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Published online: 04 Sep 2023.

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Welcoming Languages: teaching a 'refugee language' to school staff to enact the principle of integration as a two-way process

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ABSTRACT

In this article we discuss the outcomes of a project which taught Arabic as a 'refugee language' to primary school staff so they could welcome Arabic speaking children and families. The project was grounded in a commitment to social justice and inclusive education practices, and in an understanding of integration as a two-way process. The evaluation shows that teaching Arabic to primary staff had a positive impact on Arabic speaking children and families, on staff's own practice, and on the wider school community. We list a set of recommendation to expand the languages spoken and taught in educational contexts.

ملخص البحث

نناقش في هذه المقالة نتائج مشروع 'لغات مرحبّة' الذي قمنا من خلاله بتعليم اللغة العربية)كواحدة من لغات اللاجئين(لموظفي المدارس الابتدائية حتى يتمكنوا من الترحيب بالأطفال والعائلات الناطقين باللغة العربية. يرتكز هذا المشروع على الالتزام بالعدالة الاجتماعية وممارسات التعليم الشامل، وعلى إدراك أن عملية دمج اللاجئين هي عملية متبادلة. يُظهر تقييم هذا المشروع أن تعليم اللغة العربية لموظفي المرحلة الابتدائية كان له تأثير إيجابي على الأطفال والأسر الناطقين باللغة العربية، وعلى ممارسات الموظفين، وعلى المجتمع المدرسي ككل. ندرج مجموعة من التوصيات لتوسيع نطاق اللغات المحكيّة واللغات التي يتم تدريسها في السياقات التعليمية.

Introduction

In this article we discuss the findings from the *Welcoming Languages* (WLs) project, a 12-month proof-of-concept study funded by AHRC (Funding ref n. AH/W006030/1) which started in January 2022. The project was a collaboration by an international team based at the School of Education of the University of Glasgow (UofG, Scotland) and at the Arabic Center of the Islamic University of Gaza (IUG, Palestine). The aim of the project was to explore the potential for inclusion of a 'refugee language' in Scottish education to enact the idea of integration as a two-way process that is at the heart of the *New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy* (Scottish Government, 2018). To pursue this aim, the international project team designed and taught a bespoke beginner Arabic language course to education staff working in Scottish primary schools. Through teaching Arabic to education staff, the project investigated the possibility of: (i) building a culture of hospitality in Scottish education that includes language as a crucial component; and (ii) making space in Scottish schools for a greater number of languages, to include those spoken by the people and the communities who have arrived more recently.

The main goal of the project was to teach Arabic to staff in Scottish primary education to provide them with the tools needed to offer 'linguistic hospitality' (Phipps, 2012) to Arabic speaking children and families from refugee backgrounds. We adopted a whole school approach by extending the

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opportunity to take the course to all school staff who regularly engage with children and families, rather than limiting it to teachers. This is, to the best of our knowledge, a highly innovative approach to linguistic diversity in education, one that questions expectations about who needs to do (all) the learning; who (and what) needs to commit to adapting and changing to ensure integration; and what role languages play to in effective integration. The project was carried out in Scottish primary schools and, to some extent, it is specific to the Scottish policy context. However, we are confident that the project's aims, objectives and findings have significance much more broadly, both at UK level and internationally.

The project's background

In this article, we refer to people who arrive in Scotland as asylum seekers and refugees as 'New Scots', in line with the wording used in *New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy* (2018). We start this section with a brief discussion of the conceptual framework for the article. This includes the concepts of linguistic hospitality and of monolingualism/multilingualism and the narratives around which languages are worthy of being spoken and taught in educational institutions. We then illustrate the specifics of the Scottish context in relation to migration, languages, and education. Finally, we briefly explain the reasons for the choice of Arabic for the project and for the teaching of an Arabic dialect rather than the standard variety of the language (more detail on this will be the focus of a further specific article).

Linguistic hospitality

Phipps talks about 'linguistic hospitality' (Phipps, 2012), building on Ricoeur's (2004) work on translation. Translation, argues Ricoeur (ibid.), enables access to discourses in a foreign language and, importantly, 'Linguistic hospitality […] is the act of inhabiting the word of the Other paralleled by the act of receiving the word of the Other into one's own home, one's own dwelling.' (Ricoeur, 2004, pp. 19–20). Translation involves a certain degree of interpretation, a dialogue between the Self and the Other, a model of hermeneutics (Kearney, 2007) which is concerned with getting closer to 'strangeness'. Even though imperfect, however, translation requires a proficient level in a foreign language – a level that translators and interpreters can reach and through which they can make foreign speakers close to each other through their work. Expanding on this idea, Phipps (2013) discusses linguistic hospitality from the point of view of 'linguistic incompetence', recounting how she learnt her foster daughter's tongues, as a way to deeply connect with her. Phipps (ibid.) thus argues that linguistic hospitality does not necessarily require proficiency, let alone perfection, but a willingness to 'move towards' someone in their language.

