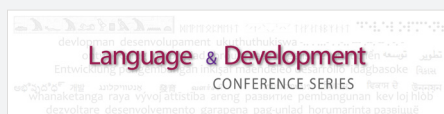


Language for Resilience: towards principled and purposeful inclusion of migrants and refugees in education through language programmes

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Introduction

In a changing world which has seen an increase of 51 million international migrants since 2010 (UN, 2019) due to conflict and climate crises, now exacerbated by COVID-19, education systems need to develop institutional resilience to help migrant students to thrive. This 'crisis within a crisis' will have disproportionate and magnified impact on the world's most vulnerable, displaced communities. The prolonged conflict in Syria spurred several Higher Education in Emergencies (HEiE) programmes across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region between 2015 and 2020 designed to integrate refugee students into higher and further education, often through English access programmes. We aim to provide insight into the learning from these programmes, principles that have emerged from our practice and frameworks for understanding teacher development needs, and how to best utilise digital resources in challenging contexts.

By first explaining the British Council's research in the area of language for resilience, and then through four case studies presented at IMMLE looking at different language interventions and materials, this paper distils some of the conditions necessary for implementing supportive language learning programmes that protect home languages through a multilingual approach. It also looks at how to support the integration of refugees within the host communities and considers protective factors for adults at risk in fragile contexts. Drawing from technical expertise in research, English Language Teaching (ELT), digital design and teacher development, this paper takes a holistic and multidisciplinary view to understanding language and its role in the development of individual, community and institutional resilience.



Background to Language for Resilience and research principles

Caspar Mays

What is Language for Resilience?

Language for Resilience (L4R) is a language teaching and learning approach, initially developed in response to the Syrian refugee crisis, that highlights the contributing role English (among other languages) plays in developing resilience in five principal areas: supporting home languages; promoting social cohesion; access to education; dealing with trauma; and strengthening education systems. The concept that language plays a critical role in helping people in crisis situations (including refugees, migrants, internally displaced persons [IDPs], host communities and education systems) to develop resilience has evolved into programming supported by a growing researched evidence base. The foundational piece of research on the notion of language and resilience commissioned by the British Council (2016) and delivered by Dr Tony Capstick and Marie Delaney states:

Language difficulties have been highlighted as one of the barriers to Syrian refugees' ability to access education. These difficulties affect children in various ways across the different countries in the region. In Turkey, language is one of the main barriers to school enrolment for Syrian refugee children and in Jordan and Lebanon, years of disrupted education have lowered the Arabic literacy rates of Syrian refugee children, making it harder for them to enter and stay enrolled in formal education. In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, INGOs have had to adapt their

curricula to the different varieties of Kurdish and balance these languages alongside opportunities to learn Arabic and English. Lack of knowledge of appropriate language can also create barriers for adults, with many lacking the skills they need to access public services or enter higher education, training and employment. (Capstick and Delaney 2016:7)

The key findings from that research are that:

- Every language used by the refugees helps them to build resilience at the individual, family and community levels. Both home language and their additional languages matter. Proficiency in additional languages provides new opportunities for education and employment.
- Proficiency in key languages gives people a voice to tell their story in various contexts.
- Language learning can bolster social cohesion and intercultural understanding.
- Language-learning activities can be supportive interventions to address the effects of loss, displacement and trauma.
- Building the capacity of language teachers can strengthen the resilience of the formal and non-formal education systems in host communities.

L4R principles and further research

The role of language in enhancing the resilience of Syrian refugees and host communities research (Capstick and Delaney, 2016) identified five interconnected ways in which language is an essential component in enhancing the resilience of individuals, communities and institutions:

1. Developing home language and literacy: creating the foundations for shared identity, belonging and future study

This principle explores the impact of home language education in early years and the associated impact of how additional languages are introduced. Barriers and therefore vulnerability factors can be encountered when vulnerable learners are taught in additional languages and the protection that comes from (especially) early years learning in home languages can be lost due to forced migration.

