

What did you read today?

A description of the reading habits of newly arrived refugee background adult students as they commence their tertiary education in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Jenny Field
Waikato Institute of Technology




Background

- ▶ Foundation Focused Training Opportunities course 2013
- ▶ Tertiary Education Commission funded programme
- ▶ 37 week course of 30 hours per week
- ▶ Operated within Waikato Institute of Technology in the Centre for Languages

Students

- 22 students
- Age range 18 – 53, mainly in 20's and 30's
- Mainly refugee backgrounds
- Most have lived in New Zealand for less than 2 years
- Range of educational backgrounds 3 -13 years schooling
- Range of L1 literacy from Starting Points Level 1 through to High School Certificate
- Three students already had part time employment





.... the ability to read well makes an enormous difference to one's school performance, career potential and personal success.

(Kearsley, 2002; Lo Bianco & Freebody, 1997).



Some literature

- Second language readers have greater metalinguistic and metacognitive awareness which enables them to readily transfer their L1 skills when reading in another language
Nation (2009) p.7
- Provide consistent extensive reading opportunities
Use reading resources that are interesting, varied, attractive, abundant and accessible
Provide some degree of student choice
Grabe & Stoller (2011) 2nd ed. p.132

Autonomy

- ▶ "... the capacity to take control or take charge of one's own learning "
Benson, P. (2011) p.14
- ▶ It is true of course that we recognise autonomous learners by their behaviours, but that can take numerous different forms depending on their age, how far they have progressed with their learning, what they perceive their immediate learning needs to be, and so on. Autonomy in other words can manifest itself in many different ways.
Little (1991) p.4

Reading programme

Workbooks for unit standards with content for Unit standard e.g Roles and responsibilities of employees and employers. Students complete workbooks cooperatively.

Daily silent reading: Extensive Reading programme 15 minutes a day. Students obtained graded readers from Wintec Library.

Class Reading time: Used available texts National Literacy series and others. Intensive reading; predicting, gaining meaning from text, observing syntax.

2 hours in computer room per week
Study ladder, FLAX (stories and tasks),
Reviewed episodes of Sisters and Brothers, on Australia Network.

Wintec resources: "In Words of One Syllable"
Shared reading using short sentences of basic sight words.

Picture Dictionary: High frequency words organised phonetically. Students used these on a daily basis

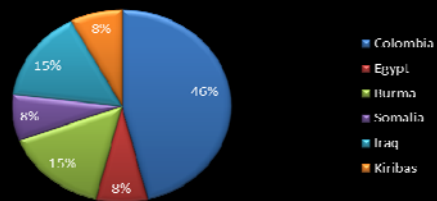
...Activities outside the classroom



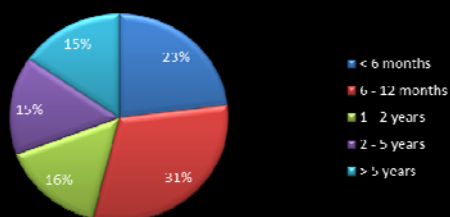
Research questions

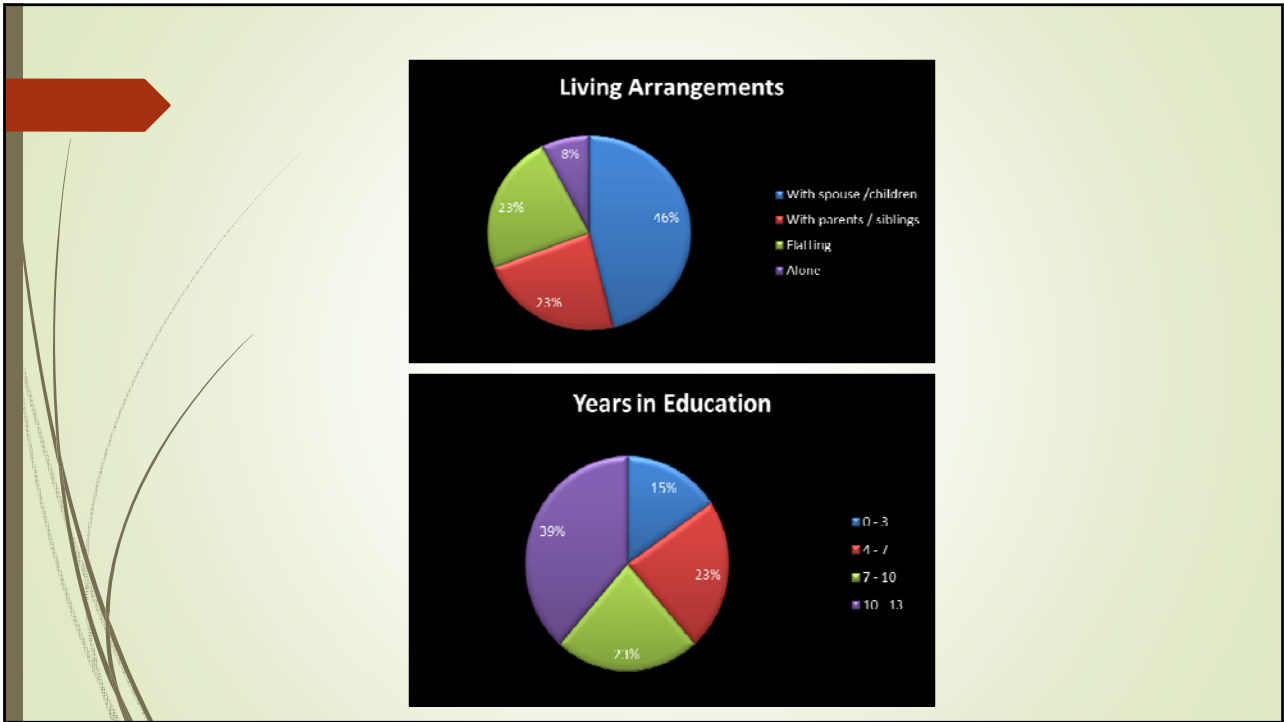
- What are students reading in their first language and in English?
- What are they reading online?
- Is their educational background in their country of origin assisting their learning now?
- How do they position L2 reading now?

