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SUBMITED
TO THE UK PARLIAMENT EDUCATION COMMITTEE INQUIRY
THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Written evidence submitted by Cathays High School

Evidence on the impact of COVID-19 to English as Additional Language (EAL) students in UK public schools. Mitigation approached through digital heritage.

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1. **Summary**

- The landscape of the English as an additional language (EAL) students in the UK is highlighted, along with evidence of the EAL students' specific educational needs.
- Evidence for the potential excess impact of the COVID-19 related pandemic to the EAL students in UK are provided.
- An evaluation of the engagement of EAL students with existing online resources for English language acquisition is presented.
- A proposal for possible mitigation of the impact with the use of digital cultural heritage resources is presented.

2. **Introduction**

2.1 In the forthcoming decade, the global surge of intercountry migration, refugees' streams, and first world interconnectivity creates unprecedented challenges for education in general and in particular language acquisition. There are currently over 1.5 million learners with English as an Additional Language (EAL) in UK maintained schools and many more in independent schools. EAL learners represent just over 21% of the primary population and nearly 17% of the secondary population in England [1].In Wales, in the 2018/2019 academic year, 35,085 pupils in nursery, primary, middle and secondary schools acquiring English as an additional language, with 13,335 was new to English (Stage A) or in Early Acquisition (Stage B)[2].

2.2 EAL learners in the UK are an extremely diverse group. The government definition of an EAL learner includes anyone who has been exposed to a language other than English during early childhood and continues to be exposed to this language in the home or in the community. This definition includes New Arrivals from aboard, such

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[1] https://ealresources.bell-foundation.org.uk/school-leaders/eal-learners-in-uk - accessed 20 May 2020

[2] https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Schools-and-Teachers/Schools-Census/Pupil-Level-Annual-School-Census/Ethnicity-National-Identity-and-Language - accessed 18 May 2020

as migrant and refugee pupils that speak little or no English. Children who are in the UK for a limited time, and who started their education in an English-medium school aboard, and finally young people who were born in the UK and are bilingual or speak English most of the time and occasionally use a different language.

2.3 From these three categories of pupils the most vulnerable one, is the newly arrived migrant, refugee, and asylum seeker students. It is an absolute necessity that they have access to basic rights such as healthcare, freedom of movement, and education.

2.4 Even before the COVID-19 related pandemic, this landscape creates two focal points that educators are trying to address. The first is related to the challenge of the acquisition of an additional language and the understanding and acceptance of a new culture, while the support provided is usually scarce for the newly arrived students in a multicultural classroom. The second point is the possibility that New Arrival students may encounter insufficient human and financial resources of education authorities, lack of intervention classes, budgetary shortfalls, and most of the time the insufficient guidance and training for teachers and education practitioners on multicultural educational methods and openness to diversity.

3. Aim of this evidence paper

3.1 This paper aims to provide evidence of the excess impact the COVID-19 related pandemic and the consequent school closures had on EAL and mainly New Arrivals, migrants and students. Data from a survey among EAL students in Cardiff, Wales will be provided, collected specifically for the purpose of this paper, and it will be correlated with similar datasets available. The final aim of the paper is the proposal of possible digital heritage ways of mitigating this impact while preparing and supporting the EAL students for the new academic year.

4. Survey on the Impact of COVID-19 related pandemic to EAL New Arrival students – a case study form Cathays High School Cardiff

4.1 Materials and Methods

4.1.1 The survey on the potential excess impact of COVID-19 related pandemic to New Arrival students was initiated by Cathays High School in Cardiff due to the actual need for assessing the impact of the pandemic to this specific student group and the acute need for innovative digital based second language acquisition resources. In Cathays around 33% of pupils in are on Free School Meals, when a 76% are non-white pupils and 45% of the pupils have English as their second language. Cathays has a dedicated EAL department with 95 newly arrived migrant, refugee, and asylum seeker students registered, aged 13 – 19. A survey was circulated to 50 registered students, that were New Arrivals to the school for the academic year 2019/2020, via email. A reminder email with the link to the survey was sent twice after the initial email. The survey has been further circulated to KS3 and KS4 New Arrival students that were registered with Cardiff Council Ethnic Minority and Travellers Education Service (EMTAS). EMTAS was also consulted on the way that survey was structured and disseminated. The survey was completely anonymised and the collection and analysis of the responses' were handled by the University of Bristol investigators, that had no access to the student's data or contact details.