Linguistic hospitality was at the heart of the WLs project, which taught Arabic to education staff in Scotland to enable them to move towards New Scots children and families and welcome them in and through their language. In a publication based on the language needs analysis that was carried out within the first phase of this project we used the term 'Language *for* hospitality' to refer to the language that the educators, the Arabic-speaking pupils and their parents/guardians wanted to learn to make New Scots feel welcome from day one. We thus stressed the idea that 'linguistic hospitality' can be enacted through language that consists of simple, even basic, phrases that can help people feel welcomed in a new space, or country (see Imperiale et al., 2023). This understanding of hospitality as a 'moving towards' others in and through their language, regardless of proficiency, was also built on a critique of widespread ideas of languages as neatly bound and value-free, ideas which still inform attitudes towards languages in education, as we discuss next.

Monolingualism and multilingualism in education

As Kramsch (2019) points out, foreign language education, like all education, is inherently political, and even within the assumed 'neutral' environment of the language classroom 'what one chooses to

talk about or not to talk about, whether it be politics, sex, or religion, is a political act' (Kramsch, 2014, p. 307). Of course, here the term 'political' is used in a broad sense, with reference to the values, beliefs, and principles that (language) educators hold and transmit through their choices and practice. This political dimension of language education, moreover, is not confined to the content of the teaching nor to the approach adopted, but also includes '[…] the connections between language problems and the larger *historical and geopolitical conditions* that have brought them about […]' (Kramsch, 2005, p. 562, emphasis added). In other words, there are ideological and value-based assumptions at work both in relation to what we teach (and do not teach) students to be, do and know with/in a language, but also in relation to the languages we consider worthy of being taught/learned and which are excluded from the public sphere.

Schools are still commonly thought of as spaces that function in one shared, standardised (named) language, and the homogeneity of this language is seldom disputed. This narrative is part of what Gramling (2016) calls 'the invention of monolingualism', that is, the pretence that a bounded nation-state equals one – sometimes two – named language(s). This narrative 'sanitises' linguistic landscapes by omitting, or even denying, the messiness and hybridity of everyday language practices (Macedo, 2019) which hardly ever match this pretence to conformity. This narrative does not exclude 'multilingualism', but the multilingualism it espouses, argues Gramling (2016), is likewise an invention, one that refers to speakers of two (or more) discrete, named languages, again disregarding the widespread organic and 'unruly' language practices that most speakers engage in/with. Moreover, as Blackledge (2019, p. 434) notes, 'not all monolingualisms are the same, just as not all multilingualisms are the same' and, historically, these sanitised forms of monolingualism and multilingualism have prioritised the speaking and teaching in formal education of the languages – and language varieties – spoken by dominant elites, thus excluding from the educational context languages – or varieties of languages – that are not seen as valuable (Macedo, 2019).

Creating a welcoming space for *all* languages – and varieties of languages – spoken by pupils and their families, ensuring that they have a role to play not just in the private but also in the public arena, is crucial to ensure linguistic inclusion in education (Pérez-Leroux & Glass, 2000). Kramsch (2019, p. 55) writes that the '[…] multilingual turn has led to current efforts in [Foreign Language] education to validate the languages the students bring with them to the language classroom by allowing them to switch from one code to another'. In other words, there is a growing awareness of the importance for pupils to engage in what Garcia (2009) calls 'translanguaging', recognising that children do not acquire a language at home and then the dominant one at school, keeping them in separate silos. However, most educational contexts still do not recognise the importance of nurturing pupils' languages by encouraging their use and by making space for them in the school curriculum (Leung, 2019 cited in Quehl, 2022). Consequently, the 'invented' monolingual and multilingual narrative is still dominant, hindering the inclusion of a greater number of languages in education. This includes the context of Scottish education, to which we now turn.

Languages and integration: the Scottish educational context

Scotland in general, and Glasgow in particular, play a crucial role in the UK asylum process. Since the start of the dispersal scheme in 2000, Glasgow has been the main UK destination (on a no-choice basis) for people seeking asylum (Wren, 2004). With the start of the prolonged civil war in Syria and the consequent forced migration from the region, Scotland has become home to approximately 3,000 Syrian people who were granted protection under the Vulnerable People Resettlement (VPR) scheme (COSLA, NDa). More recently, Scotland has seen the arrival of people seeking refuge from the war in Ukraine (Scottish Government, 2022). Ukrainian refugees join New Scots from several other countries (e.g. Iran, Nigeria, Eritrea) who have been dispersed throughout Scotland in recent years (COSLA, NDb).

