

## Mobile Language Learning with Immigrant Families in Dover



# Evaluation Report

## Acknowledgments

This project could not have taken place without the support of the following organisations:

- Kent County Council Minority Communities Achievement Service
- Guston Church of England Primary School, Dover

## Introduction

Kent County Council Minority Communities Achievement Service (MCAS) works in partnership with schools, clusters of schools, other agencies, communities, parents, carers, children and young people to improve access to education and raise the achievement of minority ethnic and bilingual children and young people. Improving communication between schools and families is an important step in ensuring that the appropriate support is accessible to newly-arrived families, and that their children are able to achieve their potential.

Guston Church of England Primary School, Dover, has a culturally diverse catchment. The school is situated near to a large army barracks with a predominantly Nepali population. Approximately 70% of the school's pupils are from Nepal, and there are also Kurdish, Polish and French-speaking children in attendance. Most children join the school with little or no understanding of English. The mobility of the local population is very high, as families move with their battalions.

For newly-arrived families, lack of proficiency in English language skills is a significant barrier to employment, access to public services and community integration. English language skills are particularly important for enabling effective communication with school staff and other parents. There has been a demand from the families living in Guston for additional opportunities to learn, practise and develop their English language skills. However, local English language classes have been oversubscribed. The school has also been keen to improve their engagement with parents, particularly mothers, where English language skills have been a barrier.

Following encouraging results from a project with Eastern European migrant families, MCAS provided a group of mothers with an English language learning application for use on mobile phones, developed by Anspear, to support the development of their language skills. School staff facilitated weekly session in the school's Community Centre to encourage the women to share and build on their experiences with the phone application.

## Project aims

The aims of the project were as follows:

- To identify the ways in which the mobile phone English language learning application was used over the course of the project by the participants and their families
- To understand the extent to which use of the mobile phone application contributed to increased confidence in English language skills.
- To understand the extent to which use of the mobile phone application contributed to increased confidence in communicating with schools, accessing employment and other public services, and taking part in community events.

# Project resources

The English language resources in the mobile phone application were divided into 11 themes (shown on the right), each relating to an aspect of daily life and based upon the ESOL Skills for Life curriculum.

Each theme was divided into three or four lessons, which included exercises to practise vocabulary, spelling, word associations, speaking and listening, reading and writing, and grammar in context. The exercises employed the interactive features of the phone, such as the keypad and the voice-recording function, and presented audio, images and text to make the material as engaging as possible.

Additional features included a 2000-word picture dictionary, vocabulary flashcards, a lesson search function, and exercise scoring to record progress and provide feedback to participants. Up to five different users could use the mobile phone application on the same handset, and their activities could be tracked independently.



Getting started



Daily life



Shopping



Eating & drinking



Going places



Home, family & friends



Free time & leisure



At work



At school



Health



Nature & environment

## Project methodology

Seventeen learners were provided with phones to use with their families for the duration of the 16-week project. Weekly sessions prompted the learners to cover particular sections of the resources, but learners could also work through the materials independently and at their own pace – at times and in locations that were convenient to them.

The application recorded when and how the materials had been used, and this information was collected from the phones' memory cards at the end of the project. Questionnaires were conducted with learners at the beginning and end of the project in order to collect learner feedback.



“ The ladies said that the regular attendance made them feel more comfortable about coming into school. Seven of the ladies also came in the following week and taught members of staff to cook Nepali food. They used the school kitchen, provided all the ingredients and demonstrated what to do using English. This would NOT have happened before the course. ”

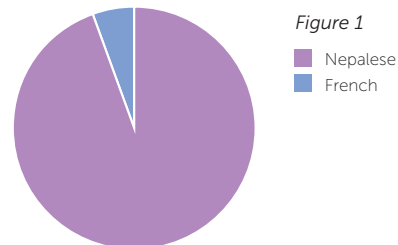
Anna Byrne, Project Leader and Assistant  
SENCO at Guston Primary School

# Learner profile

The information below provides a profile of the seventeen female learners who participated in the mobile learning project.