4.1.2   The survey was conducted with the use of 'Google forms'. An eight-question survey was created, with close answer questions. The questions were constructed to assess:

a) The access that New Arrival students have to a computer/laptop.

b) The availability of good internet connection.

c) If New Arrival EAL students speak any English at home and in the community and if so, how much.

d) How difficult New Arrival students will find the return to the school.

e) How much they have been engaging with the online content that their teachers have made available to them.

f) If students were using other material to improve their English further to the resources that teachers have made available.

g) If additional material has been used, what was that material, assessed through a multiple-choice question.

h) If the students would like some of their teaching to remain online after the COVID-19 crisis.

Only summary statistics and consequent discussion on the results are accessible to date. Further analysis of the data will be made available over the next few months.

4.2 Results

4.2.1   The questionnaire should have reached around 120 New Arrival Students in the general council area through Cathays High School and EMTAS channels. However, only 41 responses have been returned, around 30% of the potential participants actually engaged with the survey, a potential indication of the low level of general engagement of New Arrival students with communications from their school or council services.

4.2.2   No demographic or age data have been collected with this survey.

4.2.3   From the 41 responses only 33.3% of the students indicated that they have a computer/laptop available all the times. A further 55.5% replied that they have one available sometimes during the day or they can borrow one if they need to do so. A further 11.2% replied that they do not have a device available.

4.2.4   A total of 70.6% of the participants replied that they have good access to the internet through a WiFi hotspot. A further 5.9% rely on their mobile data for internet. However, around the quarter of the students (23.5%) replied that they do not have good access to the internet.

4.2.5   English was the main language spoken at home for 5.9% of students. 52.9% of the participants replied that they sometimes speak English but a different language is their main one for communication. Only an 11.8% of the students said that they speak English regularly, usually mixed with another language. Interestingly, 29.4% of the students replied that they do not speak English at all on the days that the school was closed.

4.2.6   The majority of the participants replied that it will be moderately difficult for them to return to school once opens, however around 25% of the replies suggested that it will be extremely difficult for them to return to school.

4.2.7   Around 75% of the participants replied that they only occasionally engaging with the online content that teachers have made available. Conversely, 31.3% replied that they never engage with the content.

4.2.8   58.8% of the students replied that they are occasionally using other material to improve their English. However, 17.6% said that they haven't used any material and only a 23.6% is using other resources every day.

4.2.9   From the multiple-choice question on the extra material that students are using l to improve their English, 76.5% are watching movies, and a further 58.8% are

watching TV series. Only 29.4% are reading books and a further 47.1% are reading articles online.

4.2.10 Finally, 47.4% are willing for some of the teaching to remain available online after the COVID-19 crisis, 36.8% answered 'maybe' and only a 15.8% are willing for all teaching to remain face to face on the school premises.

4.3 Discussion

4.3.1 As an outcome of the pandemic over 1.2bn pupils are out of schools. There is an urgent need for online education resources and huge access requirements both from students and teachers. Today in Switzerland, Norway, and Austria around 95% of students have good access to IT and internet for their schoolwork[3]. Tthe UK data is similar, even slightly lower, than the aforementioned countries – at 93% of students as reported in 2019[4].

4.3.2 However, and based on the outcomes of the current survey in Cardiff, New Arrival EAL access to internet and possession of a computer is significantly lower than the UK average. This creates issues with accessing resources for asynchronous teaching and makes access to live streamed sessions almost impossible.

4.3.3 The internet and computer access gap between students of privileged and disadvantaged backgrounds has previously been reported in other Western World countries, and it is a concern that the current pandemic may widen this divide[5].

4.3.4 A very crucial problem with the New Arrivals lack of engagement with English language and the school culture during the COVID-19 related pandemic, is the aspect of social isolation, difficulties in social inclusion, and the loss of significant time towards their skill development and social interaction. Even if it is vital to New Arrival EAL and the wider community to continue practicing and speaking their home language – and as it appears from the survey they continue to do so – the very little engagement with online teaching creates significant obstacles to their education[6].

