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# Social integration among Pakistani and Indian ESOL learners

Sundas Ameer

## Abstract

'Social integration' has become a politically charged notion in the 21st century debate about immigration policy and homeland security. The goal of participant citizenship and English language proficiency as an enabler of participation in mainstream UK society has driven much of government-sponsored ESOL provision. This article is drawn from a doctoral study that investigated the social integration and changes in the way Pakistani and Indian ESOL learners who have come to Britain in the last few years identify with the British society, as well as the effects of migration policy on ESOL for citizenship classroom pedagogy. It questions whether recent immigrants' limited participation in the wider community is primarily affected by English language and citizenship courses or primarily due other attitudinal, cultural and practical factors.

## Introduction

Social integration would appear to be a straightforward concept when connected to the power discourse of politics and society. In the 21st century, this term is continuously used in the UK and other modern multicultural countries in their debate about immigration, security and society in general. This debate is very relevant to ESOL provision because of the link between language and immigration. This paper is drawn from a larger doctoral study that investigated the social integration and changes in the way Pakistani and Indian ESOL learners identify with the British society as well as the effects of migration policy on ESOL for citizenship classroom pedagogy. The paper will firstly discuss the ways in which the term social integration is defined and used in British political discourse through the lens of language ideologies. Secondly, this paper will discuss whether the Pakistani and Indian migrant communities represented in this small scale study are integrated if these definitions are taken into consideration and the ways in which ESOL and Life in the UK courses have helped ESOL learners/migrants with their integration in the British society. The findings suggest a difference in the way the UK government expects the migrants and ESOL learners to integrate and the way they integrate in reality. It was found that there is a need to reanalyse and understand the phenomenon of social integration of migrants in a multicultural society. Finally, this paper will suggest some changes in government policy for ESOL learners who are studying ESOL for citizenship course to help the provision better.

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## Social integration

In any modern multicultural society, one of the expectations of the host country is that the migrants will integrate in the host society (Joppke, 2010; Blommaert & Verschueren, 1998). The 2001 riots in Britain started a political debate about immigration that focused on social segregation within different ethnic communities and on migrants living 'parallel lives' (Taylor, 2007; Commission on Integration and Cohesion, 2007). This debate on social integration of migrants was also linked to their language use in their homes as well as outside. However, there is no universal workable definition of social integration that is acceptable by everyone inter alia all government agencies and social science scholars. The reason we need to understand the different definitions of social integration in

this paper is to better understand what the UK government expects when it asks migrants to integrate in British society as well as to see what social integration actually means.

The UK government has defined the term social integration several times over the last 16 years in different policy documents and government statement. The All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) report defined social integration as “the extent to which strong social ties, maintained through a web of relationships and interactions, inspire bonds of trust, reciprocity and solidarity between Britons from all backgrounds (or how well communities and societies hang together)” (2017, p.1). The Group clearly views social integration to be a two-way process, involving reciprocity from the host community. Furthermore, in *Our Shared Future*, the report of Commission on Integration and Cohesion (Singh, 2007), social integration is defined as being “principally the process that ensures new residents and existing residents adapt to one another.” The key elements of social integration and cohesion identified in the final report are the strong sense of individual rights and responsibilities, equal opportunities for people from different backgrounds, and strong and positive relationships between people of different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and in other institutions (Singh, 2007). However, as will be discussed in the next section, the way British politicians use the term social integration seems to be totally different from what the government reports say.

### **Multiculturalism and social integration**

Any multicultural society deals with the diversity of its society in two ways; by giving everyone equal rights, and by understanding and recognising the unique identity of the minority group (Taylor, 1992). Such society does not force a culture or identity on its people, however, in recent times, many western democracies define themselves as multicultural societies but have more recently begin to move towards more assimilationist policies in practice (Joppke, 2010), where incoming communities are expected to adjust to the values and rights of the host society. In the UK, despite accepting that social integration is a two way process, the burden of integration in British society is always solely placed on migrants as they are expected to learn the language as a duty or to abandon their native culture or to adopt to the British way of life and thinking. For example, Tony Blair’s speech on multiculturalism (2006) where he defined social integration as the duty of migrants to integrate or David Cameron’s (2016) ‘plan to encourage greater integration’ by using an English language test as a tool clearly showed that the UK government kept on calling Britain a multicultural state superficially but was following an assimilative framework to deal with migrants, by placing the sole responsibility of integration on their shoulders.