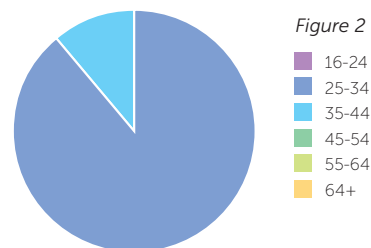
## Nationality

Figure 1 indicates that all the participants were from Nepal except one, who was French.



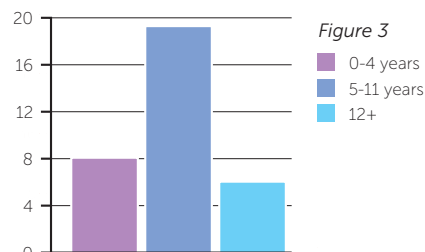
## Age

Figure 2 indicates that 88% of participants were between the ages of 25 and 34 years, and the remainder were aged 35-44 years.



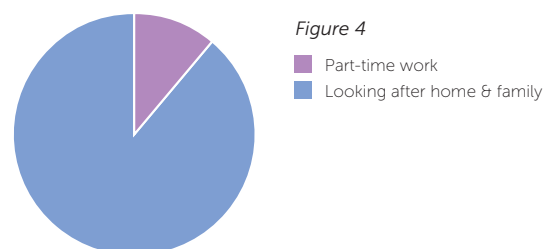
## Children

The group had a total of 33 children between them. Figure 3 shows that 8 of these children were aged 0-4 years, 19 were of primary school age, and 6 were of secondary school age.



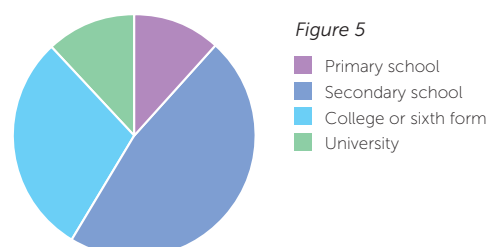
## Employment

Figure 4 indicates that 88% of the group looked after their home and family, whilst 12% worked part-time.



## Highest level of education

Figure 5 shows the highest level of education completed by the participants, and indicates that 12% of the group had been to university, 29% had left education after college or sixth form at the age of 18, 47% had left after completing secondary school at the age of 16, and 12% had left after completing primary school at the age of 11.



# Project findings

The findings from the mobile learning project, including evidence collected from phone logs, participant questionnaires and testimonies, are described below.

## Use of the mobile phone application

### Patterns of daily use

Figure 6: Session durations by time of day

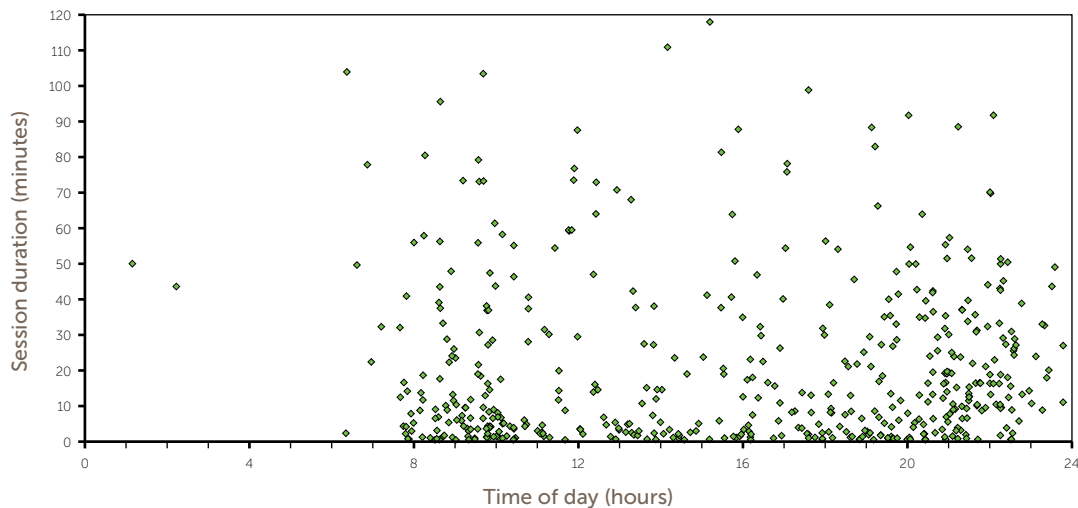
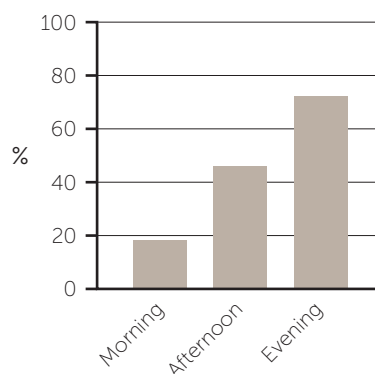