To build inclusive communities and set out a vision for a welcoming Scotland, in 2014 the Scottish Government released the first *New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy*, which first covered the period 2014–2018. The strategy was revisited in 2018, when a second version was released for the 2018–2022 period, and it is currently undergoing a further update (Phipps et al., 2022). The term 'New Scots' applies to asylum seekers and refugees who settle in Scotland, and it aims to avoid the negative connotations that other labels have taken on in public discourse. We want to briefly acknowledge here that the term 'integration' is problematic as it is too often used to mean 'assimilation' (Berray, 2019), as is the 'new' in New Scots, which begs the question of how long this 'newness' will last (Phipps et al., 2022). However, The *New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy* makes a clear effort to shift the narrative in the direction of a more positive and inclusive approach, discussing integration as a two-way process, one that requires adjustment and change both on the part of the New Scots but also from the receiving society, and one that needs to start from day one (Scottish Government, 2018; Strang & Quinn, 2021). Moreover, while migration and asylum are 'reserved matters' (i.e. they are legislated at the level of the UK government), in Scotland service provision – which, as Ager and Strang (2008) note is crucial to integration – is a 'devolved matter' (i.e. legislative power rests with the Scottish government).

With the publication of the report *Language Learning in Scotland: A 1 + 2 Approach* (Scottish Government, 2012), Scottish education committed to adapt the European 1 + 2 language policy to the Scottish context (Kanaki, 2021). The *1 + 2 Language Approach* introduces the teaching of two foreign languages alongside the main language of instruction. According to the *1 + 2 Language Approach*, a first foreign language should be introduced in the first year of primary school[1], while a second foreign language should be introduced in primary 5. The study of a language/languages in Scotland is compulsory up to the third year of secondary school. After that, it becomes optional, but students can sit examinations[2] which formally certify language learning and count towards university entry requirements. The *1 + 2 Language Approach* recognises the importance of language learning and offers the possibility of expanding the number of languages taught in Scottish education. The languages spoken by children and young people from migrant and/or refugee backgrounds are officially acknowledged in *the Learning in 2+ Languages Resource* published by Education Scotland (2020). This resource for practitioners acknowledges that 'Bilingual learners bring with them key strengths, in particular the advantage of having intercultural competences as a result of knowing different languages' (p. 3). However, the practical application of the principles highlighted in the *Learning in 2+ Languages Resource*, as well as the implementation of the *1 + 2 Language Approach,* is still rather patchy (Phipps & Fassetta, 2015; Kanaki, 2021) and, in most schools, everyday practice still focuses almost exclusively on English as an Additional Language (EAL) provision. This reflects an understanding that still views children and young people who speak languages other than English as primarily having a 'language deficit' to be fixed (Cummins, 1984) and does not sufficiently value their 'language plenty' (Frimberger, 2016).

Thus, when it comes to languages in education, the situation on the ground looks quite different from the two-way approach to integration championed by the *New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy (2018-2022)* and from the language vision of the *Learning in 2+ Languages Resource*. Language learning is still very much geared to supporting children/young people to learn English and not enough is done to valorise and officially recognise the languages they speak. As Hornberger and Wang (2008, p. 7) note, while it is important that learners '[…] acquire the literacies of the dominant society, their biliteracies in Standard English and the [heritage language] and [heritage culture] should become part of their empowering tools as well' and we argue that more could be done to linguistically meet the children/young people (but also their parents/carers) if not half-way, at least part of the way. This would recognise that children and young people live in all the languages they know and would go some way towards redressing the expectation that they should leave their home/heritage languages at the school gates (Pennycook, 2019).

The WLs project aimed to demonstrate that it is possible to include one of the languages spoken by New Scots by teaching Arabic to staff in Scottish primary schools so they can offer linguistic

hospitality (Phipps, 2012) to Arabic speaking pupils and their families. It also sought to recognise the crucial importance of valorising *all* languages that New Scots speak by welcoming them inside the school gates. In the next sub-section, we briefly illustrate the reasons behind the choice of Arabic for the project and, more specifically, the decision to teach the Levantine variety of Arabic rather than Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) favoured by most Arabic language programmes.

Teaching Arabic: some notes

We chose Arabic for the project for two main reasons. Arabic is one of the most common languages spoken by children and young people with a language other than English in the UK (Soliman & Khalil, 2022), and it is the main language spoken by children and young people from refugee backgrounds. Moreover, both the Principal Investigator and one of the Co-Investigators at the University of Glasgow have a long history of collaborating with the Arabic Center at IUG. Previous collaborations focused on English language teaching/learning and, more recently, on the teaching of Arabic as a foreign language. In 2017, we received AHRC funding for the design and development of an Arabic language course for beginners and, consequently, the Palestinian team had the knowledge, expertise and skills required to design the tailor-made course for staff in Scottish schools as well as the capacity to teach the course online.

