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Understanding the experiences of first and second generation immigrants in the UK

by Eburn Agunsoye, Joshua Reindorf, Milly
Johnston and Christina Riddle





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First generation immigrants are defined as individuals who are born in another country, have foreign citizenship or are born abroad (Husted, Nielsen, Rosholm & Smith, 2001).

Second generation immigrants are described as individuals born within a specific country, with two foreign born parents (Karthick Ramakrishnan, 2004).

This project explores the experiences of first and second generation immigrant British populations. It seeks to gain greater insights into the standard of living among people in this group, with a particular focus on identity, opportunities and education.

This project was designed and produced by Kickstart peer researchers at The Young Foundation.





Peer research is a participatory research method where people with a lived experience of the issue being investigated take part in conducting research. The research was led by Kickstarter peer researchers, of whom most are second generation immigrants. They interviewed first and second generation immigrants, asking a range of questions on topics such as identity, employment and education. The participants interviewed are from various backgrounds and geographical areas, yet there were similarities in the issues raised.

The key themes that young people highlighted were:

- Sense of belonging
- Alienation
- Accessibility
- Support
- Gratitude
- Financial freedom



The report's target audience includes but is not limited to: government, councils, local communities, charities supporting immigrants and non-profit organisations.



The literature review will explore employment, health and education experiences for first and second immigrants.

Kierans (2020) highlighted that employment and education were cited as the most common reasons why an immigrant might move to the UK. This suggests that people move to Britain in search of better opportunities than in their country of origin.

Historically, immigration to the UK is typically outside of the European Union (Kierans, 2020). This is still prevalent in current times as non-EU natives accounted for 62% of all long-term immigrants who arrived in the UK in 2018 (Kierans, 2020).

Employment

Wallace et al (2022) conducted a study on the children of the Windrush generation, many of whom were unlawfully deported to their country of origin (JCWI, 2022).





Windrush refers to workers from Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and other islands immigrating to the UK to help with the British economy during the 1950s and 1960's.



In the first and second generations, they discovered all groups of immigrants in the UK had worse employment chances than their white British counterparts.

Wallace et al (2022) revealed:

- First-generation men in general have a lower employment rate than white British men. Pakistani, black African, and Bangladeshi men had the biggest discrepancies
- Women's employment gaps are higher than their male counterparts, and lower than white British people
- All populations improve their job condition from the first to the second generation





Health

Maciagowska et al., (2017) conducted a systematic review of the mental health needs of Polish immigrants in the UK and found three main themes:



- The negative mental health aspects of migration – this included frustration and multiple stresses; language difficulties; financial hardship; discrimination and isolation; unfamiliarity with the culture; cultural stigma and shame
- The positive mental health aspects of migration comprised of freedom and new opportunities
- Coping – this incorporated personal traits, social capital and culture as well as individual differences



Education

Dustmann et al's report in 2010 aimed to assess how British ethnic immigrant minorities perform in the labour market and whether the British born individuals outperformed their parents.

They discovered that:

- Second generation ethnic minority immigrants tend to be better educated than their parents' generation (Dustmann et al., 2010, page 10)
- Minority children experience achievement disadvantages before starting school. These disadvantages are reduced considerably during compulsory schooling and turn into substantial advantages for some ethnic groups at the end of compulsory schooling (ibid., page 9)
- The relative improvement in education between the parent and descendent generation is far larger for ethnic minorities than for white British people (ibid, page 10)



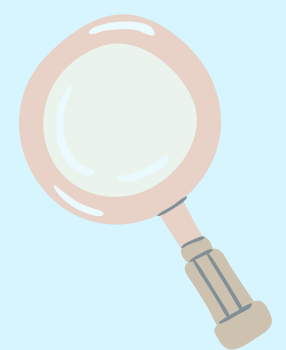
Peer researchers

Four Kickstart peer researchers working at The Young Foundation interviewed seven participants in a small call study. The participant criteria included:

- Being over the age of 16
- Being a first or second generation immigrant in the UK
- Having experiences of the education system or employment

Data collection

The peer researchers conducted semi-structured interviews. All interviews were recorded with consent. The interview script was divided into four sections, including an introductory question and three overarching research questions with relevant prompts. The three main questions were:



- what are your experiences concerning your identity as an immigrant in the UK?
- how would you describe your education experience as an immigrant in the UK?
- what are your experiences regarding employment as an immigrant in the UK?