Figure 6 shows when, over the course of the day, the participants used the application, and for how long. Although a high proportion of sessions were short in duration (0-15 minutes), some of the participants were using the application for much longer periods of time (up to 118 minutes). Whilst activities on the phones were designed to be short in length, lasting 1-3 minutes each, it is clear that participants made use of the phones for significantly longer periods of time.

It is clear that the application was in use throughout the morning, and to a greater extent in the afternoon and evening, with considerable activity until midnight. This pattern is reflected in Figure 7, which presents learner responses to the question 'When did you use your phone?'

Figure 7: When did you use your phone?



## Use of application over time

Figure 8: Number of sessions by date

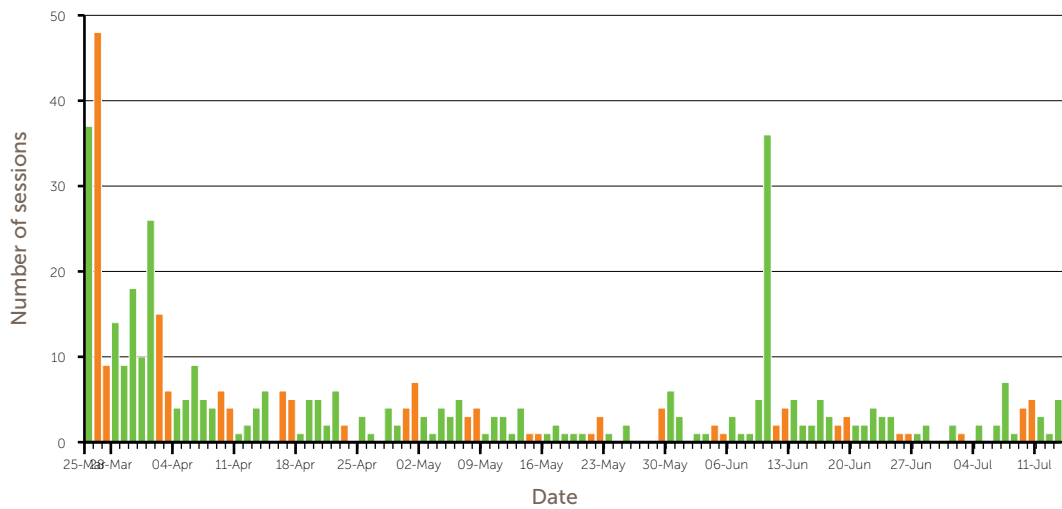
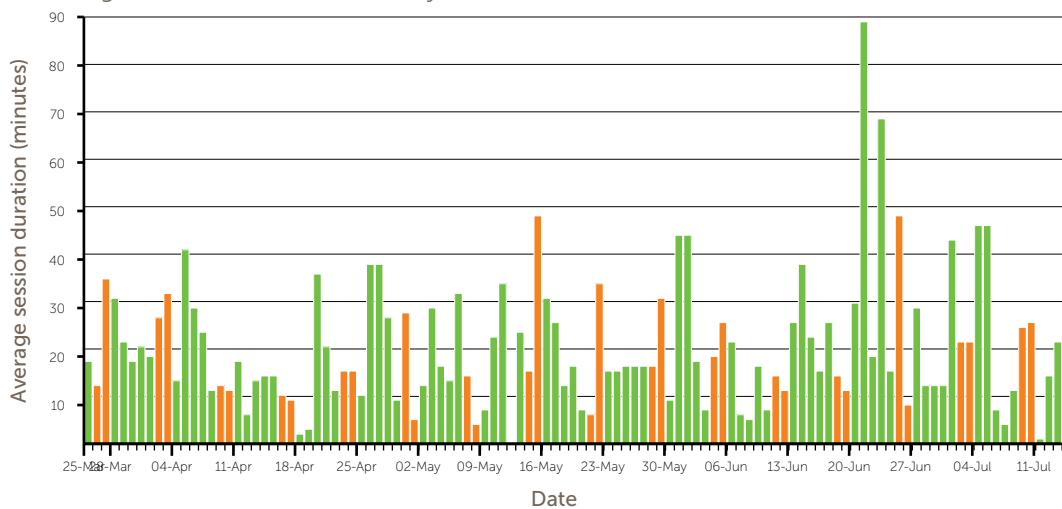