2. Access to education, training and employment

This principle explores how 'supporting refugees and those affected by instability to develop competence in additional languages enables them to access a wider range of employment and training opportunities' (Capstick and Delaney 2016:8). This can be explored further with forced migration where opportunities and access may only be open in a certain given language.

3. Learning together and social cohesion: language-learning activities as a basis for developing individual resilience, ensuring dignity, self-sufficiency and life skills

The third principle of L4R explores concepts of integration, protection and the building of wider community networks fostering social cohesion as a result of learning together. Learning together can increase refugee integration and therefore protection.

4. Addressing the effects of trauma on learning: language programmes as support and as a means to address loss, displacement and trauma

The research found that 'Language has a central role to play in helping refugees to address the effects of loss, displacement and trauma' (Capstick and Delaney 2016:9). There are many facets to this and include concepts of:

- 'voice' enabling stories to be heard and understood
- 'safe spaces' where the classroom is a place to work through the effects of trauma
- 'safe spaces' where the second or third language is a vehicle.

5. Building the capacity of teachers and strengthening educational systems: building institutional resilience through professional training for language teachers

The final principle explores the importance of not only focusing in individual and community resilience by recognising that institutional resilience also requires support to help them support students to learn in multicultural environments. This in turn will build more protective spaces for vulnerable refugee and host community students.

As can be seen in Table 1, since this formative 2016 research, the British Council has commissioned a further four linked pieces of research including cross-disciplinary deep dives into the L4R principles (Capstick, 2018), two pieces of research in Jordan on language perceptions and language learning (Hett, 2019; Sowton, 2019) and, most recently, research on sustaining digital engagement with vulnerable and marginalised communities (LearnJam, 2020).

Title	Publication Date	Author(s)
The role of language in enhancing the resilience of Syrian refugees and host communities	2016	Tony Capstick and Marie Delaney
Cross-disciplinary perspectives on the role of language in enhancing the resilience of refugees and host communities	2018	Dr Mohammed Ateek, Professor Clare Furneaux, Dr Tony Capstick, Dr Beverley Costa, Professor Shirley Reynolds, Chris Sowton and Dr Kerryn Dixon. Editor: Dr Tony Capstick
English language provision to displaced and marginalised youth in Jordan's non-formal education sectors	2019	Georgie Hett
Language learning: attitude, ability, teaching and materials in host and refugee communities in Jordan	2019	Chris Sowton
Language learning: attitude, ability, teaching and materials in host and refugee communities in Jordan Best practices for engagement with digital educational resources among refugee and host community youth in Jordan	2020	LearnJam

Table 1: List of researches commissioned by the British Council

Case study: insights into a dialogic teaching approach in a refugee classroom

Francis Randle

The Sudanese and Somali community in Jordan live in extremely challenging circumstances, marginalised as refugees from countries not prioritised by the donor community, with a lack of access to basic services and opportunities, and also through facing regular stigmatisation and discrimination. Language learning is a priority for many young refugees in this context; however, courses may rely on textbooks that are out of date or designed for a commercial language school audience and pedagogical practices may be very teacher-fronted or static (Sowton, 2019).

In a class of Somali and Sudanese refugee language learners in Jordan in which I conducted some research, I was therefore interested in how more dialogic and inclusive approaches to the class might try to overcome some of these contextual challenges. These included the process of learner involvement in the selection and organisation of academic material that mirrors ongoing initiatives in the higher education and open-learning sectors, while also incorporating some of the initiatives that include refugees as partners in the construction of higher education courses. Finally, it relied on the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) framework, which requires that: 'Community members participate actively, transparently and without discrimination in analysis, planning, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of education responses' (INEE, 2010:21). From a pedagogical perspective, this resulted in a classroom approach based on principles of open dialogue and restless enquiry into the world.