The WLs Arabic course design was based on a needs analysis which identified what language items the educators and the Arabic speaking children and parents/carers felt should be taught (see: Imperiale et al., 2023). At this stage, parents were also asked which variety of Arabic should be taught, since Arabic is a language that includes several local dialects (Badawī, 1973). While there was no agreement on this (the families were from a range of different Arabic speaking countries), several parents told us that teaching the Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) variety may not be useful since the children may not speak it, although a few are learning it at the mosque or at complementary school. MSA, in fact, applies '[…] almost exclusively [to] High literary registers, with no true native speakers […]' (Van Putten, 2020, p. 77) and is generally used only in public and official spaces such as the news, higher education, official websites, etc. As Soliman and Khalil (2022, p. 7) suggest, '[…] despite the complex attitudes that many Arabic speakers have regarding the sociolinguistic situation of Arabic, the teaching of Arabic dialects and raising awareness of their existence is fundamental if we are to equip learners with a language that they can fully and naturally use'. On the basis of the parents' feedback and of thinking and discussions on this subject, we decided that we would focus on Levantine Arabic for the WLs course, as this is the variety of Arabic spoken by the majority of Arabic speaking New Scots. Teaching a widespread Arabic dialect was a way to further reinforce the idea of providing linguistic hospitality to children and families in a language variety that would be more likely to sound familiar and recognisable to many of them. It was also a way to move beyond the narrative of language 'purity' and to challenge the hierarchy between language varieties that see the standardised, more powerful variety as having a higher status. However, the Palestinian team was also very careful, when deciding the linguistic content of each lesson, to select Levantine Arabic words/phrases/sentences that are commonly used in different dialects and which share similarities with Modern Standard Arabic, to increase the likelihood that they would be understood across the different Arabic dialects spoken by pupils and families in the school.

In this section, we illustrated the project's conceptual and contextual backgrounds and the reasons for the choice of Levantine Arabic for the project. We now go on to illustrate the project's structure and the methodology used for the evaluation of the project.

Project structure, data collection and data analysis

The WLs project was articulated in four phases. *Phase 1* was led by the UofG team and consisted of an analysis of the language needs, which were collected through a series of focus groups with staff and Arabic speaking children and parents/carers in the four participating schools (for more on this, see Imperiale et al., 2023). *Phase 2* was led by the IUG team, and it involved the development of a

beginner Levantine Arabic language course (syllabus, activities, materials, etc.) that would meet the needs of staff, children and parents/carers identified during Phase 1. The course comprised 10 lessons, for a total of 20 hrs. *Phase 3, led by the IUG team,* consisted in the teaching of the Arabic course. This was done online (Zoom or Teams) and each Palestinian teacher taught one or two primary school staff. A total of 24 staff started the course and 19 finished all 10 lessons. Finally, *Phase 4,* led by the UOfG team, consisted of individual or pair interviews with 13 Arabic learning staff; 3 focus groups with Arabic learning staff; one focus group with 8 Arabic speaking children; individual interviews with the 5 Palestinian Arabic course designers and teachers at the Arabic Center. For this article, we draw on the conversations with school staff and with Arabic speaking children. A further publication will discuss the findings emerging from the interviews with the Palestinian Arabic course designers/teachers.

All interviews and focus groups were semi-structured, as the research team had agreed on a shared interview schedule. The conversations with school staff were all carried out in English, while the focus groups with Arabic speaking children was carried out multilingually with the support of the project's research associate – whose first language is Arabic – who acted as an interpreter. All conversations were audio recorded, transcribed and analysed thematically. The inputs Arabic were transcribed in their English translation provided by the research associate, and transcripts were shared among the project research team on the UofG document sharing platform, so the team could work on the analysis collaboratively. The research team familiarised themselves with the data by reading the transcripts and then coding them, looking for patterns within each transcript and across them. Themes were then generated by grouping the codes, which were subsequently refined and named (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022).

In the next section we illustrate and discuss the main themes that were generated from the analysis of the data, focusing on the feedback collected in relation to the impact of the project on: Arabic speaking children; school staff; all pupils more broadly.

The project's findings

The evaluation of the project revealed that taking part in learning basics of Arabic had a positive impact on the teaching staff, on the Arabic speaking children and their families, and on the school community. We organise this section under four headings, each corresponding to a theme that emerged from the analysis: (1) impact on Arabic speaking children; (2) impact on primary staff's practice; (3) impact on *all* pupils.

Impact on Arabic speaking children

Impact on Arabic speaking children was highlighted as the most important outcome of the project by the primary staff and in the children's feedback. Impact on the children was articulated through three main sub-themes: practical usefulness; children's wellbeing; and recognition of expertise.

Practical usefulness

Staff who had been learning Arabic noted the practical impact of their learning on the children, as they were able to establish a stronger connection, convey some simple school-related content, and attract the children's attention. A headteacher who had been learning Arabic, for example, reflected that:

> When young children start in a Scottish school, if they have come from another country, maybe they've never been to school, it takes them a long time to understand why it is that their parents are leaving them in this very strange place where no one speaks their language, so to be able to at least have the basics of conversation I'm sure helps in settling them a bit quicker.