My argument in this article is not to judge the government in their approach to dealing with migrants but to understand and to point out that it is using the term “integration” superficially, while in actual fact sets out to achieve assimilation (Joppke, 2010). Many scholars (Blommaert, 2017; Joppke, 2010; Blommaert & Verschueren, 1998) over the years have argued that multicultural societies are using ‘integration’ as a keyword to describe the processes by means of which outsiders—immigrants, to be more precise – need to ‘become part’ of their ‘host culture’. While on the other hand, Blommaert (2017, p.14) has defined a socially ‘integrated individual as an individual who has achieved such diverse forms of integration and is able to move from one community to another one while shifting the modes of integration expected in each of them’. For this reason, a migrant who is not only an active member of his or her host country but also contributes actively to his own cultural group or native country is a socially integrated person.

Throughout its history, The UK took pride in being a multicultural society and never claimed to be a nation state. It identified itself as the leader of the Commonwealth that is the symbol of diversity. Crick (2010) historically proved that England has for many centuries not been a single nation, unlike, say European states such as France and Germany. He argued that the UK is the union of four states and throughout its history, the English, although in the majority, did not try to make other states English. English is a culture but British or Britishness is an allegiance to the Crown of the UK. This highlights the fact that the British government were so engaged in dealing with migration that in the way they forgot their own history and political tradition of multinationalism and multiculturalism in the form of the union of four states.

### **Social integration and ESOL for citizenship provision**

Since 1960, policies addressing migrants in British society have been based on a complex and contrasting range of views moving from seeing immigrants as good social capital to bad social capital, from multilingualism to focusing on one national language (Cheong et al., 2007). However, after the 2001 riots, the UK government used the ESOL for Citizenship course to address this issue of social inclusion by making citizenship education compulsory for immigrants seeking citizenship. Initially, however, the proposal for citizenship education in the Crick Report was not for adults; it placed explicit emphasis on social integration with English language facility as both a key tool and a primary measure of an individual's worth for nationality and citizenship (Crick, 1998). The basic goal of the ESOL for citizenship course as a means to achieve the target of social inclusion was even mentioned as the reason behind the immigration, naturalisation and settlement legislation that was implemented in October 2013. It was explained in the statement by the UK Home Office that 'understanding and being able to use English at a level which facilitates interaction with the wider community is key to successful integration' (The UK Home Office, 2013, p.3)

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### **The study**

The data presented in this paper come from the author's PhD dissertation entitled 'ESOL for Citizenship Courses in the UK: Social Integration, Identity and the Role of Classroom Pedagogy' (2007 unpublished). In the study, the data was collected using questionnaires and semi structured interviews both before and after courses of two to three months, conducted at various centres, investigating the following questions:

- How successful is the goal of achieving the social integration of immigrants through ESOL with citizenship material?
- What impact does this goal have on migrant lives and their identity with reference to integration in British society?

After data analysis, various key themes emerged related to the phenomenon of social integration, such as going to the community centre, getting involved in the British community, and problems the participants faced in integrating into British society.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted. Eight participants of Indian and Pakistani origin (4 males and 4 females) were interviewed at the start of the course as well as at the end of the course. The participants were anonymized and were categorised from A to H with interviews were conducted in the native language of the participants that was Urdu in case of Pakistani and Hindi in case of Indians, then subsequently the transcription was translated.

To investigate whether ESOL for citizenship course helps in the social integration of immigrants, participants were asked various questions about their integration into British society in the first interview at the start of the course as well as in the second interview at the end of the course. Questions related primarily to the mainstream government

definition of social integration focussing on the efforts made by the individuals to integrate and the extent to which this was enabled or blocked by the wider community. These included questions about starting a life in the UK as well as getting involved in the British community. The results relevant to answer the question of social integration will be discussed in the next section.

