

Recommendations for sustainable workplace language learning

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Support for language learning in the **low-paid, low skilled** workplace

Questions

1. Why support migrants in low-skilled jobs?
2. Why support language learning at work?
3. What support do migrants want?
4. What support do migrants need?
5. What support is practical?

Answers

Practitioner-led action research (1997-14)

Research for Mayor of London's office (2013)

Why support migrants in low-skilled jobs?

1. Migrants in low-skilled work **more likely to stay** in UK than foreign students/high-skilled migrants

2. Language skills linked to

- **Full-time work**
- **Participation in vocational learning**
- **Utilising existing higher level skills**

Migrant in low-skilled job + better language skills =
added value for **migrant, employer** and **economy**

Mayor of London's office

3. Limited language skills pose significant quality + safety issues for employer-organisations

Practitioner-led research

Why support language learning at work?

Dynamics

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

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

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

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

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

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

→ Limited exposure to English at work, at home

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

Why support language learning at work?

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

A. At work

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

A. At work

Work = most realistic place for migrants to study

What we also know about work

Most adult learning (formal + informal) already happens at work

Work as a vehicle for learning

Structured activity within instructional framework (i.e. specified tasks, processes, training, supervision, feedback etc)

Exposure to English: interaction with colleagues, supervisors, managers, clients/customers, use of documentation, signage etc

Practitioner-led action research results

Realistic opportunity in low-paid, low-skilled workplace for

- On-the-job learning, integrated into management of work activity
- Guided learning, supported with materials

led by employer, facilitated by learning provider

What support do migrants want?

[Note: migrants **do** want to improve their English]

Guidance to help them learn effectively, efficiently

Motivation to help them **persist** with learning

Opportunity to **extend** their exposure to and use of English

Personalised feedback

Requirements

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

Protected study time when mentally fresh

Preferences

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

Speaking + listening, pronunciation (lower levels)

Writing + pronunciation (higher levels)

What support do migrants need?

Barriers to learning

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

Barriers = enablers

What support do migrants need?

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

In other words – exactly what every other language learner needs

What support do migrants need?

1. Accessible learning opportunities

- 1) New learning opportunities (*different to existing ones that migrants do not access*)
- 2) Better signposting (*help to find suitable learning*)

2. Support to engage & persist in learning

- 1) Learner training (*effective learning strategies*)
- 2) Hooks & incentives (*motivation*)

Diverse group in diverse circumstances

→ Support needs to be **coherent** (structured), but also **flexible**

What support is practical?

Formal learning: Workplace classes – but issues re cost, capacity, operational constraints

How can we supplement formal learning?

Internet-enabled **scaffolding programme** to support informal workplace learning

- Employers to lead language development at work without expensive classes (e.g. guided learning materials, coaching & mentoring, work organisation, supervisory feedback, peer learning groups etc)
- Workers to form self-directed study groups using a self-directed learning programme

Learning provider = expert facilitator, resource developer, employer-mentor, consultant, trainer, etc

Thank you

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