> (G., Headteacher)

A class teacher noted how knowing just a few simple words made a big difference by attracting the children's attention and helping to establish a connection, all of which then translated into greater engagement by the children:

> Even just using words like, you know […] *yalla*, you know, those little things. They're small bits. They're small words and you think 'Bah' [dismissive tone], you know, but they really respond to it because they're thinking 'Ohh!' [surprised tone]. You know? Yeah. And it's such a welcoming word for them when they're saying *yalla* and that if they definitely have … they definitely respond a lot more to it, they're more likely to kind of give you their attention, and kind of listen to what you're saying. And so yeah, it's been good and that sense.
>
> (J., Class teacher)

A nurture group[3] staff used her emerging knowledge of Arabic to translate simple words, such as numbers, for young Arabic speaking children, and so facilitate a connection between English and Arabic:

> In class, in primary 1, they are learning their numbers, so with the two … three Arabic children in the class, I'm trying to say number one is *wahed* so that they are learning … they know that that relates to their [language].
>
> (E., Nurture Group staff)

As can be seen from the previous extracts, most of the staff were very aware that the Arabic they had been able to learn during the 10 lessons of the course did not equip them to say more than simple sentences and words, but they were using their learning in creative ways with Arabic speaking children to support them and their leaning.

Children's wellbeing

While the practical utility was an important consideration, by far the biggest impact of knowing that staff were learning Arabic, however, was on the children's wellbeing. Seeing that their efforts had a clear benefit on the children's wellbeing was something that the staff involved in the project were very keen to stress:

> The benefits for the children, not even in terms of us initially using the language, but just them seeing that people want to be able to communicate with them, that they're making an effort …
>
> (K., Class teacher)

Reports of children's happiness, of smiles and of excitement at hearing staff in their school speak Arabic were a very strong theme from the staff's feedback, and something that rewarded them for their effort, as this extract further shows:

> They value the fact that we've been learning Arabic [inaudible] and we're saying something new to them, like *Marhaba* or *Saba al kahir*, you know, and they are looking at you like 'Ah! I can't believe you're learning Arabic' … to see the smile on their faces when they hear Arabic!
>
> (S., Class teacher)

The emphasis on children's wellbeing and the unanimous emphasis that all education staff put on the positive impact that learning Arabic was having on Arabic speaking pupils, is a clear indication of the staff's commitment to make Scotland a place where all children can grow up 'loved, safe and respected', as the *Getting It Right For Every Child* (GIRFEC)[4] policy framework for service provision for children in Scotland stipulates. It was also a clear example of the linguistic hospitality we hoped the project would foster.

Recognition of expertise

A further positive impact of the project on the Arabic speaking children is that it put them in a position of expertise. Teaching Arabic to staff in primary schools with substantial numbers of Arabic speaking pupils and parents/carers meant that we were able to build into the course some language practice with Arabic speaking children and parents/carers. This put the Arabic speaking children in the position of being the experts, providing quite a shift from the more common focus on their 'lack' of English. This was something the children greatly appreciated, as this class teacher reports:

> They are very nice, and they are very excited about it, they love to be asked […] and to feel important, in a way. They tell me 'It's easy, it's easy, Arabic is easy. English is difficult'
>
> (M., Class teacher)

It is interesting to note, in the extract above, also how the children were able to challenge narratives about language and language learning, telling their teacher, from their position of expertise, that 'English is difficult, Arabic is easy'.

Being in this position of expertise also meant that Arabic speaking children were able to help staff in their school learn, and some of them even decided that the staff needed extra practice. About halfway through the Arabic lessons, for example, a primary class teacher wrote a WhatsApp message to her Arabic tutor. The message included a photograph of a notebook with Arabic and English words. The text of the message says:

> Just wanted to show you some of the children's notes in my notebook. They have been giving me homework too. It is really having a positive impact on the children, so thank you for all your hard work.
>
> (C., Class teacher; text of message reproduced with permission)

Similarly, the following conversation with a group of Arabic speaking children shows a child's gratification in knowing that her teacher was learning 'about the Arabic language' with her help. At this point in our conversation, the young person had just told us about helping her teacher learn Arabic by giving her a list of words to learn:

> Researcher: Really? You were giving your teachers homework?!
>
> Child: Yes! (laughs)
>
> Researcher: Oh wow! (laughs) … and what did that feel like?
>
> Child: I was happy because I want the teacher to, like, learn another language … Not just her language. To, like, learn about the Arabic language
>
> (Arabic speaking child; English in the original)

More generally, throughout our conversation, the Arabic speaking children highlighted feelings of wellbeing, using words such as 'happy', 'good' and 'nice' to describe their feelings and reactions when hearing staff in their school speak Arabic, echoing what had also been reported by the staff.

Similar positive impact was also reported by both staff and children in relation to the effects that the projects was having on the parents. Again, the impact was about practical language use to make a connection with the parents. However, perhaps more significantly, it was also symbolic of the schools' effort to meet them some of the way in the journey of settling into the Scottish context.