4.3.5 The lack of engagement with school culture through digital media and the online teaching resources, may not be just an issue of connectivity, but also an outcome of the disruptive education that many of these pupils have experienced. Coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, conflict zones, and areas of political and economic crisis, these pupils may have never experienced before a structured learning environment with the technical equipment available in mainstream UK schools[7].

4.3.6 Therefore, the COVID-19 related school closures may have affected disproportionally a significant number of pupils in the UK, the New Arrival, migrant and refugee students. These pupils which are classified as the most vulnerable by many agencies are already facing integration problems, particularly those living in accommodation, hostels, and with foster carers and those that are not members of a community[8].

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[3] Li, C. and Lalani, F. 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed education forever.
https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/coronavirus-education-global-covid19-online-digital-learning/
[4] ONS – accessed 20 May 2020
https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristics/homeinternetandsocialm
ediausage/bulletins/internetaccesshouseholdsandindividuals/2019
[5] Li and Lalani 2020
[6] https://ealresources.bell-foundation.org.uk – accessed 20 May 2020
[7] Koehler, C., Schneider, J. Young refugees in education: the particular challenges of school systems in
Europe. *CMS* **7,** 28 (2019). https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-019-0129-3

5   Proposals for digital cultural heritage mitigation practices

5.1 The school, as institution, was to date the main vehicle that supported the social integration of New Arrivals', their English language and skills development, whilst offering pastoral support and wellbeing provisions. Some of the funding for these vulnerable pupils was related to their school's attendance and performance. It is, therefore, vital that new platforms are developed that will mitigate the impact of the school closures to such pupils, and after the COVID-19 crisis can work in parallel supporting and enhancing the school role. These platforms should adhere to the cohesion and integration policies that already in place[9].

5.2 Based on the survey included in this evidence paper, New Arrival EAL pupils seems to be better engaged with TV content rather than internet-based material, something that may be explained by the lack of good internet connection, or the lack of a personal device to access online content. Resources for New Arrival EAL should, therefore, be included within future BBC/other TV network educational provisions. Material uploaded on BBC iPlayer may also be more effective.

5.3 Previous research among New Arrival EAL students in Cardiff – but also in Padua Italy, Thessaloniki, Greece, and Belgrade in Serbia – indicated that students became more engaged with learning material and felt better included in the host society, when the resources were based on the Cultural Heritage of the host county[10]. In a survey of Cardiff students they replied that they enjoyed learning about Cardiff's past and culture, and they feel that this knowledge would help them towards job applications, collaboration with fellow British citizens and so on.

5.4 Thus, the reason that Cultural heritage is the core component of the proposed mitigation method, is due to the plethora of stimuli that Cultural heritage can offer to the learning process and the necessary values it can promote. Cultural heritage in education is functioning as a tool that promotes the transformation of a stereotypical learning environment into a cognizant one. Making students aware of a variety of heritage landscapes can cultivate acceptance, equality, inclusion, and communication[11]. The more aware the learners are about recognising and respecting their heritage, the more they can develop sustainable initiatives for accepting, respecting, and embracing other people's cultures.

5.5 The print that humans leave on the different types of Cultural heritage assets, tangible or intangible, define their culture and contributes to the creation of a bond with which the local people identify themselves, and develop their sense of belonging[12] . Inviting the learners on a journey of exploring, identifying, and recording different cultural heritage assets provides them with the opportunity to explore a foreign language through purposeful and meaningful tasks. They get exposed to formal and

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[8] Manzoni, C. and Rolfe, H. 2019. How School are Integrating New Migrant Pupils and Their Families. *National Institute of Economic and Social Research*. London.
https://www.niesr.ac.uk/sites/default/files/publications/MigrantChildrenIntegrationFinalReport.pdf

[9] Manzoni and Rolfe 2019

[10] Kalogirou, K., Stamenković, D., Fernée, C. L. and Trimmis, K. P. 2020 – *in press*. 'A Town of Many': Drama and Urban Heritage Landscapes as Mediums for Second Language Acquisition and Social Inclusio. *The Global Education Review* 7(3).

