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# INTERIM PROJECT REPORT

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) for funding the Welcoming Languages project.

We are grateful to the Scottish primary schools and education staff that are part of the WLs project, for being so generous with their time and efforts. Our heartfelt gratitude goes also to all the New Scots, children and parents/carers, for sharing their experiences and suggestions.

Thanks for the WLs project's steering committee: Laura Goff (Head of EAL Services, Glasgow City Council), Alison Phipps and Iman Sharif (University of Glasgow, School of Education) for their practical support, feedback and guidance.

Finally, a big thank you to our team at the Arabic Centre (Islamic University of Gaza, Palestine) who are working tirelessly and with great professionalism to design, develop and teach a bespoke language course within a very short time frame. What is more, the team are doing this amazing work in the context of the extremely difficult circumstances caused by a blockade that has now lasted for more than 15 years. This project would not happen without your patience, dedication, skills and resilience.





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The Welcoming Languages project is funded by the UKRI (AHRC) and led by a team based at the University of Glasgow (Scotland). It explores the inclusion of a 'refugee language' in Scottish education as a way 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). It does this by offering a tailored Arabic language course for total beginners to education staff in Scottish primary schools.

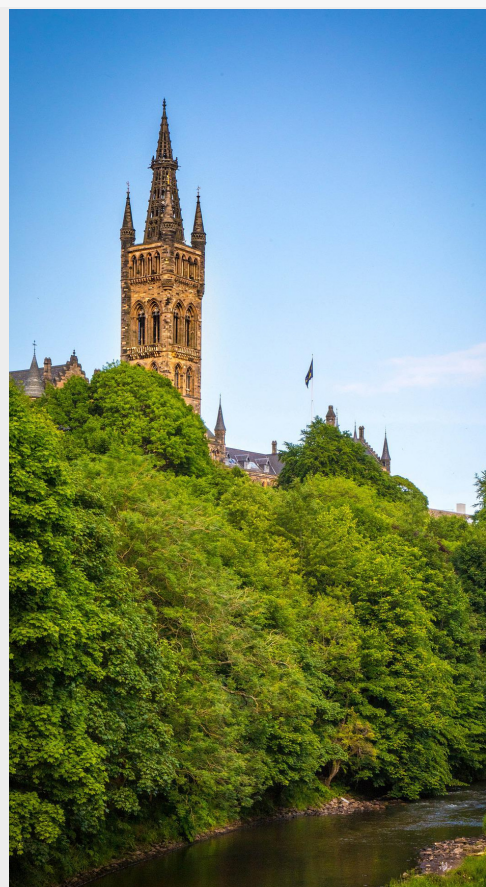
Arabic is a language spoken by many children and families who make Scotland their home (the 'New Scots'). It is also the language for which the project team already has experience of collaboratively designing and developing a beginner course.

The Welcoming Languages project stems from the beliefs that, by learning some simple language useful in a school setting, education staff can make Arabic speaking children and parents/carers feel welcome, to see that their language is valued and that education staff are willing to make the effort to move 'towards' them.

The aims of our project are to show that it is possible to build a culture of linguistic hospitality in Scotland; to make space in Scottish education for the many languages that New Scots bring with them; to give space in Scottish schools to a greater number of languages, including those of the people who choose Scotland as their new home.

## THE PROJECT'S GOALS

Teaching Arabic to Scottish educators can have several benefits for New Scots but also for the whole school community: it allows education staff to meet and greet children and families in their own languages and to learn sentences useful for immediate communication needs; it helps teachers to expand their language repertoires and to add language tasters to their everyday classroom routine; it shows children from refugee backgrounds that staff in their school are interested in the languages they bring and even want to learn them; it offers a very practical example to all children, regardless of their linguistic background, that all languages are worthy of being learnt; it can help Scottish education staff reflect on the challenges of learning a new language.



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# RATIONALE



## WHY A REFUGEE LANGUAGE IN SCOTTISH EDUCATION?

The New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy for 2018-2022 (Scottish Government, 2018) stresses right from the very start that “[...] refugee integration [is] a two-way process, bringing positive change in refugees and host communities, and helping to build a more compassionate and diverse society” (p.3). Despite this recognition of the need for integration to include adaptation both by those seeking refuge and the receiving community, when it comes to language learning, the two-way process looks more like a one-way street, as refugees are expected to learn the host country’s language and to use their home language only within the private sphere (indexed by the use of the term ‘home language’, which we also use in this report).