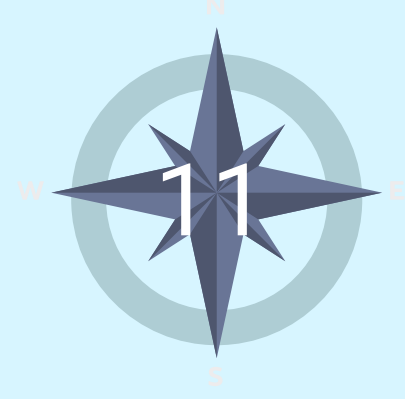


Participant demographics

The mean age of participants was 24, with the youngest being 16, and the oldest being 33. Four participants identified as cis men, and three identified as cis women. All participants identified as heterosexual. Two participants were located in London, the remaining five were located in Bedford, Dunstable, Kent, Newcastle and Nottingham.

Five participants were second generation immigrants, two were first generation. English was the first language for five participants, and the second language for two participants. Six respondents described their ethnicity as Black British, one participant described their identity as South Asian British. Six respondents identified their nationality as British, one participant identified as Nigerian.

Three participant's families' migrated to the UK in the 1990s, three in the 2000s, and one in the 1960s. Three participant's families had migrated from Nigeria, the remaining four had migrated from Sierra Leone, India, Cameroon, and America/Jamaica.



In terms of highest level of educational attainment, one participant had completed their GCSEs, three had completed A-levels, and three had completed undergraduate degrees.

Four participants worked part-time, one worked full time, and two were students. Six participants were living with parents or a carer, one participant was renting.

Limitations

Ideally, the peer researchers would have recruited a more diverse range of participants in terms of gender identity and sexuality, in order to understand the experiences of individuals at these intersections and incorporate their voices. Unfortunately, they were limited by tight time constraints and the convenience sampling methodology.

Limitations to the study include not having a variety of participants. The peer researchers recruited seven participants and two were first generation. Most participants also were in the Midlands or Southern region, with no participants from the Northern region. A small number does not represent every first or second generation immigrant experience.

FINDINGS

Among the participants, there was a collective understanding of a dual or intersectional identity in their lives. A prominent theme for some participants included a sense of belonging within the UK, particularly when integrated with others in similar ethnic, cultural or spiritual communities

Where I live is very diverse, very multicultural. There are loads of different people from different backgrounds. And that's how I see where I fit in.
- 'Sarah'

If it wasn't even for the UK as well, I wouldn't have found that relationship with Christ.
- 'Ben'

People in my local society perceive me quite well. They know who I am, they know the kind of character I possess. So among the local community, people who I've met within schools growing up, in my university, in my work, they perceive me quite well, they understand who I am for the most part, my friends.
- 'Mercy'



However, another recurring theme among the participants included feelings of alienation. Some participants felt disconnected with wider British culture...

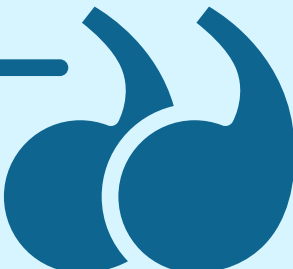
a lot of the [British] events going on were based on alcohol, which was just boring. If you don't drink, what are you supposed to do? If you go to some of these [British] clubs, sober, oh my gosh, they're so bad.
- 'Adam'

I don't really relate as being a migrant. I feel like I need to have come through like a journey or a struggle. But I didn't go through that growing up.
- 'Peter'

... or the culture of their parents


My parents are from Cameroon, but I was born and raised here...I've never been to Cameroon. And so, I immediately feel a sense of artificial - like this kind of fakeness to my being.
- 'Sami'

Others criticised and conveyed their disappointment about negative connotations purported in the UK associated with being a minority, regardless of status as a first or second generation immigrant.



People don't really see you for you. They see you for who they think you are, or what they've seen, especially in like representation in the media, and stuff like that.

-'Adam'



They see that I'm a big guy, naturally and maybe sometimes the way I dress, I'll wear a hoodie. Outside in public, not for any bad reason, I just like wearing hoodies. Then you'll see that people shift differently, you can tell that the air is different. Just because of who you are, not necessarily because I've done anything to upset these people.

- 'Sami'



Concerning the first and second generations' education experience, most participants described it as 'easily accessible'. Free (State-funded) secondary school was described as an advantage as they got the right to education. This was up to the age of 18 for all second generation participants.



It's mandatory to go to school until [you're] 18. So you kind of had to, and it was free, which is good.
- 'Sami'



It was pretty easy and pretty smooth. And I don't feel that my race affected anything. That's the only good thing when it came to school, there were different kinds of races there as well. Same thing with college. Same thing with university.
- 'Mercy'



Despite potential hinderance such as a language barriers or culture adaptation, the focus on intelligence rather than their country of origin conveyed their British education experience. Having students that looked like them (ethnically) also was an incentive to feel comfortable.