Impact on staff's practice

Before delving into the impact the project had on staff and on their practices, it is worth mentioning that the feedback we collected from the primary staff was very positive in relation to both the design of the course and the teaching approach of our Palestinian colleagues. The staff consistently agreed that the content of the course was practically useful, and they commended the flexibility and

patience of the Arabic language teachers. These positive elements were crucial to the success of the project, since lack of time and workload pressure were challenges that most of the primary staff reported, and which impacted on their ability to practice and prepare for the lessons.

The timing of the project meant that a few staff dropped out after the first block of five lessons, as they moved school or role after the summer break. However, 19 staff (out of the 24 who had started) completed the full 10 lessons, and most were interviewed at the end of the course, both individually and in focus groups, to gain a personal and a collective perspective on their experience. Becoming a language learner was, for several of the staff involved in the WLs project, an important moment of reflection on, and awareness of, the challenges experienced by Arabic speaking children and their families who are learning English, as this educator told us:

> It's been really nice in that sense, just to have a little bit of commonality, and so it's allowed me to kind of build an awareness of how difficult it must be for these children who come to Scotland and don't have English … And actually when … when the shoe's on the other foot and you're learning a new language that you know nothing about, it's really, really difficult. So, it's kind of made me reflect a little bit on my teaching.
>
> (C., class teacher)

This teacher was not the only one to reflect on the difficulties she was experiencing as a language learner and on reconsidering her practice as a consequence. A family support member of staff also realised that the 'easiness' of a language is a very relative concept, which clearly echoes the 'Arabic is easy, English is difficult' point raised by one of the children earlier. She drew a parallel between her experience and the experiences of Arabic speaking the children and parents/carers learning English, which helped her reflect on the support she is providing:

> I think one of the things it has to definitely also make me more aware of, especially from like Arabic speakers' point of view, of how difficult English can be as well […] I think I'm more aware of that as well. And I think that's really helpful in thinking about support for them, to be aware of that.
>
> (P., family support staff)

As both the extracts above illustrate, becoming a language learner had a direct impact on practice as educators become aware that their expectations of pupils may at times be unrealistic. Having the opportunity to put themselves in the position in which their pupils (and their families) find themselves every day, arguably led these staff to become more attuned to the effort the pupils and parents/carers are making and to the potential ramifications of substantial and prolonged demands on their attention and concentration.

Learning Arabic also had the added effect of connecting the Scottish staff to their Palestinian teachers, thus giving them a view into their everyday lives. For one of the staff, this meant also reconsidering some of his expectations of what life in the Gaza Strip is like, challenging the widespread view of Gaza as a place of constant struggle and sorrow to see it also as a life affirming place where, despite the many challenges, pleasure and beauty are found:

> From a British perspective, what we hear and see about Gaza … generally is to do with violence [our teacher] showed us some of the streets, and the food she eats. It was a really nice perspective because we are used to seeing pictures of bombed-out buildings and … and all these kind of things, and [our teacher] is showing us a street that, to my mind, looks like the kind of street you would see in the Mediterranean, um … and the food that she has for breakfast. I mean, my goodness … it gives the impression that it would be a lovely place to leave (G., headteacher)

The extract conveys an appreciation of the 'normalness' of life in the abnormal circumstances the Gaza Strip and of how this normality is important to the people who live there. This was a 'by-product' of the Arabic lessons that, while not the main focus of the project, we had also hoped to achieve, as this experience is something many New Scots share, as they hoped and tried to endure very difficult circumstances for as long as they could, before leaving became the only remaining option.

Impact on all pupils

Not only did the project impact the primary staff involved in it and the Arabic speaking children and their parents/carers, but its impact also rippled out to include other children in the school, regardless of their linguistic background. Teaching staff, in particular, made sure that their classes knew that they were learning Arabic, and some also taught elements of Arabic they were learning to all their pupils. This was noticed by the Arabic speaking children, as this extract shows:

> Researcher: What about you? Did you help your teacher … or teachers in your school?
>
> Child: like, the numbers in Arabic. Then the teacher said 'All the class say the numbers in Arabic' … up to 10!
>
> (Arabic speaking child; English in the original)

Knowing that 'important' adults in the school, such as teachers or headteachers, were taking an interest in one of the languages spoken by New Scots pupils and families sent to all children a clear message about welcoming; about being willing to change to ensure inclusion of all pupils; and about the importance of all languages. One of the class teachers recounted how she was practicing her 'end of course solo talk' in Arabic with the help of a pupil and told us:

> I'm not kidding, I had every child right here and at the end there was this massive applause like 'Miss, well done, you've learnt that language, that's fabulous'. I asked the children 'Why do you think Miss X is learning Arabic?' So there's this [inaudible] 'because you do Spanish and you do French' 'Yes, and what else?' 'To help the boys and girls who can't speak English yet'. So they are beginning to recognise that the reason the teacher is learning Arabic is also to help other children. (K., class teacher)

As we can see from the extract, the teacher took advantage of the interest that her practicing Arabic had elicited to get the pupils to reflect on the reasons why she was learning Arabic and about the role of language in ensuring the inclusion of all pupils.