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However, as language is a crucial part of identity formation for young people from refugee backgrounds (Valentine et al, 2008), language teaching and learning should be crucial for a two-way process of integration, with both people seeking refuge and host communities endeavouring to learn and accommodate each other's languages (Phipps & Fassetta, 2016; Valentine et al., 2008). While there is a general understanding that home language maintenance is good for children and schools strive for some representation of the languages pupils speak (see e.g. Canagarajah, 2014), there is no or very little space in the public sphere for refugees' home languages. Some Scottish schools are acknowledging the diversity of languages spoken by pupils by organising informal language classes for teachers. This, however, is an exception to the rule, carried out informally and only very sporadically. The Welcoming Languages project makes a case for investing in long-term, sustainable approaches to language diversification in education, led by linguists, expert course developers and language teachers and tailored to the specific needs of the language learners..

The Scottish language policy for schools has seen the introduction of a 1+2 approach to modern language (The Scottish Government, 2012). This means that pupils can expect to learn two additional languages alongside their home language. The approach allows for 'language tasters' to give pupils a sense of what other languages sound and look like. Although it has had, so far, limited and patchy uptake, this policy opens the door for the teaching of a much greater variety of languages than the 'traditional' ones and thus also to the languages that asylum seekers and refugees bring with them.

To date, the emphasis in integration has been on learning English or the language of arrival contexts. While research on target language learning by refugees (adults and children) abounds, and while there is a rich literature on modern language teaching in schools throughout the UK, there are no insights, as far as we are aware, on how teachers and other education staff can acquire a 'refugee language' in order to welcome them. A start in this direction has been made by Phipps's (2012) autoethnographic reflections on linguistic hospitality and solidarity and by the critical analysis around Scottish language policy by Phipps and Fassetta (2016) which recommended a diversification of language teaching on the grounds of a range of considerations, including welcoming of refugees and migrants. A wealth of research on multilingualism, affect and decolonisation, which supports the need for diversification of language teaching, is further exemplified by the work of Kramsch (e.g. 2008), Ros i Solé (2016) and the special issue on Researching Multilingually in the *Journal of Applied Linguistics* (2013).

The Welcoming Languages project makes a timely praxis-oriented contribution to theoretical, methodological and policy insights into the issues of: refugee integration, language education and intercultural studies. It works to inform theoretical reflections on integration and contribute to current thinking around decolonising education, critically evaluating which languages are worthy of study and the assumptions upon which this choice rests. The outcomes are of interest to a wide range of stakeholders in Scotland but also in the rest of the UK and internationally. Stakeholders include people with refugee backgrounds, educators and policy makers (i.e., Education Scotland; the General Teaching Council for Scotland; the British Council), as well as statutory and volunteer services who work with asylum seekers and refugees and/or who have interest in diversifying language teaching and learning and in inclusion and social justice in education.

## WHY ARABIC?

Arabic speaking refugees have been dispersed throughout Scotland, including 2000 recently-arrived Syrian refugees who have been dispersed in all of Scotland's 32 local authorities prior to the suspension of the resettlement scheme due to the Covid-19 pandemic (<http://www.migrationscotland.org.uk/our-priorities/current-work/syrian-refugee-resettlement>). As a

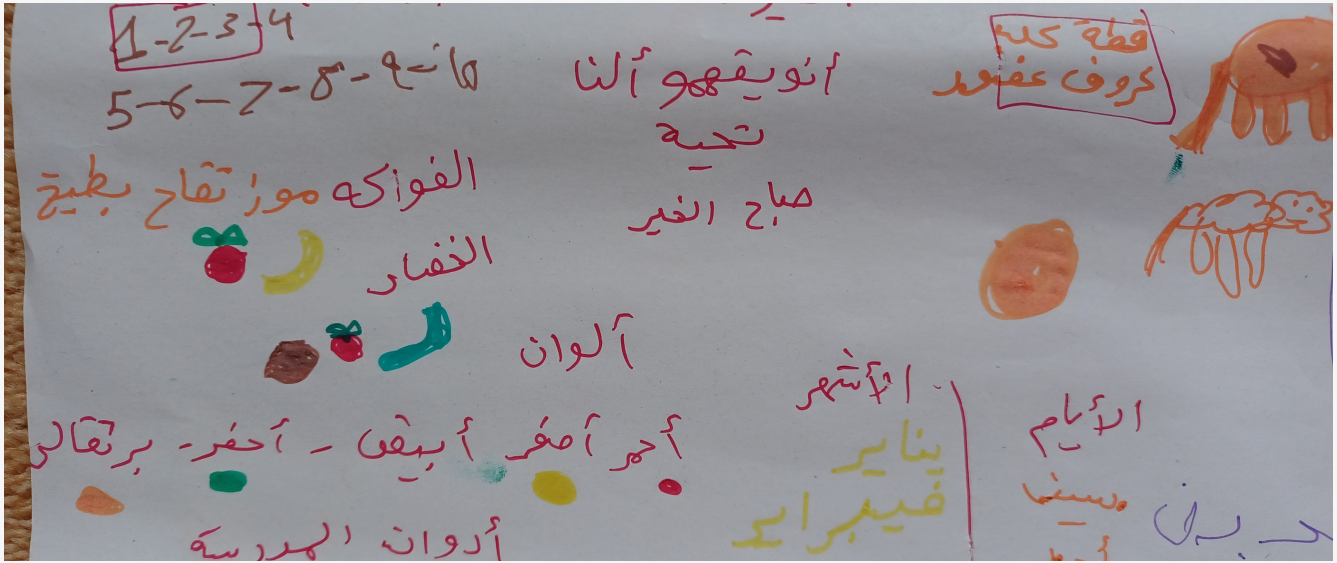
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consequence, some Syrian families live far away from other Arabic speakers, their children have no opportunities to speak this language outside the home and no way to practise or learn to read and write in Arabic. Syrian parents worry that their children may lose their proficiency in Arabic, and that they will never be able to achieve full literacy in the language (also as a means to access the Qur'an), as evidenced by feedback from the families that has been collected by COSLA, the umbrella association of Scottish Local Authorities. Further to this, the research commissioned by the Scottish Government on the substantial consultation for the Integration Strategy 2018-2022 recorded 90% of participants naming language as the most important element in enabling integration.