## Results and analysis

### At the start of the course

#### Going to the community centre

One of the ways of integrating into British society is meeting people from different communities. As identified in Sagger et al (2012) and in the Commission on Integration and Cohesion report (Singh, 2007) access to the community centre is a key factor that can directly improve social integration in local communities. Even though this question was raised at the beginning of the course, the final interview revealed that all participants, except a female participant, responded that they were not aware of any community centre and had never been to one or they (mostly males, as seen from the comments of participants D, E and G) considered the mosque as the community centre where they could meet people from other communities. The following are responses to the question:

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**S:** How often do you go to a community centre and why do you go there?

**B:** I didn't get a chance to go there (Participant B Interview 1)

**C:** No, I have never been there (Participant C Interview 2)

**D:** the community centre is very near to our house. I pray there five times a day but when I am at work then I do not go there. (Participant D Interview 1)

**D:** Ahhh ( ... ) I go to the mosque once a week apart from that we do not have any community centre. There are no parties where everybody can come and I do not go to parties anyway. (Participant D interview 2)

**E:** No, I have never been to a community centre (Participant E Interview 1)

**G:** If there is any religious program so we go there or for a meeting ( ... ) otherwise we watch it on TV so it is not a problem. (Participant G interview 2)

A community centre is an important place in the local community where people from different cultures can come and meet each other. It is a symbol of integrated community. The findings of a study conducted by Marriott (1997) showed that 4.4 million people approximately 10% of the total population uses local community centres in England and Wales. The above comments show that the participants were not actively involved in the local community when it comes to meeting people from different cultural backgrounds.

The courses did not help the participants understand the reason behind going to the community centre as all male participants thought that the mosques, where they go to pray, were community centres. The mosque is an important place where Muslims from different communities and countries can meet, converse and pray together. That can be considered as one level of social integration as the person going to the mosque may actually be coming out of his/her comfort zone of only socialising with the people from his/her native country. However, in Manchester and Lancashire, many mosques are for specific groups, for example a Muslim from India may go to a different mosque from a Muslim from Pakistan. It can be said that going to a mosque may be better than not meeting anyone however it can be inferred that majority of participants preferred to meet only those people who had similar cultural and religious background as them.

Female participants on the other hand reported that they had never been

to a community centre. Female participants were dependent on their family decisions and permission to meet other people. For this reason, they were unable to decide on their own to go to a community centre. The responses of the female participants at the end of the course also showed that they were not aware of any community centre and the ESOL for citizenship course had not signposted or directed them to any local community centre.

Another aspect of integration that was identified in this data is that there are two levels of social integration. One where immigrants need to integrate with people of other communities with a similar religion to theirs and the other where they need to integrate with people of different religious orientation or none. It was found that male participants liked to identify themselves with the people of similar religious sect and liked to socialize with them such as Participants G and H. So, in a way they were integrated to a certain extent but not with people of other communities.

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### Problems faced

In the first interview, at the start of the course, the participants were asked about the problems they face while integrating into British society. The reason for asking them this question was to make them aware of any problems so they could work towards addressing them in the course. They were again asked similar question at the end of the course to analyse the effects of the course on integrating ESOL learners into British society.

Most of the participants responded that they faced problems in getting along with British people because of cultural differences and language barrier. Some participants said that they felt meeting people from other cultures could have been easier for them if they had better English, but other participants felt religious and cultural differences, such as drinking alcohol, fashion and celebrating different festivals, made it hard for Muslims to meet non-Muslim people. This issue cannot be resolved by attending an ESOL for citizenship course.

**B:** You can say one of the problems is communicating in their language, then their days are different and we do not celebrate them, we celebrate our own days. (Participant B Interview 1)

**C:** Ahhh ( ... ) if I would meet them (2.0) I would try to say hello, hi and can talk a bit but to keep on talking, it would be difficult. (Participant C Interview 1)

**D:** We face problems because of their culture like they drink alcohol and they dance and it is very different from our culture. So, I feel it is hard to get along with them but I will still try. (Participant D Interview 1)

**E:** I face problems because of language and culture. (Participant E Interview 1)

**G:** Firstly, it is the culture like fashion over here is very different. Then how people talk we have to think about it first. (Participant G Interview 1)

The above comments show that the participants identified two factors that hinder them from meeting people from other cultures and communities: cultural difference and language at the start of the course. Language classes did not appear to have helped the participants in getting to know people from other cultures. After completing the course, the participants realised that it was not easy to integrate with other people just by knowing the language; there are also other factors that can influence the social integration of a person such as length of stay and the neighbourhood in case of Participants D, E and F, and family background and choices in case of Participants A and C.