Figure 8 shows the number of times (sessions) that the participants used the application over the course of the mobile learning project. The group collectively used the application up to 48 times per day over the course of the first two weeks, but the number of sessions then decreased to a relatively constant number, usually between 2 and 7 per day. The midway evaluation of the project, which took place on 10 June 2011, involved extensive use of the phone application, and may explain the high level of activity on this date.

Figure 9: Duration of sessions by date



Although the number of sessions decreased over the course of the project, Figure 11 indicates that the average time for which participants used the application did not decrease in the same way, with daily average session lengths reaching more than 80 minutes towards the end of the project.



## Use of language material

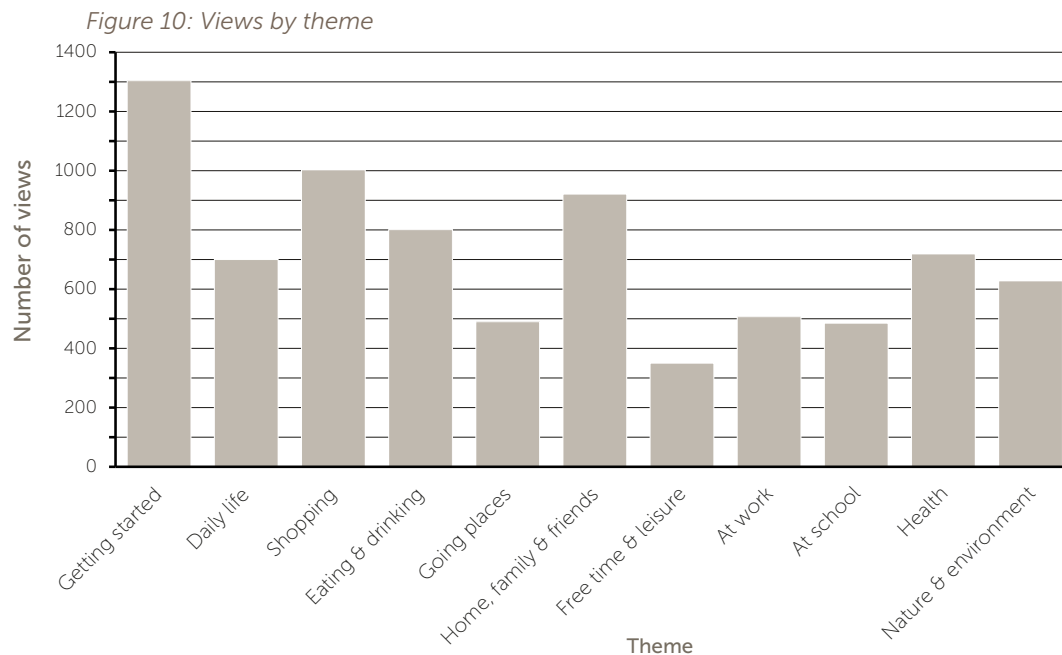


Figure 10 indicates the number of times activities from each of the language themes were viewed. The data indicates that Getting started, Shopping, and Home, family & friends were used the most, whilst Free time & leisure, At school and Going places were used the least.