Country of Origin



Length of Time in NZ





Data from Starting Points 2013

Years of schooling in country of origin	What do you read in English	Most days	Sometimes	Never	1 st language
0-3 2	Work and study material	12			3
4-7 3	Road signs	5	1	1	
7-10 3	Newspapers , magazines	4	3	3	8
	Books		2	1	7
10-13 5	Easy books	1			
	Puzzle books and crosswords	2			
	Timetables	0	2	1	8
	TV Guide	0	1	1	6
	Texts emails	2		4	6
	Religious books	2			5
	Advertisements packaging	2		2	2
	Websites	6		3	6

Life goals	Hobbies	Drivers' Licence
accountant	soccer	8 Students had passed learners, restricted or full
mechanic	ride BMX	
hospitality	reading	
human rights	study	
architect	use computer	
business woman	cooking	
help everybody		
nurse		
to get work		

Results 2014

- ▶ In 2014 eight of these students completed a Level 2 and a Level 3 programme. (36 weeks of fulltime classes) 22 hours per week.
- ▶ **What do you read in English now?**
- ▶ Mostly I read /do my homework 5 responses
- ▶ Reading with children after school 4
- ▶ Go to the city library 3
- ▶ Visit the Wintec library. 2
- ▶ Read English online 2
- ▶ Use Facebook 1
- ▶ Read the free paper 1

**"Now that I am here, I am trying to learn and think in English."
"I use an online dictionary for new vocabulary"**

Results 2014

- ▶ **What do you read in your first language?**
- ▶ Read books in their first language (history, true stories) 2
- ▶ Read stories to children 2
- ▶ Read language books 1

- ▶ Email friends 2
- ▶ Facebook family and friends 5
- ▶ Chatting 1
- ▶ Online / websites / news from own country 2
- ▶ Writes poems and put them on Facebook 1

"Reading is becoming easier and easier. I like reading hard material. It helps my vocabulary. I want to know new vocabulary."

Results 2014

- ▶ **How do you feel about reading now after two years at Wintec?**

Quite confident

6

Its quite hard.


2

What are your career goals?

- ▶ police, nurse (2), hospitality, hairdresser, accountant, find a job, do Level 3.

"I write the word down and then go to Google translate."

" I can see that reading is important for my further study, and now it is getting easier."



Discussion

- ▶ Students seemed to view reading in English as an essential tool for further study and read for that reason
- ▶ Parents in the cohort read with their children
- ▶ They use Social Media mostly in L1 to keep in touch with family and friends. They also email and chat. The majority use Facebook.
- ▶ Some read English for leisure, getting books from the library for their children and for themselves.
- ▶ Those that are entering study next year at NZCEL Level 3 have career goals. Most plan to enter a mainstream course at Wintec when they have finished their language study.



Discussion

- ▶ All but one student in the 2014 study had the benefit of 10 plus years of schooling in their country of origin. Nation (2009) p.7
- ▶ 75% are able to read with more confidence and feel equipped to start Level 3 NZCEL. 2 students found the course very challenging
- ▶ All understand the place and value of reading for their future
- ▶ Most of their reading in English at home is their study material
- ▶ They have set potentially achievable goals for their future




Conclusion

- ▶ Students from refugee backgrounds entering tertiary education who have had 10+ years of education in their country of origin are able to transfer their skills in reading in their L1 to read in English
- ▶ They seem to position reading in English as a tool for their further study, and only a few are reading for leisure during the semester
- ▶ They feel a sense of relief that they can manage the new vocabulary loads
- ▶ They acquire new vocabulary through a range of strategies
- ▶ Parents promote reading with their children and assist themselves by reading with them
- ▶ Students use social media widely in their L1 to stay in touch with family and friends



Suggestions for teachers at this level

- ▶ Introduce an extensive reading programme at Level 1 and 2
- ▶ Build on strengths brought by students from their countries of origin
- ▶ Support library membership
- ▶ Support all reading done on digital devices
- ▶ Read something every day in class
- ▶ Build in variety and interest into curriculum



Bibliography

Benson, P.(2011). *Teaching and Researching Autonomy. (2ndEd.)*. Harlow,UK:Longman Pearson


Kearsley, I. (2002). *Build on the rock: Teacher feedback and reading competence*. The Australian Journal of Language and Literacy, 25(1), 8–24.

Little, D. (1991). *Autonomy: Definitions, issues and problems*. Authentik, Dublin.

Lo Bianco, J. & Freebody, P. (1997). *Australian literacies: Informing national policy on literacy education*. Melbourne, Vic: Language Australia.

Nation, I.S.P. (2009) *Teaching ESL/EFL Reading and Writing*. New York: Routledge.

Grabe, W. & Stoller, F.L (2011) *Teaching and Researching Reading. (2nd Ed.)*. Harlow,UK: Longman Pearson



■ Thank you

jenny.field@wintec.ac.nz