### At the end of the course

#### Getting involved in the British community

Similar questions were asked in the second interview to see how the ESOL for citizenship course helped the participants in becoming active

citizens by informing them about the ways in which they could involve themselves in the local community.

In the second interview, all participants said that the ESOL for citizenship course had helped them in learning the language that

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would help them in meeting other people. However, all participants except participant D also disclosed that they did not do anything for the community. Participant D was the only one who said that he got involved in the local community because of the ESOL for citizenship course. He said that the ESOL for citizenship class had helped him in talking to his neighbours. He had started trying to do something for the community by helping people in need in his neighbourhood and by keeping his street clean.

**S:** Can you give an example where you did something for the community?

**D:** At the moment, I only try to keep my street tidy and our council also takes care of the streets. So, I look after my street and area. (Participant D Interview 2)

Other than participant D and E, participants said that although by attending the ESOL for citizenship class they had learnt the language, they still felt that they were unable to get involved in the community.

Three female participants, A, B and C and one male participant, G explained that they tend to stay at home and did not like to go out and for this reason they did not know many people in the community. Participants A, B and C had come to the UK on spouse visas and they were dependent on their husbands' or in-laws' decisions about meeting people from outside their family; they were not allowed to go out of their house without being accompanied and not allowed to talk to outsiders without permission. Also, they had extended families in the UK, so did not feel the need to meet people from other communities.

**S:** How have you got involved in the community?

**A:** (5.0) I haven't got involved that much ( ... ) I haven't done anything for the community. (Participant A Interview 2)

**B:** I can meet them but in our neighbourhood, there are mostly Pakistanis so we only meet them and secondly, we are not living here for a long time. (Participant B Interview 1)

**S:** Do you think English class has helped you in getting to know other people and cultures in the UK?

**B:** Ahhh ( ... ) I don't think it has helped me that much

**S:** Why not?

**B:** Because all students are Pakistani in my class so I did not get a chance to get to know other cultures and people in the UK. (Participant B Interview 2)

**B:** No, I haven't done anything for the community yet. (laughs)  
(Participant B Interview 2)

**S:** Ok, why not? Why haven't you done anything for the community?

**C:** (5.0) Because I don't go out of the house that much ((laughs)).  
(Participant C Interview 2)

Participants A, B, G and H also explained that the majority of people living in their neighbourhood are Pakistani or Indian so they did not need to use English with them and they could talk to them in their own language. They said that English class did not make any difference in their involvement in the local community and meeting other people.

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Participants G and H were male participants who were on a spouse visa. Both were working in a takeaway and were living in an Asian majority area. They said that they meet people in their neighbourhood but their neighbours were mostly from India or Pakistan so they used their native language with them and did not feel the need to meet people from other cultures.

**G:** no, it's not like that ( ... ) because we can do everything easily in our language so I haven't felt any difference because of English ( ... ) because in this community, we have our culture and we do not have any problem in using our language. (Participant G Interview 2)

By looking at the above comment, it can be said that living in an area where the majority of the people can speak the native language of the immigrant does seem to influence the integration of the person as well as the use of English language. They will keep on using the native language and stay in a comfort zone by only interacting with people of similar background. The children will also go to the schools of that local area and will end up making friends from their own ethnic group. If a person is living in a mixed community, they are more likely to meet people from different cultures and become more integrated into British society.

Participant F also lived in an Asian majority area, but as a single mother without any family support in the UK, she had to do everything herself. Somebody advised her to enrol for an English course because she was facing difficulty in meeting, talking to and understanding other people.

**F:** Before, when I did not know any English, I was unable to understand what somebody was saying to me in English. Then someone advised me that if I would go to the centre and learn English, I would be able to understand. (Participant F Interview 2)

Participants D and E had been living in this country for seven or eight years. They said that they got along well with their neighbours, who were either British or multinational and talked to them on daily basis. They also talked about the ways in which they helped their neighbours or their neighbours helped them: participant E talked about how he, along with his neighbours, communicated with the council about the problems in their area; participant D contributed to his local community by keeping his street clean.