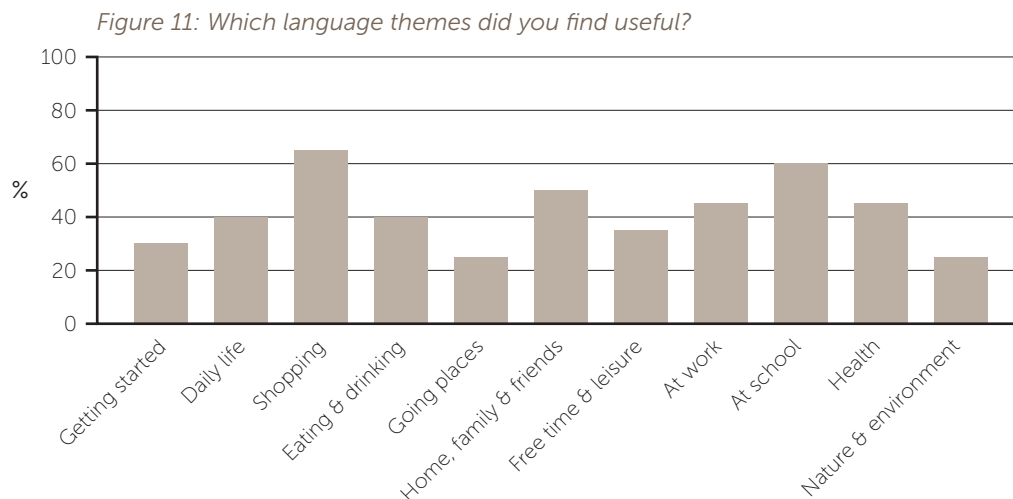


Figure 11 presents the language themes that participants found useful according to their questionnaire responses. In this case, Daily life, Going places, At school and Health were the themes considered most useful, with Nature & environment, Getting started, and Free time & leisure considered least useful. It is interesting that the At school theme was one of the least used themes, but one of those considered most useful.

Figure 12: Views by exercise type

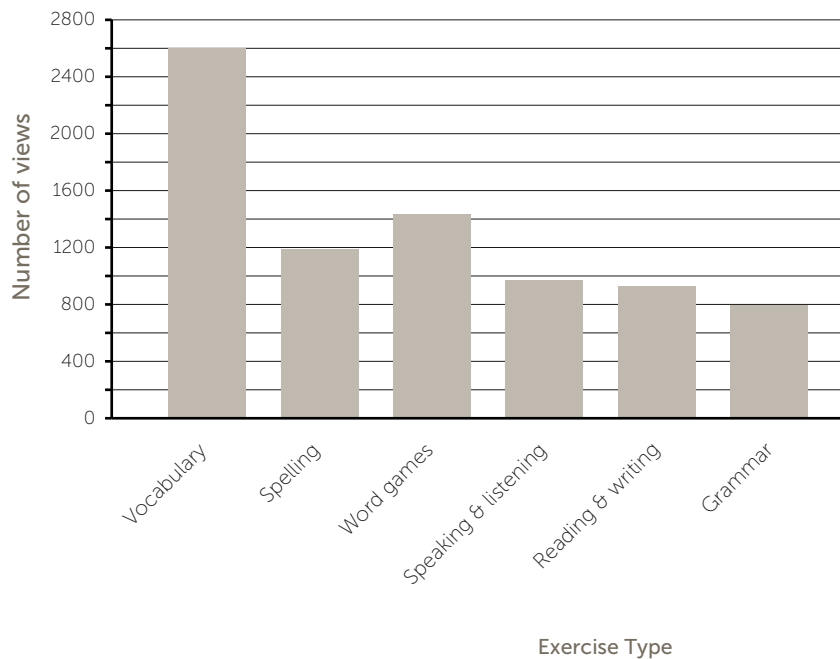
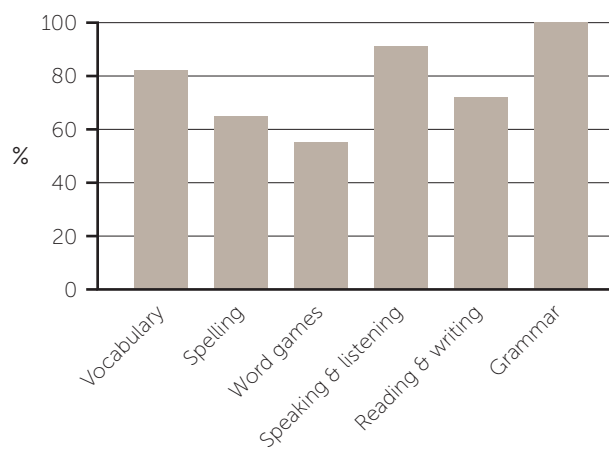