Other staff recognised that the fact that they were learning Arabic could be an important 'educational' point for *all* children, one that gave them the opportunity to reflect on integration, language, and the role of making mistakes in learning. These are, of course, important reflections for all children, regardless of their linguistic background:

> I think even for pupils who aren't Arabic speaking, it's recognizing that it's OK to learn a different language, you know, and it's OK to struggle with learning a language, because I do talk about how I'm finding it difficult at times with them, so they … it allows them to maybe kind of reflect a little about themselves, that it's OK to not be getting at the language straight away […]. (J. class teacher)

Through his learning, this teacher was able to emphasise points about language education that can benefit the Arabic speaking pupils but also all pupils, conveying to them that making mistakes is part of the learning process, and not something to be anxious about. Arguably, in a context such as that of the UK, where languages are suffering from a lack of interest and commitment and are slowly being squeezed out of higher education – even in the relatively more welcoming context of Scotland[5] – staff in education leading by example can have a crucial role to play to change this trend.

Discussion

The WLs project set out to see what happens if we introduce one of the languages spoken by New Scots in Scottish primary schools, as a way to offer linguistic hospitality. This was done through teaching Levantine Arabic to school staff, so that they can welcome children and their families in their own language, ensure their wellbeing and help them to feel included and considered. The project's evaluation shows how learning even a small amount of Arabic had a powerful impact on Arabic speaking children, on the Scottish primary staff and the wider school context.

The impact of the project on the Arabic speaking children was practical, as it allowed staff in the schools to communicate immediate needs, attract a pupil's attention, or translate some words related to subject content. It also had a powerful symbolic impact, letting Arabic speaking children

and families see that the demand is not exclusively on them to adapt, but that staff in education are making practical efforts to ensure that they are part of the school community. This is a clear instance of linguistic hospitality in action and an example of inclusive practice, one that recognises that 'every learner matters and matters equally' (UNESCO, 2017, p. 12).

The WLs project also contributed to challenge a representation of children who speak languages other than English as having a 'deficit' that needs to be fixed (Cummins, 1984). Being able – even encouraged – to speak Arabic in the school context, showed to staff, peers, but also to the children themselves that they have valuable resources/competences from which they can draw. This helped them to position themselves as learners with multiple selves/identities which all have a place in the school context rather than having to be kept separate (Hornberger & Wang, 2008), and as learners who can dwell in all their languages and cultures. This is important for all children who live in a multiplicity of languages since, as Capstick (2018, p. 8) notes: 'learning in a home language at school has positive effects on children's sense of self, sense of belonging and academic achievement, and it validates their home life'. However, it is arguably even more crucial for young New Scots, who may have experiences of trauma, displacement and loss of connection with friends, families and communities, a break in their lives that the connecting thread of language may help to minimise.

By engaging education staff as language learners, the WLs project also had a clear impact on staff's own practice. Finding themselves in a position of 'linguistic incompetence' (Phipps, 2013) meant that staff were able to better put themselves in the shoes of Arabic speaking pupils and their families. It offered them the opportunity to engage reflexively with their own practice. Nussbaum (2008) highlights empathy as essential to our humanity and as a crucial ingredient for social justice and for truly democratic education. The primary staff involved in our project arguably already came from an ethics of care (Held, 2006) and concern for the welfare of all children which translated into their interest in and engagement with the WLs project. However, experiencing challenges of learning a totally new language also sparked spontaneous reflexivity and led them to reassess their own practice and assumptions. As Brownlee et al. (2017, p. 242) note, 'reflexivity involves critical thinking that evaluates multiple perspectives in context and leads to specific action in the classroom', and this process of using experience to evaluate multiple perspectives was noticeable in the feedback of some of the staff in the project. Moreover, several of the staff were open to practice Arabic and make mistakes in front of pupils, subverting the idea of teachers as 'all knowing' to model acceptance of mistakes as part of the learning experience. To do this, they had to open themselves to experience of 'open vulnerability', which they could do in the familiar context of the classroom and with children, as they felt '[…] safe and confident enough to risk opening themselves to the possibility of embarrassment and emotional stress for the sake of relationship building and student learning' (Song, 2016, p. 634).

Learning to engage with different perspectives and reflecting on their practice as a result of becoming a language learner arguably was a result of the project that benefitted all pupils and not just Arabic speaking New Scots children. The same can be said about the willingness and openness of staff to be seen getting the language wrong as a way to promote a healthy attitude towards mistakes as part of learning, as these practices of metacognition (Barnes & Solomon, 2014) that the project set in motion can have positive repercussions on all pupils. However, the project also had a more direct repercussion on pupils in relation to an appreciation that all languages are interesting, valuable and worthy of being learnt, as they could see staff in their school learning Arabic and this learning was, in some cases, also cascaded on them. This is an important lesson for children, one that can motivate young people to learn languages and, moreover, to see that all languages are equally valuable, including those spoken in their community (Bak & Mehmedbegovic, 2017).