[11] historicengland.org.uk

[12] Penna, K. N. 2018. Cultural heritage as an educational base for the traditional pillars of sustainable development. 6th International Conference in Heritage and Sustainable Development, Granada, Spain, 12-15 June.

non-formal learning, develop their critical thinking skills and receive practical support towards their integration in the local communities[13].
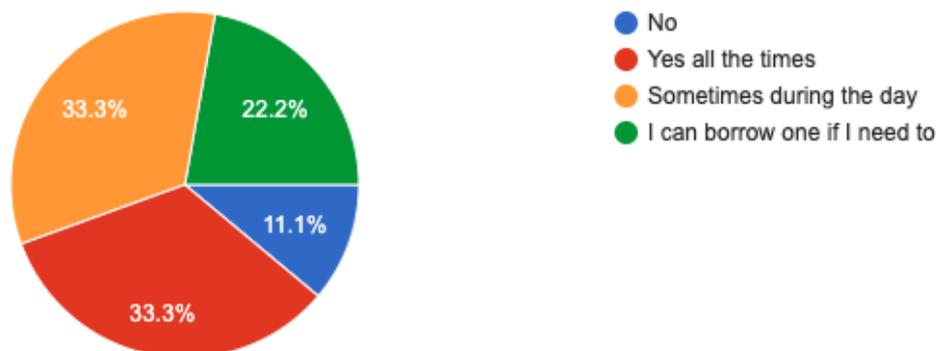
5.6 Thus, we propose any possible mitigation practices for COVID-19 related impact to New Arrival EALs to take the importance of Cultural Heritage on board and any material or resources to be based on relevant Heritage Assets. Mobilising heritage for New Arrival inclusion and education would be beneficial not only to the students but also to heritage professionals and organisations. Digital exhibitions, online virtual heritage walks, educational TV programs could potentially have a significant impact.
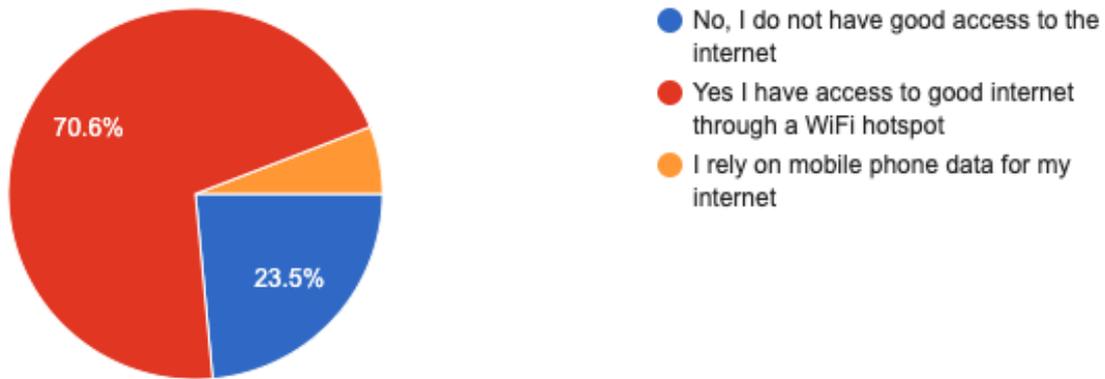
6 Acknowledgments

7 Annex – statistics from the Cardiff evidence survey.

7.1 Responses on the availability of laptop/computer to students

7.2 Responses on access to the internet among New Arrival EAL students

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- No, I do not have good access to the internet
- Yes I have access to good internet through a WiFi hotspot
- I rely on mobile phone data for my internet

7.2 Responses on English speaking in the community for New Arrivals.

- Yes, English is the main language I am speaking at home
- No, I do not speak English at all these days
- Sometimes I speak English but a different language is my main one for communication
- I speak English regularly, but mixed with another language

7.3 Responses on the use of other material to improve English during the COVID-19 school closure.

- Yes
- No
- Occasionally