Figure 12 shows the number of times that each type of exercise was viewed over the course of the project. Vocabulary exercises were viewed significantly more than any other type of exercise, with a total of 2600 views. Both Spelling and Word games exercises were viewed more than 1000 times, whilst the remaining exercise types were viewed between 790 and 990 times over the course of the project.

However, Figure 13 suggests that that the participants found the Grammar and Speaking & listening activities particularly useful.

Figure 13: Which exercise types did you find useful?



## Location, collaboration and usability

Figure 14 shows that participants all used their phones at home, although some use of the phones was also made at work and on public transport.

Figure 15 shows that all of the learners used their phones with family members, and that 45% used them with their friends.

Figure 14: Where did you use your phone?

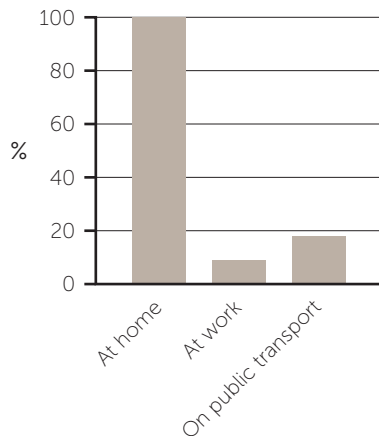


Figure 15: With whom did you use your phone?

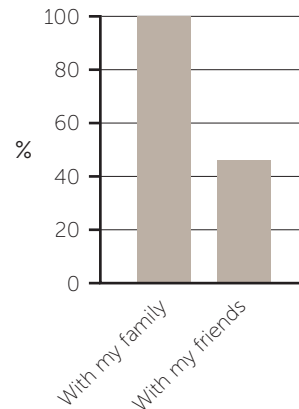
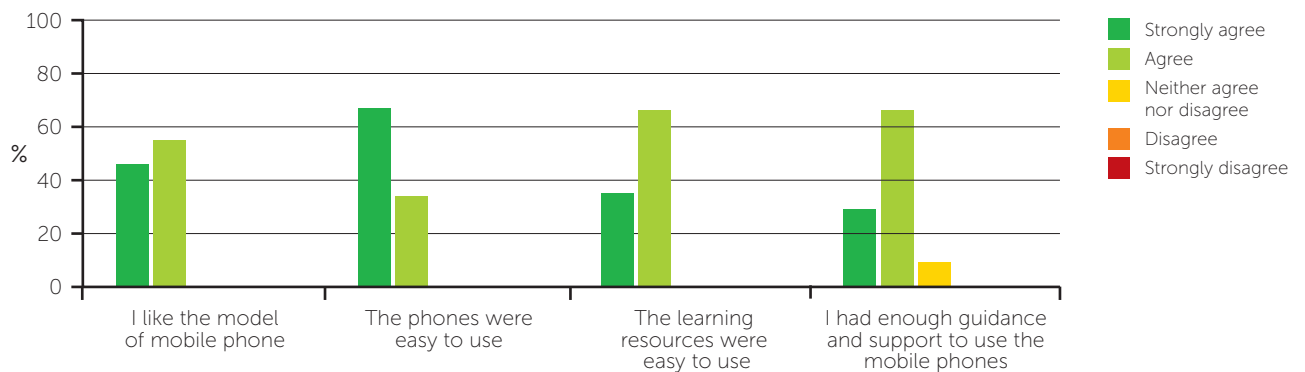


Figure 16 suggests that, in general, the learners did not find the phones or the application difficult to use, and felt they had enough support throughout the project.