Benefits noted in discussions included feelings expressed by students that they felt they were given an opportunity to express their culture,

which in turn made materials and learning more motivating, and that they were able to find space to think critically and reflectively in a secure environment, which was not always possible in their daily lives. Participants in this class were in a situation where they had been often unable both in their host and home country to safely express their own culture in an education setting:

They used to teach us something about Arabian civilization (in the classroom) ... they give us some kind of fiction. We are supposed to ... (have to) know our own language, our own history.

(Male Sudanese learner, 30 in Randle, 2019)

Also important was the option to allow students to create lesson content through their own materials and life experiences:

It is not about the teacher bringing something to teach us, my mind is not interested in the class (if that happens), it is not something interesting for me. But the student, the classmate, or the friend, they always bring something (to the class) what the people need.

(Male Sudanese learner, 30 in Randle, 2019)

Through reducing the gap between the teacher and the learner, space is allowed for classroom dialogue, and also for genuine exchange between the teacher and the learners. In a focus group, this was expressed in the difference between this class and those with teachers in Sudan:

Many teachers the way they talk is not good to the students ... if you ask some questions, they get angry ... if you are talking about something outside of the subject, they don't allow you. Here we have the opportunity to express what we need to know, or what we want to hear; that is the unique thing about this class.

(Male Sudanese learner, 28 in Randle, 2019)

Dialogue is structured in this way so that it is led by the learners and represents the multifaceted and unpredictable nature of dialogue outside the classroom, rather than one-dimensional and static turn-taking. The use of questions in generating dialogue and thought is central to the Freirian approach to the classroom, as well as in dialogic teaching (Skidmore and Murakam, 2016) for making the link between thought and speech, and for promoting a 'restless, impatient,

continuing, hopeful enquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other,' (Freire, in Jones, 2012) which can be seen in the comments of the learners:

I have ideas that need answers, and something that I want to share with the world, because when I was in Sudan I feel like I was in prison, you know. I need answers, I have something to share.

(Male Sudanese learner, 26 in Randle, 2019)

There may be little opportunity to speak out or for free expression and debate of ideas in a refugee context (Moser-Mercer, et al., 2016), thereby making the language classroom an important site for opening these avenues for enquiry and thought, and to allow refugees to reflect on the world around them and their place in it.

Case study: digitising teacher education

Claire Duly

In the context of refugee education, teachers, volunteers and facilitators are often so geographically dispersed and professionally diverse that an innovative and durable solution is necessary to support and develop their professional practices. The British Council's approach to teacher development under L4R takes a 'digital-first' approach and makes its

training courses and material available as Open Educational Resources (OERs) for all to access online when this is possible. These resources have been developed under a set of professional practices (Figure 1) that are relevant and appropriate to teachers working with migrants and refugees in education.



Figure 1: Professional practices for teachers and managers working migrants and refugees in education

Below are introductions to two of the key digital modules.

An introduction to trauma and its effects in the classroom

Understand learner experience and behaviour. This module helps teachers to develop a basic understanding of trauma and its effects in the classroom, and improve the teaching and learning process. The aim of this module is to look at how trauma impacts students, so teachers are equipped to shape the teaching and learning processes to be safer, more inclusive and protective.

Dealing with very challenging behaviour

Understanding learner experience and behaviour. This module helps teachers understand how a basic understanding of trauma and its effects in the classroom can benefit the teaching and learning process.

These modules were developed as a response to outcome four of the Language for Resilience report, which finds that language programmes can act 'as a supportive intervention and a way to address the effects of loss, displacement and trauma on behaviour and learning. Language can be linked to enhancing resilience by its potential role in helping refugees to address the effects of loss, displacement and trauma. Language gives a voice so that stories can be heard and understood. The effects of trauma are often displayed in learning situations, but psycho-social interventions do not always need to be seen as separate interventions to language learning. Language learning can provide opportunities for safe spaces, where students work through the effects of trauma in learning by exploring personal experiences and feelings through creative activities, play and storytelling. This can be particularly powerful in the safety of a second or third language.' (Capstick and Delaney 2016:10)

In addition to these modules, the British Council developed a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC¹) with Future Learn to support teachers working with migrants and refugees in education. This course has reached over 10,000 teachers, volunteers and programme managers working in diverse contexts across the world and feedback has been overwhelmingly positive.