There were definitely people who were less proficient than me. But the teacher[s] never commented on this [standard of English]. They just took it as their responsibility to help them grow.
- 'Chris'



I was encouraged. There were teachers that put more emphasis on students who were from the BAME community. We had more attention put on us to do better to succeed.
- 'Janet'



Other participants described the opposite experience – the lack of support. From first generation to second generation, participants noted how their ethnicity subconsciously influenced their education experience, rather than their citizenship. Other participants noted how their family country's education was different to Britain. This meant leaving them [participants] with the responsibility to progress academically on their own, at a young age.



I don't think there's enough support in place for primary school children who have busy working parents, because they're immigrants, so they don't have like a foundation, and in the UK to help them, you know, survive, but also help the children.

- 'Peter'

I felt like maybe my race might have [affected my education experience] instead of my immigrant status. In secondary school, we used to get in trouble if our hair was a different colour. Other girls that weren't Black would do the same and wouldn't get in trouble.

- 'Mercy'



Some first and second generation participants feel grateful of the employment and education opportunities they have experienced in the UK, compared to their native countries. For example, in some of the countries where the participants are from, primary and secondary education is fee-paying.

In regards to employment, many second generation immigrants felt they did not have any problems getting work, mainly because English is their first language, but some say their race may play a part. As well as this, they are also grateful for their parents making the decision to reside in UK, leaving their lives behind in search for better opportunities for their children.

There's so much available to you, if you want to come and do somethingit empowers me because you can be anyone that you want to be in the UK, which makes me just really grateful.
- 'Adam'

I don't think being a second generation immigrant has affected my employment. I say this because English is my first language... I think race is a different story
- 'Sarah'

The majority of participants said the main reason they or their families migrated to the UK was in search of better job opportunities, which would lead to a higher income. However, some participants said their parents had to start from lower skilled jobs despite having the qualifications and experience for skilled work. As well as this, some participants felt they 'work to survive' instead of choosing a career that they feel passionate about.



You have to work to survive sort of mentality, I feel like that could have been passed down to me and my brother as second-generation immigrants. And the main reason being is that when it comes to finding a job, we just look at a job as a 9 to 5, but it should be something that we're interested in and following our passions and desires.

- 'Ben'

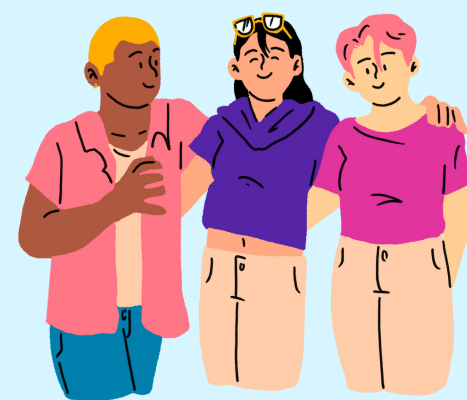
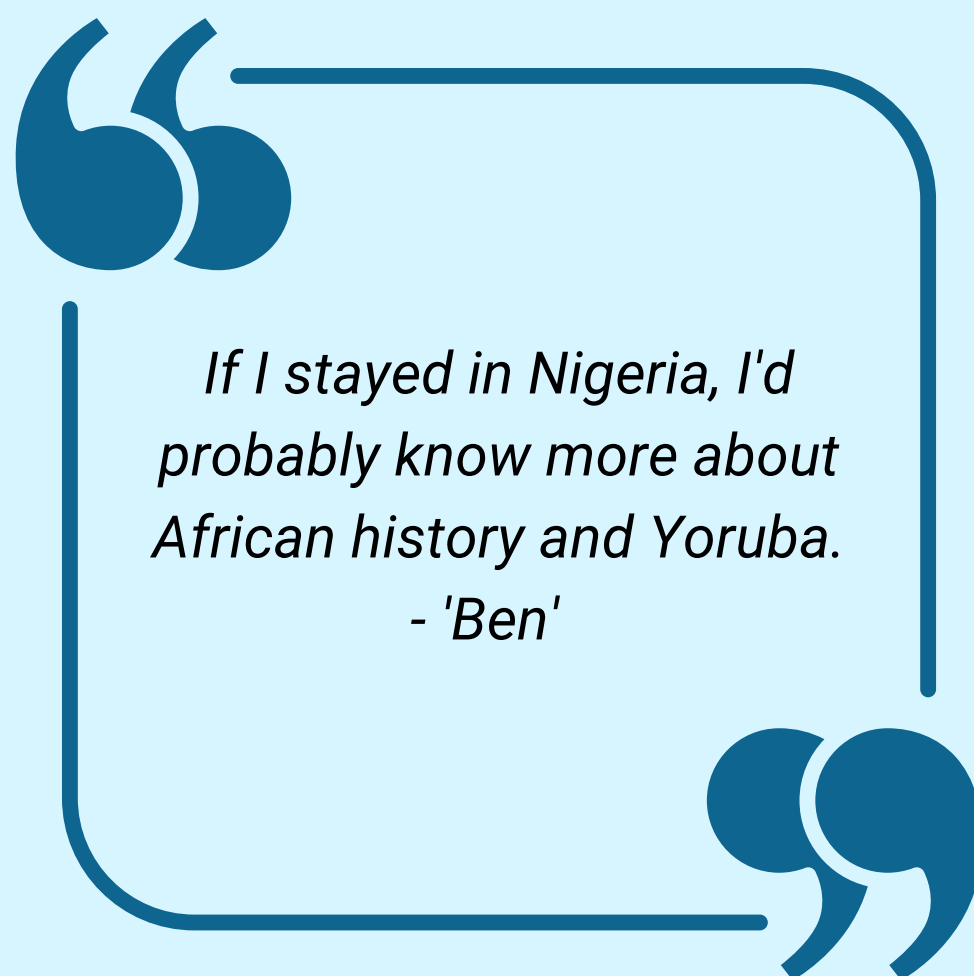