“ The positive impact of the phones, I feel, is farther reaching than just the language in the applications. It provides a massive opportunity for social interaction as well, giving support to those parents who may have before felt more socially isolated. ”

Rachel Hutchings, Specialist Teacher, Bilingual and Ethnic Minority Achievement, Dover District, MCAS

Figure 16: Feedback on support and usability



## English language skills

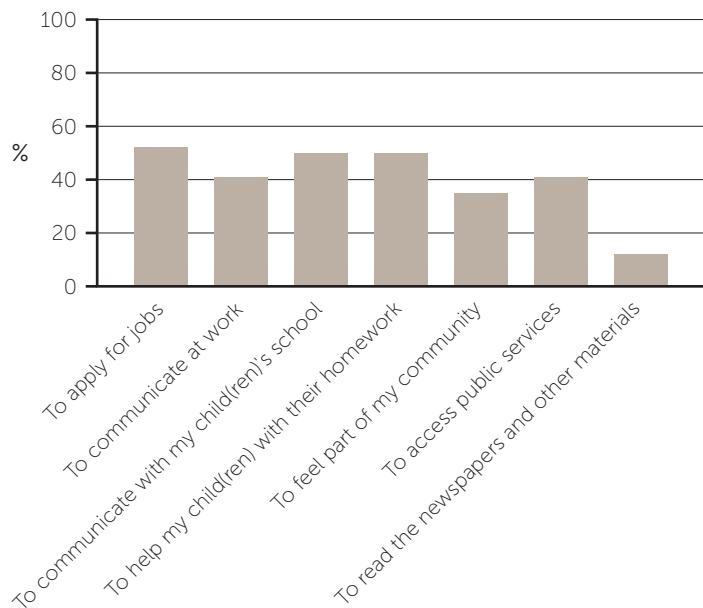
### Motivation to learn English

Figure 17 shows some of the key motivations of the group to learn English, with applying for jobs, communicating with schools and helping children with homework featuring highly in learner responses.

“ The mobile phone project has been so much more than just a learning tool. It has strengthened the link between the school and the local community. One of the ladies is now working on a voluntary basis within the school. Some ladies from the group came in to show members of staff how to cook Aloo Dum, a traditional Nepalese cuisine. They were confident enough to explain the ingredients and instructions in English. ”

Anna Byrne, Project Leader and Assistant SENCO at Guston Primary School

Figure 17: Motivation to learn English



## Confidence in English language skills

Figure 18 compares learner confidence levels in different English language skills at the outset and close of the 16-week project. Some increases in confidence are observed across the language skills, and there is a particularly notable increase in confidence in writing, from 18% to 29% of participants feeling very confident in their abilities. Whilst these increases in confidence could be attributable to a number of factors, these results suggest that the use of the phone application has made a small but positive contribution to confidence levels in English language skills.

