seven closed-ended questions. In total, the questionnaire included 13 open-ended questions and 36 closed-ended questions. The closed-ended questions included multiple-choice, Likert scale, ranking, and checkbox questions. The open-ended questions required the respondents to explain their answers and provide insights on different aspects. The questions were typed in both English and Arabic.

The second questionnaire was designed for instructors teaching English to refugees. The questionnaire consisted of 26 questions; seventeen closed-ended and nine open-ended. The questionnaire was used to collect data about the instructors' perception of the needs of refugees from different origins and the challenges refugees face in learning English. Both questionnaires were administered electronically using Microsoft Forms. Links to the questionnaires were shared with the relevant groups, and participants responded electronically. In very few cases, a hard copy was given to the respondents to overcome connectivity problems.

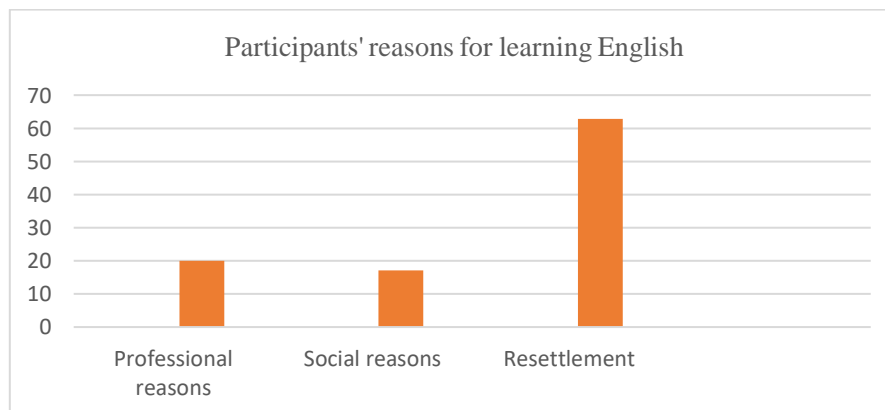
### 3.4 Data Analysis

Since the aim of this study was to investigate the needs and the challenges the refugees in Egypt face and not to make any generalization concerning a wider population, the data collected by the questionnaires that were administered at StARS for the refugees' learners and the instructors were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize the characteristics of the data set in an attempt to answer the research questions. A thematic analysis of the open-ended questions was conducted to summarize the most prominent challenges and needs.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Refugee Learners

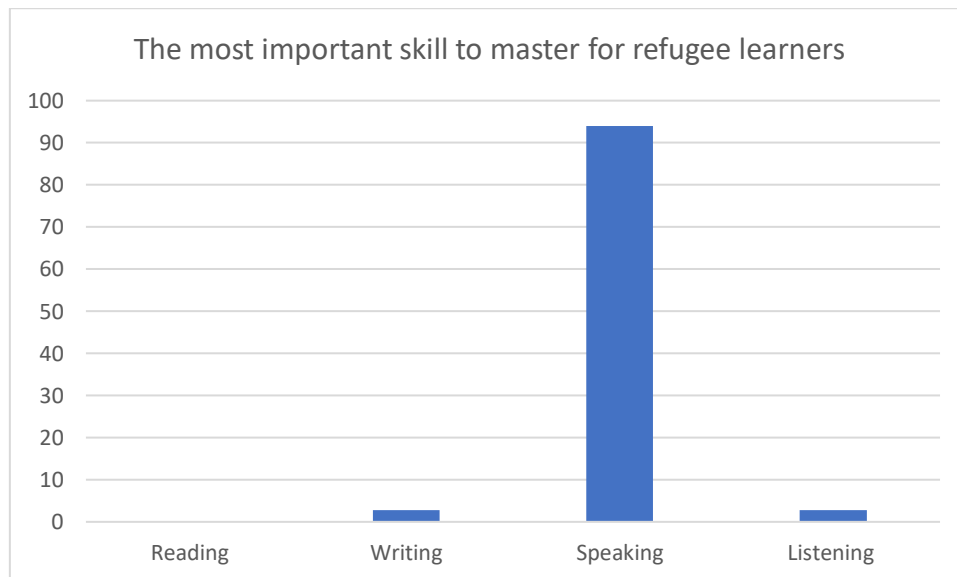
In investigating why refugees in Egypt seek to learn English, the participants of this study were asked about different reasons behind their eagerness to learn English in Egypt, where the official language is Arabic. When asked about their belief that mastering the English language will improve their financial status, 86% expressed their agreement, while only 14% were neutral. However, all participants agreed that a good command of English will land them a good job opportunity. In response to the open-ended question of why refugees seek to learn English, there were a variety of answers that ranged between finding better job opportunities, self-development, and being able to communicate well with different people. In addition, 62.8% of the participants expressed that their main interest in learning English was because they wanted to resettle in another country (Figure 1.). The following are examples of the participants' responses: "I want to be able to travel to Canada", "to improve my qualifications to find a better job and be able to travel abroad".