**D:** Because my next-door neighbour and the one on their side are British so when I go out in the street, we talk and I don't face any problem. We discuss different things and I also try that I talk to them as much as I can so I can learn something from them. In this way, they will know me and I will know them ( ... ) I haven't done anything especially for the community but when somebody needs something I try to help them ( ... ) at the moment I only try to keep my street tidy and our council also takes care of the streets. So, I look after my street and area. (Participant D Interview 2)

**E:** No, I like to meet all kinds of people because the people who live near my house are Hindu, English, and Jamaican. So, I meet all of them and they are also very friendly.

**E:** I find it difficult to talk to European people like Spanish, Portuguese who don't know how to speak in English. (Participant E Interview 1)

**E:** I haven't done anything for the community because I have a job ( ... ) you can only do such things when you are free from your job. It is volunteering and you need time for that. (Participant E interview 2)

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The above data shows that social integration of the participants and getting involved in the British community did not improve after completing the ESOL for citizenship course. Social integration depends on a number of personal factors, such as length of stay in the UK, as can be seen from the comments of Participants D and E who had been living in the UK longer than the other participants, and whose circumstances were very different from other participants who came to the UK on spouse visas. Other factors are: the neighbourhood, cultural similarities and differences, family background and choices made by the family as a whole, especially in the case of female participants. Social integration cannot be taught on a course or by learning a language.

## Discussion of findings

After analysing the data, it was found that the ESOL for citizenship

course had no effect on the social integration of the participants. The responses of the participants remained the same in both interviews and no change was seen in their social life because of the ESOL for Citizenship course.

These participants were not fully integrated into the host society according to the definition of social integration provided by government agencies. The participants still showed an inclination to only meet people who have a similar ethnic background. Such behaviour is considered problematic if the discourse of the mainstream politicians of the UK is taken into consideration (Bower, 2016; Brown, 2007; Hinsliff, 2002; Johnston, 2006; Mason & Sherwood, 2016). In the present study, it was found that social integration is a complex phenomenon and integration cannot only be achieved through English language requirement. The extent to which a person integrates depends on his/her personal circumstances, neighbourhood, length of stay in the UK and family background and choices that the family make as a whole, especially in the case of female immigrants.

### Language and social integration

Language was considered an important factor that can affect social integration by politicians in their debates (Hinsliff, 2002; Mason & Sherwood, 2016; Home Office, 2013). The participants of the semistructured interviews felt that the level of language proficiency required for social integration was not gained by the end of the course. The participants became aware after completing the ESOL for citizenship course that the language they need to integrate into British society was higher than the level required for fulfilling the UK Home Office's requirement. As discussed above, the link between language and social integration was established by the people in power in the UK: politicians, official policy makers and media and it has been repeated and reinforced so many times that it has gained the status of a commonsense notion that is unquestionable even for the minority against which it is targeted. For this reason, all participants felt that the courses they had invested in provided the opportunity to gain British citizenship but did not adequately equip them with the language skills to integrate into British society.

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On the other hand, it is argued that the UK government is using different types of tests, such as ESOL and the LIUK test, as a shibboleth for their inclusion/exclusion from the host country as well as for managing the immigration (Brubaker, 1992; McNamara & Roever, 2006). Thus, excluding the ones who cannot attain the required level prescribed by the government. Language in this argument plays the role of 'tangible self evidence' for the dominant group as they make knowing the language a common-sense reality through their language ideologies (Blackledge, 2005). In this case, the common-sense reality is that English language is the key to social integration.

For integration, English is not the only solution, there are a host of other factors that can boost integration as pointed out by different reports after the 2001 riots (Cantle, 2002; Denham, 2002; Ritchie, 2001). Blackledge (2005) argued that English language does not ensure social integration, however, social integration helps in learning the language. But this is also not the case, the link between language and social integration and the belief that any person who does not know the language will not be sufficiently integrated in the society is an idealistic notion (Blommaert, 2017). This aspect will be discussed in more detail later in the next section.

### Personal background and social integration

The responses from the participants of semi structured interviews suggested that social integration depends on the personal background as well as the amount of family support people have in the UK. If a

person is living on his/her own without any extended family or friend circle, then he/she is more likely to meet people from other communities in the British society such as in case of participant F. On the other hand, if someone is living in a close-knit family or in an Asian majority neighbourhood then it is unlikely that he/she will meet people from another culture or get involved in the local community.