[It's one of] the most prosperous countries in the world. A life with opportunity. It'll be interesting to see what this generation does because there's so much opportunity. Many people in second generation are going to be very successful

- 'Chris'



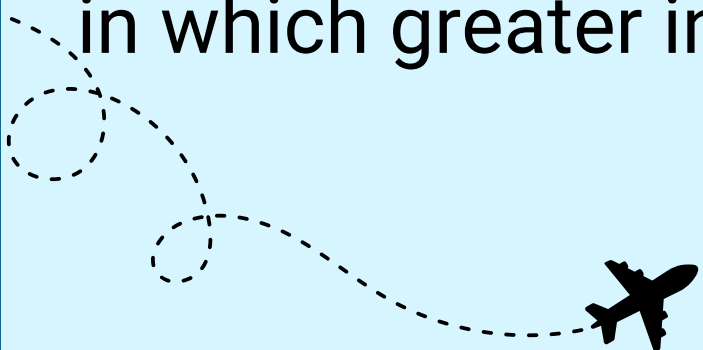
One way to help with problems concerning identity for second generation immigrants is to preserve their native languages. Some second generation immigrants feel out of place as they cannot speak their native language. For example, if local councils where there is a large diaspora community held sessions for their residents to learn their native languages. This would help second generation immigrants feel more connected with their culture.



Another recommendation is to highlight services that are available to first and second generation immigrants. For example, there are bursaries for students who are the first in their family to attend university. These schemes help to level the playing field for immigrants and give them the support to function in a new society.



This research aimed to fill gaps in literature concerning the lived experiences of first and second generation immigrant British populations. As such, it has revealed other areas in which greater insights are needed:



1

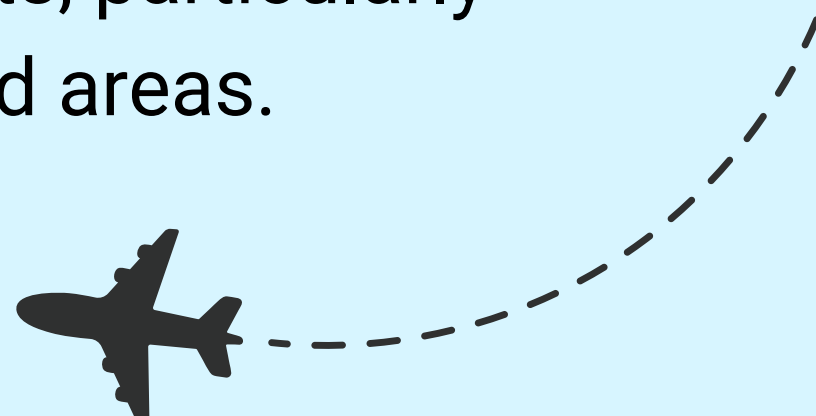
This research could be replicated as a quantitative study. This allows for a larger sample size and increases the representativeness of the results garnered

Further research is needed to investigate what kind of resources could be developed in wider society that could better support the integration process for first and second generation immigrants.

2

3

Further research is needed to explore means of reducing negative perceptions or biases about immigrants, particularly from stigmatised areas.



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