**Figure 1:** Participants' reasons for learning English

In investigating whether the participants think that they feel obliged to learn English in Egypt, 37% expressed that they felt totally obliged to learn English, while 31% expressed that they felt some obligation. When they were asked if mastering English would help them integrate more with Egyptian society, 57 % expressed their agreement, 23% were not sure, and 20% thought it has no effect. Their reasons could be summarized under four main themes: landing better career opportunities, communicating better with different social classes, an alternative to weak Arabic, and definitely a goal for relocation. This is again intriguing since Egypt is an Arabic-speaking nation, and knowing Arabic should be enough to help integrating into the Egyptian society.

The most interesting among these themes is “communication with different classes of people”. Participants expressed their sense of obligation to learn English, saying, “Most people use English terms in their everyday language.”, “English is spoken a lot, and many people use English expressions all the time”, “ Rich people speak English in Egypt”, “People respect you more when you know English”, “ There are places in Egypt people speak English more than Arabic”, and “Most people use English in good places now”. This could be the reason for the participants’ responses when they were asked about the type of courses they would sign up for. The results showed that 74% stated that they would certainly enroll in conversation courses (figure 2). In the same respect, when the respondents were asked about which skill they think is the most important among the four skills, 94% of the participants stated that speaking is the most crucial skill to master. This could also be related to the fact that 62.8% of them chose relocation as the first reason for being keen on improving their English-speaking skills, while 20% had professional goals as the drive for their choice when they were asked to choose why they wanted to master the skill they think was the most important. In their views, the skill of speaking fluently is an enabling tool to achieve their goals.



**Figure 2:** Most important skill to master for refugee learners

The second section of the questionnaire explored the respondents’ needs in learning English and the challenges they faced as well. The challenges can be categorized under two main themes: language-related challenges and resources-related challenges. Many respondents expressed their struggle with specific language-related issues such as pronunciation, fluency, possessing a limited vocabulary repertoire, and writing. On the other hand, the respondents faced many financial and logistic challenges. The most prominent among those challenges is the tuition fee which they found very expensive in places other than StARS. Other issues were mentioned among the challenges, such as the time to attend courses and study while having to work or search for a job, the difficulty of commuting to language

centers, and the lack of the opportunity to practice what they learned in class away from the class. When the respondents were requested to rank the following factors from the most important to the least important to them (the tuition fees, the content of the course, the proximity of the place to your home or workplace, receiving a certificate, the nationality of the instructor), 53% chose the tuition fee as the most important factor.

The questionnaire also investigated the respondents' needs as well as their preferences in learning. When they were asked about what they thought could help them improve the skill they wished to master, the respondents' answers could be classified into five main categories; more opportunities to practice in and out of class, qualified teachers, traveling to an English-speaking country, using technology, and learning more vocabulary by reading English material and listening to English media. They expressed their suggestions for improvement as follows: "If I practice the language a lot through meetings and classes with people from different countries, I can be better", "Using technology, good teachers, more practice will help me improve", "Reading and learning new words and speaking a lot is good to be better", and "Listen more to English people and attend more classes". Moreover, 97% of the respondents strongly agreed that they learn better through participating in activities using the language with other learners.