The process of linguistic hospitality the project hoped to foster was thus a clear outcome for all involved: for the primary staff, who could welcome Arabic speaking children and families in their language; for the Arabic speaking children, who could welcome school staff and other pupils into their language; for the school community as a whole, who could take an extra step in their ongoing commitment to the welcoming and inclusion of all pupils.

Conclusions and recommendations

As Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) argue, schools are sites where ideologies are reproduced through privileging of the knowledges of some groups over those of other groups. This, in turn, works to reproduce social disparities and to ensure that those who already are in a more powerful position retain their advantage. These mechanisms of reproduction work on a broad scale, but they can also be applied at the level of language ideologies, which '[…] are not neutral, since the perception of language they represent is formed in the interest of a specific social or cultural group' (Quehl, 2022, p. 25). However, schools can also be sites of contestation and change and, as we found in our project, staff who work in education can be more attuned to the importance of making changes to their practice to ensure greater inclusion for all pupils. Of course, not all staff in education is equally sensitive and open, nor everyone is willing to make the effort required to accommodate those who arrive as asylum seekers or refugees. However, our project demonstrates that a willingness to change is not uncommon, and that many staff working in education do this from a deep commitment to social inclusion, equity, and care for all. This also rests on an understanding of the need to respect and celebrate '[…] the language practices that students bring to school' as a way to make 'concrete such values as solidarity, social responsibility, and creativity' (Macedo, 2019, p. 12) as well as an appreciation of the crucial importance that linguistic hospitality can have for those fleeing war and/or persecutions.

Based on the findings of the project, we believe that it is crucial to give education staff the opportunity to expand their knowledge of the languages spoken by pupils in their schools, to put into practice the values of solidarity and social responsibility by welcoming and including children and families in the languages they speak. To this end, we make the following recommendations:

- Make space for pupils' languages in Scottish education, as this improves children's self-esteem and wellbeing, recognising what they have rather than simply focusing on what they lack.
- Teach education staff the languages spoken by pupils, as this has both a practical and symbolic value for New Scots children and their parents/carers, providing linguistic hospitality and welcoming.
- Teach languages spoken by pupils to education staff, as this strongly conveys to *all* pupils, regardless of their linguistic background, that all languages are important, and that language learning is relevant and desirable.
- The languages that are offered as part of the 1 + 2 Language Strategy should be extend beyond the traditional 'modern languages' to include the languages spoken in the community.
- Forms of official certification (e.g. Nat 5 or Higher examination) should be available for the languages spoken by 'New Scots' as they are for other, more traditional languages.
- Online tools can be effective in language teaching/learning, especially if opportunities for in-person practice are also available.
- Online tools could also support teaching/certification of languages spoken by New Scots, as they allow for clustering regardless of geographical distance.
- Schools should be supported to create inclusive school community and actively contribute to creating inclusive community and society through linguistic hospitality and welcoming.

As we finalised this article, the WLs project report and its recommendations have gained support from Members of the Scottish Parliament from all parties and also from the Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills. This demonstrates an encouraging degree of sensitivity and goodwill by Scottish policymakers towards the importance of welcoming New Scots in the languages they speak and to ensure that more languages have a place in Scottish education. We believe that these recommendations, together with continued research and discussion on the importance of languages in the process of integration can help to foster social justice and an ethics of care in

education that can benefit children and parents/carers from refugee backgrounds but also, more broadly, communities and the wider society.

Notes

1. Education in Scotland is a devolved matter and is overseen by the Scottish government. Compulsory education consists of: seven years of primary school (P1 to P7) and four years of secondary school (S1 to S4). Young people can complete one or two further years of secondary school to study towards and gain qualifications that give them access to Higher Education.
2. The Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA) offers formal qualifications in subjects of study at secondary level. For languages the main examinations and qualifications are: National 5 (usually taken at the end of S4), Higher (usually taken at the end of S5), and Advanced Higher (usually taken at the end of S6). Higher and Advanced Higher are recognised for study at university level.
3. Glasgow City Council offers nurture provision in all schools, as part of a nurturing approach to education. In primary education 'nurture groups' can be set up in schools to cater for the wellbeing of children. They are staffed by trained educators who focus primarily on the social and emotional needs of pupils https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/article/18943/Nurture.
4. The GIRFEC policy framework was first implemented in 2006. It shapes service provision for children in Scotland from a rights-based approach and with an emphasis on service partnership to ensure that all children have the right support at the right time. See: https://www.gov.scot/policies/girfec/.
5. See for example the following news item from the Edinburgh Evening News about cuts to foreign language programmes in Scotland https://www.edinburghnews.scotsman.com/education/edinburgh-napier-third-university-scotland-cut-their-foreign-language-programme-2993516.

Conflict of interest

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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