It's been a fantastic course and I couldn't have asked for more. I will certainly study more on the aspect of Resilience for the Learner as well as myself as teacher. A peep into the Neurotransmitters was great and how I can try to cater to the Oxytocin, etc. It's a pity that it was just for four weeks ... (Anonymous, Class Central 2020)

Although I am not teaching a whole class at the moment and work mainly with individuals, I want to develop confidence and skills to work in a wider range of settings with refugees and migrants. Your course has already helped me become more confident and has given me inspiration and ideas. It has really expanded my range of approaches and has helped me to set a higher standard for myself as, when one works in isolation, with no supervision, one has little measure of one's standard. Your course is acting as a kind of supervision for me. I particularly liked the link to the teacher's diary with headings on how to reflect on one's own lesson... (Anonymous, Class Central 2019)

Through research, development and investment in digital education programmes for teachers, the British Council is committed to developing teaching and learning for the world's most vulnerable youth.

More information on our free training resources is available on our website². In addition to our online resources for teachers and teacher educators, we have established and continue to maintain a Facebook community³ for practitioners, researchers and partners to engage with each other and reflect on their online learning journeys. This community provides a valuable space for this kind of cross-cutting interaction among diverse groups of interest and focus.

¹ <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/migrants-and-refugees-in-education>

² <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/training>

³ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2600599690183813>

Case study: HOPES – English and higher education in MENA

Hala Ahmed

A great deal was learned about working with refugee students in the ELT classroom from the HOPES (Higher and Further Education Opportunities and Perspectives for Syrians) project. This was an EU-funded initiative in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq, and between 2016 and 2019 the British Council supported 19 universities and educational providers to provide English access courses and accreditation as part of the Higher Education English Access Programme supporting Syrian and local students. As academic manager, I was responsible for developing the teacher training and ongoing professional development programme for 283 teachers across the region and developing the blended English access syllabus.

Having worked on a project that helped Syrian refugee students who have suffered trauma and displacement, I have had the opportunity to see the effects of trauma on second language learners' attention, concentration and memory. This can obviously hinder their motivation to learn and their engagement with some topics or materials. These effects are magnified when learners feel marginalised, isolated or neglected. The importance of a second or even a third language in this fast-changing world is evident, and, in this regard, refugees are no exception.

This section looks into how language classrooms can work on different levels to address these two key areas: helping students as well as teachers to deal with trauma in the language classroom and how this in turn would make the classroom a safer and more inclusive learning environment. Successfully achieving this on the classroom level will ultimately lead to a greater and more strategic goal, giving a voice to young people and adults, building social cohesion in host communities and providing individuals

with the skills they need to access work, services, education and information, as well as meeting their psycho-social needs. Recommendations and practical ideas supported by the British Council-published research were shared with the audience, and they in turn shared their experiences at the end of the session.

The HOPES project is a good case study in this respect as it stemmed from an actual need expressed by the Syrian refugee communities in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt and it did come in alignment with all the international humanitarian efforts made from 2016 to 2019. This includes The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants⁴, The Global Compact on Refugees⁵, 1% conference⁶ and others. The HOPES project shed some light on a very important dimension of this work which emerged amid the project delivery: the effect of trauma on both the learners and the teachers in our classes.

It was quite essential, for the project context and delivery, to define trauma and outline its main effects/symptoms, such as withdrawn attitude, poor engagement and high avoidance, so that classroom practitioners and perhaps other stakeholders, whether in HOPES or other similar projects, can better understand the challenges of difficult behaviour manifested in the classes and how teachers, as front-liners, can better handle this.