In an attempt to examine the relationship between the nationality of the instructor and the refugees' success in learning English, the respondents were asked about the role that the instructor played in their progress in learning English. It was found that 88% of the respondents agreed that the instructor's role in their success is indispensable. They also explained their reasons elaborately. The reasons included the instructor being fluent, qualified, competent, encouraging, and supportive, providing a lot of practice opportunities, and facilitating the lessons and the process of learning. The respondents expressed opinions such as "When the instructor is good, calm, and honest, he can help me develop", "When he gives information in a good way that helps me improve and teach me new words and expressions," and "A good teacher gives a lot of exercises and homework to help me in learn".

The last section of the questionnaire addressed the nationality of the instructor. The respondents were asked if they preferred an instructor of their own nationality, and to this question, 9% strongly agreed, 9% agreed, 53% were neutral, 24% disagreed, and 6% strongly disagreed. However, those who agreed explained their reasons stating that an instructor of their own nationality would understand them more as s/he would have the same cultural background. When the respondents were requested to rank the following factors from the most important to the least important to them (the tuition fees, the content of the course, the proximity of the place to your home or workplace, receiving a certificate, the nationality of the instructor), the nationality of the instructors came last as 85% of the respondents ranked it as their least important factor.

It is also worth mentioning that when investigating the respondents' preferences of the instructor's nationality, they were required to rank the following types of instructors from the most preferred to the least preferred (native speaker of English, any qualified instructor, an instructor of your own nationality), an instructor of the same nationality of the respondent was the least preferred choice for 79% of the respondents.

#### **4.2 EFL Refugee Instructors**

The questionnaire administered to the instructors mainly investigated their perception of the refugees' needs in learning English and the challenges they usually face. All the instructors agreed that the main reason why refugees in Egypt generally seek to learn English is relocation to another country. In this, they agree with the majority of refugee learners in their intended goals of seeking to learn English. This could be in favor of the learners since the instructors seemed to have a true idea of the learners' needs and could thus work on catering to this need.



As far as the needs of refugees are concerned, 60% of the instructors agreed that refugees from different countries have diverse needs, explaining that by saying that the needs of the refugees are varied and not solely focused on learning. Some of their answers were as follows: “Refugees usually have different expectations, and education is one of them”, and “Some need to do their business, others get learning in different aspects of their life, and some need medical help, especially from war places”.

According to 57% of the instructors, the most challenging skill for refugees is speaking. They argued that this was a natural result of the various accents and limited opportunity for practice present among refugees of different nationalities. This was expressed in answers such as “The refugees’ languages, and accents are different”, “They do not have enough confidence to speak in front of others”, and “They usually don’t have anyone to practice English with”. Again, this is in line with the needs and challenges expressed by the learners. Almost all of them expressed their need to enroll in conversation classes and stated that speaking fluently constitutes a difficulty for them for several reasons.

Contrary to the learners’ views concerning the nationality of the instructors, a total of 80% of the instructors believed that refugees would prefer an instructor of their own nationality since s/he “would have the same values and culture” and “refugees would feel more comfortable and relaxed”. This could be an invitation to the instructor to reflect on their roles. It could be that the emotional and psychological support they should provide needs to be clearly perceived by the learners in addition to the educational role that they play.

## **5. Discussion**

The focus of this study was to explore the aims of the refugees in learning English as a second language in Egypt, where the official language is Arabic and the challenges that refugees face in this process in Egypt. This study also examined the learners’ and the instructors’ perceptions of how crucial the nationality of the instructor is in helping learners acquire English as a second language.

The results of the present study agree with some studies in the field in some respects and differ in others. The general needs and challenges of refugees remain greatly similar regardless of where they live. They all seek better social, financial, and educational conditions, and this is mainly achieved through being able to obtain good job opportunities. The present study agrees in this respect with Türker & Çelik (2022) and Al Masri & Abu-Ayyash (2020). Both studies confirm that financial stability is the main goal that refugees seek by trying to learn a second language, which is purely an instrumental motivation.

The results of the present study are also aligned with Huang’s (2021) results, where Syrian refugees wanted to master the language to develop vocationally. In this particular respect, the situation in Egypt is not very different. English is a language that is thought of as an essential qualification when applying for any job that pays well in Egypt. Within the Egyptian context, English as a language is deemed as a characteristic of the elite. Thus, by learning English and being able to communicate, refugees think that they will have a better social affiliation, and the process of acculturation with a better social class will be easier. This also agrees with Ćatibušić et al. (2019) as the refugees in Egypt, not so different from the Syrian refugees in Ireland, seek to learn a second language mainly for better employment, more accessible services, and for social blending and feeling as a part of the community.