Figure 18: Confidence in English skills

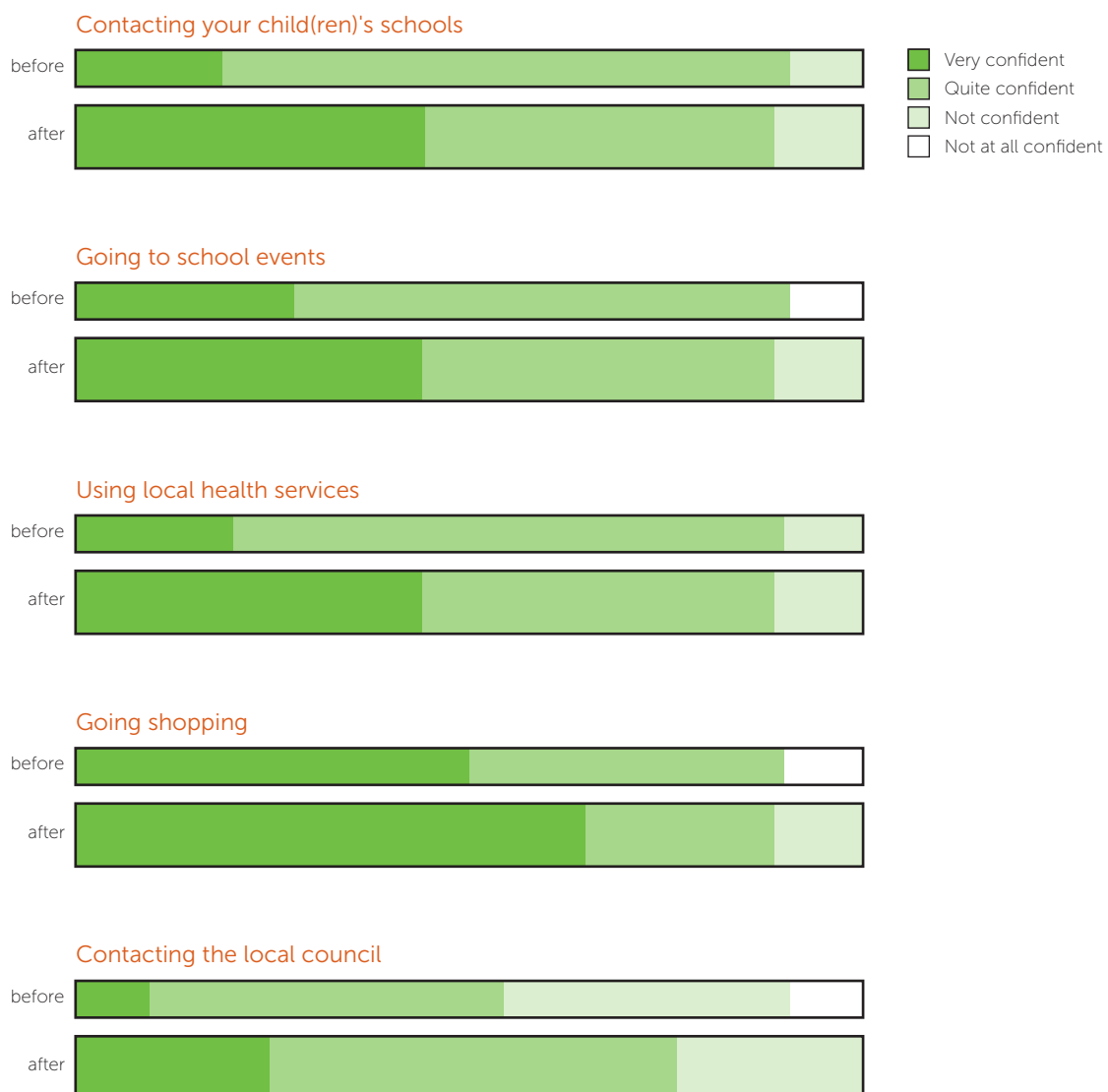


## Community integration

### Confidence to participate

Figure 19 compares learner confidence levels in undertaking different activities within their community at the outset and close of the 16-week project. Learner confidence increases for all the activities, with an increase from 18% to 44% of participants feeling very confident about communicating with their children’s schools.

Figure 19: Confidence to participate in community activities



# Conclusions

The following conclusions may be drawn from the project findings:

- Learners used the English language mobile phone application throughout the day and evening.
- The number of times learners accessed the English language resources over the course of the project decreased, but the duration of each session remained relatively constant.
- Learners found the language themes Shopping, At school, and Home, family & friends most useful, and made particular use of the vocabulary exercises.
- Learners mainly used the resources in their homes, and all of them used the resources with their families.
- The learners found the resources easy to use, although some felt they would have benefited from more challenging language material.
- Learners experienced some increases in confidence levels across English language skills, and particularly felt more confident in their writing abilities, as a result of their participation in the project.
- Learners were more confident about taking part in a range of community-based activities as a result of their participation in the project, especially about communicating with their children's schools.