Understanding the theory is important, as suggested above, but also using practical ideas in the language classroom is very helpful for learners as well as teachers. Through practical activities, teachers can deal with the negative effects on learning through learning. Learning a second or unfamiliar language can be a protective factor in helping people recover their distress. Drama, puppets, storytelling, speaking

⁴ <https://www.unhcr.org/new-york-declaration-for-refugees-and-migrants.html>

⁵ <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/the-global-compact-on-refugees.html>

⁶ <https://www2.daad.de/microsites/other-one-percent/en/70634-conference-programme/>

in the third person and language switching have all proven useful in helping people talk about their emotions without feeling vulnerable (Delaney, 2016). In addition, for a more inclusive and safer classroom, multilingualism, valuing home language and identity and integrity within the host community are all required to achieve inclusion and social cohesion.

Although it was 2019 when the UNESCO urgently called for training teachers on trauma and

psychosocial assistance for migrant and refugee students (UNESCO, 2019), this call is even more urgent and valid now than ever. With COVID-19 worsening, the situation of refugees and migrants and making them top of the list among other vulnerable groups, teachers can be a crucial source of support for learners suffering from trauma if they are given the right training and all the while bearing in mind that they are not mental health specialists.

Case Study: working with teachers inside Syria

Micheline Esso

Syrian teachers continue to face massive challenges within their careers given the lack of access to any teaching and learning resources in addition to being exposed to eight years of conflict. Those challenges vary from huge numbers of displaced children, insufficient education and financial resources to respond to the continuous influx of IDPs, lack of management skills, shortage of qualified teaching staff, inability to identify professional development, and the lack of governance combined with poor monitoring and accountability measures.

Supporting teachers in similar contexts does not only result in improved learning outcomes, but it will also create opportunities and new alternative paths for them in their rapidly changing contexts. Besides this, it will also equip them with some of the knowledge and key competencies they will need to provide effective teaching in emergency settings to ensure more participatory, interactive, learner-centred approaches that will help improve learning outcomes.

With the absence of face-to-face options, online learning remains a crucial alternative, especially when blended with a provision of tailored

expertise from experienced trainers. Thus, such blended approaches play a key role in strengthening teachers' capacities and ensure contact with those in hard-to-reach zones.

The British Council's *Teaching for Success Syria* is an example of a tailored online professional development programme that consisted of two components: a) online self-access modules and b) e-moderated live training sessions for English teachers inside Syria to improve their English teaching methodologies and establish a digital community of practice for reflection, knowledge and expertise exchange. The course had two phases, each lasting three months, and supported the development of teachers' knowledge of language systems and their classroom teaching knowledge and skills. Using online placement tests, surveys, self-assessment tools and phone interviews, teachers' needs were mapped, and programme content designed accordingly. Throughout the live sessions with their e-moderators and the self-accessed interactive learning management system, teachers were exposed to new innovative English teaching methodologies and encouraged to reflect on and carry out those methodologies in their classrooms.

Feedback from teachers participating in the programme was presented at the IMMLE conference. This was intended to raise awareness of the importance of creating opportunities for language teachers in times of crisis and using technology for teachers' development in fragile contexts. Samer, an English teacher from the north of Syria, was keen on helping dropout students in his areas and therefore he participated in the programme and, although he had poor connectivity, he made sure to attend and finalise all requirements of the programme. Fatima, an English teacher from Homs, lost her husband during one of

the conflicts in the city and as a result had become the sole carer for their three children. The conflict had forced her to quit teaching in order to support her family and her sick mother, but she held on to the hope of going back to her career when times were better.

When she participated in the programme, she was scared and thought she might not complete this course given her low digital literacy; however, encouraged by her trainer, she was able to overcome the getting started phase and commit to the learning journey.

Conclusion

Testimonies such as those above are abundant among the thousands of students and teachers who have been working in Language for Resilience programmes in the years since the term was first used in the 2015 research. There are enormous pressures on the lives of students and teachers who do not want to be viewed simply as migrants and refugees, and these pressures have been exacerbated by COVID-19.

What seems increasingly clear, though, as evidenced in the projects, reports and testimonies above, is that the acquisition, improvement and retention of appropriate languages provides a crucial and invaluable means of not only strengthening resilience but providing hope, a place within the community and a potential pathway for better futures.



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