However, in other respects, the situation in Egypt is rather unique. It cannot be easily compared to many other host countries. English is not the official language in Egypt. Arabic is the official language and the mother tongue of the Egyptian people. Modern Standard Arabic is employed in all formal and official documents, newspapers, education, and formal media. Several variations of Arabic are spoken in Egypt. Different dialects are spoken by Egyptians depending on where in Egypt they come from. However, all these dialects are mutually intelligible, yet distinctive.

The difference between the Egyptian context and any other context is that, in most cases, Egypt is sought as a transitioning country by many refugees. This was expressed by the refugees themselves as

62.8% stated that they wanted to master English in order to be able to proceed with their travel plans, and it was also stated by 60% of the instructors who believed that the main goal of the refugees behind learning English is relocation, unlike the case of the Syrian refugees in Ćatibušić et al.(2019) who wanted to feel at home and invest in learning the language for a better future for their children in Ireland. In Egypt, refugees try hard to learn English to increase their opportunities of traveling to either, Europe, Canada, USA, or any other country that they seek to settle in.

The process of learning English as a second language in Egypt is not easy. Thus, the refugees' struggle is real because refugees in other countries where they eventually settle are surrounded and immersed in the languages that they seek to learn with an abundance of opportunities for practice and feedback. This, in fact, agrees with the recommendations of the participants in the study of Al Masri and Abu-Ayyash (2020) as they expressed that one way to acquire the language was to engage in social interaction with native speakers on a daily basis to be able to learn the colloquial language needed for their everyday interactions not only the language found in books. However, in Egypt, refugees with different nationalities speak and interact in Arabic, the official language of the whole nation, if it is their native language or the official language of their home countries, or they try to learn survival Arabic to be able to interact in the few cases where Arabic is not their native language. In most cases, refugees deal in Egyptian Arabic and may resort to classical Arabic in very rare cases.

Moreover, to improve the language skills of the refugees, most host countries such as Germany, Canada, Turkey, and Ireland usually enroll refugees in obligatory language support classes funded by the government since it is a crucial step to integrate refugees in their cultures through facilitating the acquisition of the target language for them (Lindner et al., 2020; Türker & Ćelik 2022; Hung, 2022; Ćatibušić et al., 2019). In some contexts, learners are offered up to 40 hours of English language classes per week during their first year, as in the case of Ireland, and between two to four hours during their second year (Ćatibušić et al., 2019). In another context, such as Denmark, refugees have to attend around 1800 hours of language training over the duration of three years. The training also includes a civic education module (Nielsen Arendt et al., 2021).

Mandatory language training in Egypt is not obligatory. The situation in Egypt is rather different. Since the official language is Arabic, not English, and the majority of the refugees are from neighboring countries that speak Arabic, the government does not compel refugees to complete language training in English, and thus, providing this type of training is neither a priority nor an obligation. Therefore, this becomes one of the needs that is more addressed usually by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and NGOs such as Saint Andrews' Refugees Service (StARS), Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), and Caritas Egypt (Caritas Egypt is a humanitarian organization that provides a range of different services including language and vocational training for refugees in Egypt). Enrolling in private courses is not always an option for refugees due to the expensive tuition fees. Therefore, in the absence of multiple opportunities to practice language and the limited chances of attending formal instruction in English and receiving feedback, the process of learning English as a second language remains a bigger challenge for refugees in Egypt.

The results of the present study also correlate with Miller et al., (2005) regarding the instructors' beliefs of the variation of the refugees' needs according to their different origins. In the present study, 60% of the instructors agreed that refugees from different countries have varying needs and expectations. The refugees' needs vary and are not always solely focused on learning. This is because they belong to different geographical regions, have diverse cultural and educational upbringings, and could have different native languages as well. This also is in line with Bernhard (2023) findings with regard to the significance of understanding the intricate and varied needs and experiences of refugees when it comes to learning a second language, which accordingly requires the attention of more systematic social and institutional organizations that can help cater for the needs of those refugees.