However, it is hard to call somebody segregated because he/she is only meeting people from his/her own ethnic background or considering the local mosque as a community centre, such a person is positioning himself/herself in the local host society according to his/her past experiences and beliefs. According to Blommaert (2017, p.14) a person can be 'sufficiently integrated' according to his/her needs and demands in a variety of communities. These communities can not only be the communities from his/her host country but also from the country of origin. Immigrants reconstruct their social position in the society according to their past experiences and future expectations in their imagined community (Anderson 2006). Their imagined community is not only linked to their country of origin but also to the community of people of similar ethnic background in the host country. The behaviour of an immigrant in the host community is not only due to his /her own past experiences but also that of his/her family and other people who are related to him /her. According to Bourdieu (1990), individuals decide which actions are appropriate given the successes and failures of members within their social group (Johnston, 2016). For this reason, different people in a similar social field can behave in a similar fashion. Going to a community centre or meeting people from different ethnic backgrounds are such social behaviours and an individual is more likely to follow them if their family members and friends do it.

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Similarly, people from the host community also have their notion of imagined community with a nationalistic orientation in their mind where people from different cultures who speak different languages do not necessarily fit in (Anderson, 2006). For them all people should speak the same language. This imagined community of the host population is formed by not only considering the personal and family experiences with the immigrants but also the political discourse of the mainstream politicians and media.

For this reason, seeing migrant people who are meeting people of similar ethnic background as segregated is the perspective of the people from the majority group or government agencies who have a dominant stereotypical belief of the speaker of other language. These beliefs are dominant because they have the control of opinion formation through media and thus their discourse is powerful and influential. These beliefs can be based on past encounters or a series of misrecognitions. However, their continuous repetition of misrecognised beliefs in a power discourse can strengthen the belief so that it becomes a universal notion, which then act as 'yardsticks' by which actions of others are measured and judgements are passed (Blommaert & Verschueren, 1998, p.28). Thus, considering somebody who is only meeting people from their own ethnic background as segregated is one such universal notion created by the ideology brokers. Blommaert (2017, p.14) challenges such notions and brands them as 'nostalgic' and 'sociological surrealism' in political debate.

### Length of stay

Length of stay is another important factor that can enable the immigrant to develop relationships with their neighbours and facilitate social integration in the host community. It was found that the longer a person has stayed in the UK, the more integrated he/she becomes. In semi structured interviews, Participants D, E and F were more integrated than all other participants because they had lived in the UK longer than other

participants.

This finding conforms to Bourdieu's (1990) notion of habitus and field, where field is a structured social space within which a person acts reasonably according to his/her social position. His/her actions are bound by the beliefs related to the conditions of that field. The beliefs of a person are not pre-defined or determined in essentialist terms but are subconsciously formulated in habitus by considering early socialization experiences. According to this theory, the longer a person stays or has experience of a certain social field, the more his/her beliefs and concepts about that field are formulated and reformulated. Thus, the longer the participants have lived in British society, the more aware they were of their social position in the society. Some participants, such as Participants D, E and F formulated and defined their social position in the diverse community by socialising with all kinds of people while others only positioned themselves within their own community thus remaining 'segregated even after living in the host country for many years.

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## Conclusion

All participants of the semi-structured interviews can be considered socially integrated as they were able to live in the UK without any hindrance by not only maintaining the link with their country of origin but also understanding their role as the member of the host society (Blommaert & Verschueren, 1998; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2009; Blommaert, 2017).

The findings of this study showed that an English language certificate or the ESOL for citizenship course does not ensure social integration, and for this reason it is idealistic to believe that by introducing or increasing the language level requirements of language test, the social integration of immigrants can be achieved. However, some mainstream politicians of the UK and the UK's government's official policy on this matter claim otherwise (The UK Home Office, 2013). I would suggest that the reason for linking language with social integration is more of a gatekeeping technique than a tool to encourage integration. For this reason, it can be said that the UK government is using the term integration superficially and is inclined to follow the assimilative framework to manage migration. For this reason, I would argue that there is a need for the government to better understand the way immigrants integrate into British society and to separate ESOL provision and ESOL for Citizenship courses from the immigration process.

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