

What inspired you to choose your dissertation topic and how did you narrow down your focus?

I had been working with refugee children for some time and had become fascinated by their journeys in learning English. Many of them often spoke of their experiences of those around them either being incredibly welcoming or incredibly unwelcoming, and I wanted to find out to what extent they felt that learning English helped them to integrate with their peers, particularly in a school setting.

My initial plans were definitely over ambitious. I wanted to interview and survey many refugee children from multiple schools. However, I quickly realised that I faced a unique challenge in that many of the refugee children I wanted to work with had poor English language skills. I therefore decided it would be better to gather a richer set of data by narrowing down my scope hugely and just working with four refugee children from one school. This enabled me to get to know the children a lot better, encouraging them to open up more, and it allowed me to trial a number of different research methods that helped us alleviate the language barrier.

How did you find the dissertation experience? What were the highs and lows?

As I had picked a topic that I was already very interested in, I really enjoyed the research aspect of my dissertation. I worked for a month as an English as an additional language teacher, so I was working with the kids that I was researching every day and really got to know them. Following my research, I also went back to the school a few times and shared elements of my research with them. This was a real highlight for me as I felt like my work did produce some lasting impacts.

The writing up tasks I found more difficult as I had to manage my time really well to balance the writing alongside my normal uni work. Inevitably with a long piece of work, the final proof reading and editing phases took a long time. This sometimes was quite tiring and repetitive but it was worth it in the end!

What advice would you give other undergraduate students undertaking a (GCYRG-themed) dissertation?

I would give 3 pieces of advice.

1. Choose a topic that you enjoy! Researching and writing a dissertation takes a lot of time so you might as well spend it exploring something that really interests you.
2. Read other people's dissertations from previous years and speak to friends to hear more about what they're doing. It can help to give you ideas on how to approach what you're working on and to keep morale up!
3. Don't necessarily let your dissertation research stop at your dissertation deadline. See if you can make it have more of a lasting impact. For example, you could get your work out more widely and start an interesting conversation, or you could talk to the people you researched to see whether you can work with them to stimulate any practical action.