The last intriguing result of the present study is the perception of the instructor's role for the instructors and learners. Benseman (2014) argued that the presence of bilingual tutors for refugees is very important as they provide more than just learning. They also provide social and cultural support. By bilingual, he meant tutors who spoke the two languages; the native language of the learners and the target language they seek to learn. It was also stressed that the bilingual tutors belonged to the same cultural background as the refugees. This idea of cultural awareness was also argued for by Şerife et al. (2018). In their study, the instructors themselves expressed the importance of being well informed of the circumstances and the "psychosocial status" of their refugee learners in addition to the importance of being bilingual and proficient in the language skills that are most needed by the learners. These views agreed with the view of 80% of the instructors in the present study, who argued for the importance of the aspect of shared values and culture to create a sense of comfort and trust and eventually help learners achieve better results. These views additionally agree with the views expressed in Dryden-Peterson et al. (2021) on the role of the teacher in promoting the refugees' education, as the learners themselves expressed how important it was for the educational process to make things easier for them through translation which requires proficiency in two languages. Therefore, in all cases, teachers need to be culturally aware of the needs of the refugees since they play an important role in bridging the gap between schooling and blending in the community.

Though EFL instructors in the present study saw that the nationality of the instructor is an important factor in the process of second language learning, this was not the opinion of the majority of the refugees surveyed. Unlike the results of Kostoulas-Makrakis and Makrakis (2020), in which Syrian refugees preferred community service EFL classes because those classes were delivered by Syrian EFL teachers who are more knowledgeable of their culture and needs, the refugee participants in the present study did not see the instructor of their own nationality as an advantage or a leading factor to achieve success. Only 18% of the present sample found the idea of an instructor of the same nationality helpful to their situation. The rest of the respondents were either neutral or disagreed with the idea. In fact, 85% of the respondents ranked the nationality of the instructor last in a list of the most important factors that affect their attending English classes. This was supported by the majority of the respondents as when they had to rank their preferences of the nationality of the instructor, 59 % ranked the native speaker instructor as their first choice, while 79% ranked the instructor of their same nationality as the least preferred choice. Thus, the idea of having the same culture and values seems not to be as important as being exposed to an authentic native language for the refugees. This could also be interpreted as part of the acculturation process.

## 6. Conclusion

Finally, the needs, challenges, and aspirations of the refugees in learning English will always remain a complex issue since trauma and difficult psychological and social circumstances will always be part of the equation. The aim behind seeking to learn a specific second language may differ. However, the enabling pedagogy and constant support will always remain the driving forces to help achieve the successful acquisition of a second language. Though Egypt poses a unique context for refugees who seek to learn English as a second language, the challenges, and the needs of the refugee learners in Egypt are comparable to many other contexts in many aspects. Thus, constant research on the developing and evolving needs is required to make ends meet and help refugees blend in their host countries in general. Additionally, more research on how to provide better opportunities for the practice of English as a second language for refugee learners in Egypt is also needed to cater to their learning goals, even if relocation is their ultimate goal.

## References

- Abu Jarour, S., & Krasnova, H. (2018, Aug. 16). *E-Learning as a means of social inclusion: The case of Syrian refugees in Germany*. AMCIS 2018 Proceedings, New Orleans. <https://aisel.aisnet.org/amcis2018/Education/Presentations/28>

- Adelman, E. (2019, Dec. 17). Refugee teachers: The challenges of managing professional expectations with personal experiences. *INEE*. <https://inee.org/resources/refugee-teachers-challenges-managing-professional-expectations-personal-experiences>
- Alefesha, H., Al-Jamal, D. (2019). Syrian refugees' challenges and problems of learning and teaching English as a foreign language (EFL): Jordan as an example. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies*, 6(2), 117-129. <https://doi.org/10.29333/ejecs/235>
- Al Masri, H. & Abu-Ayyash, E. (2020). Second language acquisition from Syrian refugees' perspectives: Difficulties and solutions. *Open Linguistics*, 6(1), 372-385. <https://doi.org/10.1515/opli-2020-0025>
- Benseman, J. (2014). Adult refugee learners with limited literacy: Needs and effective responses. *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, 30(1), 93-103. <https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.38606>
- Bernhard, S. (2023). Accommodation, empowerment and disinvestment - Typical second-language learning trajectories of Syrian refugees in Germany. *International Migration*, 61, 254-269. <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.13044>
- Ćatibušić, B., Gallagher, F., & Karazi, S. (2019). Syrian voices: An exploration of the language learning needs and integration supports for adult Syrian refugees in Ireland. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 25(1), 22-39. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2019.1673957>
- Cobo, M. O., Kralik, R., & Bianco, R. (2020). Refugees' L2 learning: New perspectives on language motivation research. *XLinguae*, 13(4), 64-80. <https://doi.org/10.18355/XL.2020.13.04.05>
- Dörnyei, Z. (1998). Motivation in second and foreign language learning. *Language Teaching*, 31(3), 117-135. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S026144480001315X>
- Dryden-Peterson, S., Chopra, V., Talhouk, J., & Geha, C. (2021, October). We see you: What Syrian students wish their teachers knew. Refugee REACH Initiative, Harvard Graduate School of Education. <https://www.reach.gse.harvard.edu/resources/we-see-you-what-syrian-refugee-students-wish-their-teachers-knew>
- Finn, H. (2010). Overcoming barriers: Adult refugee trauma survivors in a learning community. *TESOL Quarterly*, 44(3), 586-596. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27896747>
- Gardner, R. C., & MacIntyre, P. D. (1991). An instrumental motivation in language study: Who Says It Isn't Effective? *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 13(1), 57-72. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44487535>
- Huang L. (2021). "I have big, Big, BIG dream!": Realigning instruction with the language-learning needs of adult Syrians with refugee experience in Canada. *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*. 37(2), 141-163. <https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.40800>
- Huang, L. (2022). Supporting adult Syrian learners with refugee experience in Canada: Research-based insights for practitioners. *Journal of Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00220574221091930>
- International Labour Organization. (2023, March 21). Socio-economic profiling of refugees and asylum seekers in Egypt. [https://www.ilo.org/global/programmes-and-projects/prospects/publications/WCMS\\_872992/lang-en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/programmes-and-projects/prospects/publications/WCMS_872992/lang-en/index.htm)
- Miller, J.M., Mitchell, J.M., & Brown, J.R. (2005). African refugees with interrupted schooling in the high school mainstream: dilemmas for teachers. *Prospect*, 20(2), 19-33. <https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/aeipt.145113>
- Ngan, H. Y., Lifanova, A., Jarke, J., & Broer, J. (2016). Refugees welcome: Supporting informal language learning and integration with a gamified mobile application. In K. Verbert, M. Sharples, & T. Klobučar (Eds.), *Adaptive and adaptable learning: EC-TEL* (pp. 455-458). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-45153-4\\_54](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-45153-4_54)
- Nielsen Arendt, J., Bolvig, I., Foged, M., Hasager, L., & Peri, G. (2021). Language training and refugees' integration. *Institute of Labor Economics (IZA)*. <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/232897/1/dp14145.pdf>
- Nimer, M. (2019). Institutional structures and Syrian refugees' experiences with Turkish language education in Turkey. *Istanbul Policy Center (IPC)*. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/72660>

- Norman, K. P. (2017). Ambivalence as policy: Consequences for refugees in Egypt. *Égypte/Monde Arabe*, (15), 27–45. <https://doi.org/10.4000/ema.3663>
- Oroujlou, N., & Vahedi, M. (2011). Motivation, attitude, and language learning. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 29, 994-1000. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.11.333>
- Kostoulas-Makrakis, N. & Makrakis, V. (2020). Developing student-driven learning activities to promote refugee-quality education through the CARE methodology. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 28(2). <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669760.2020.1765091>
- Şerife, D., Belet, B., & Ecmel, Y. (2018). Teaching Turkish as a second language to Syrian refugees. *Educational Research and Reviews*, 13(18), 645–653. <https://doi.org/10.5897/err2018.3565>
- Türker, M., & Çelik, H. (2022). Investigation of Syrian refugees' motivations for learning Turkish. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies*, 10(1), 65-74. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijels.v.10n.1p.65>
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2022). Refugee statistics. <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/>
- Van Tubergen, F. (2010). Determinants of second language proficiency among refugees in the Netherlands. *Social Forces*, 89(2), 515–534. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.2010.0092>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner, & E. Souberman (Eds.). Harvard University Press.