As a research team, moreover, we already collaborated in the Online Palestinian Arabic Course (OPAC) project (2017-2018), an AHRC funded project whose primary output was the design and development of a language course for beginners in collaboration with the Arabic Center at the Islamic University of Gaza (Palestine). The experience and expertise in designing a bespoke Arabic language course gained during the OPAC project, means that the Welcoming Languages team can build on previous experience to work on an Arabic course tailored for Scottish educators. Teaching Arabic is thus an excellent - and practical - starting point for the project to demonstrate the feasibility to introduce refugee languages in Scottish education that could be expanded, if appropriate, to other refugee languages. Moreover, while speakers of Arabic (and of other refugee languages) are available in Scotland, it is amply demonstrated that speaking a language does not necessarily translate into being able to teach it. The Palestinian team are trained to teach Arabic online to total beginners and have experience of course development gained during the OPAC project. It made thus sense, for the Welcoming Languages project to start from Arabic and education what we hope is an experience that can be expanded to other languages and services in the future.

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# THE PROJECT'S STEPS

STEPS	DESCRIPTION
<p><b>STEP 1</b> LANGUAGE NEEDS ANALYSIS</p>	<p>The UofG team asks staff in partner schools as well as Arabic speaking parents/carers and children what language they think we should prioritise for the course (i.e. which needs/situations are more important; what they want to be able to say and what children and families want to be able to hear)</p>
<p><b>STEP 2</b> COURSE DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT</p>	<p>The IUG team, with the support of the project's Research Associate, designs and develops an online Arabic language course that takes on board the needs that emerged from the language needs analysis.</p>
<p><b>STEP 3</b> LANGUAGE COURSE DELIVERY</p>	<p>Scottish staff in the participating primary schools take the 20 hour beginners Arabic language course designed by the IUG team. The course is divided into two blocks of 10 hours each, one before and one after the summer holidays</p>
<p>EVALUATION IS CARRIED OUT AT REGULAR INTERVALS THROUGHOUT THE PROJECT</p>	

# LANGUAGE NEEDS ANALYSIS

The language needs analysis was carried out in March 2022 and it involved focus groups with Scottish educators interested in taking the course; with Arabic-speaking refugee children; and with the children's parents/carers. Overall, we consulted staff, children and families in 4 primary schools in Glasgow and we gathered the language needs from:

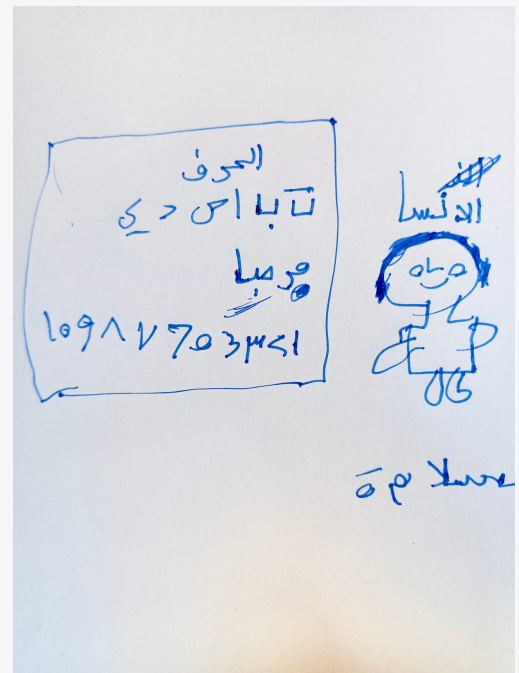
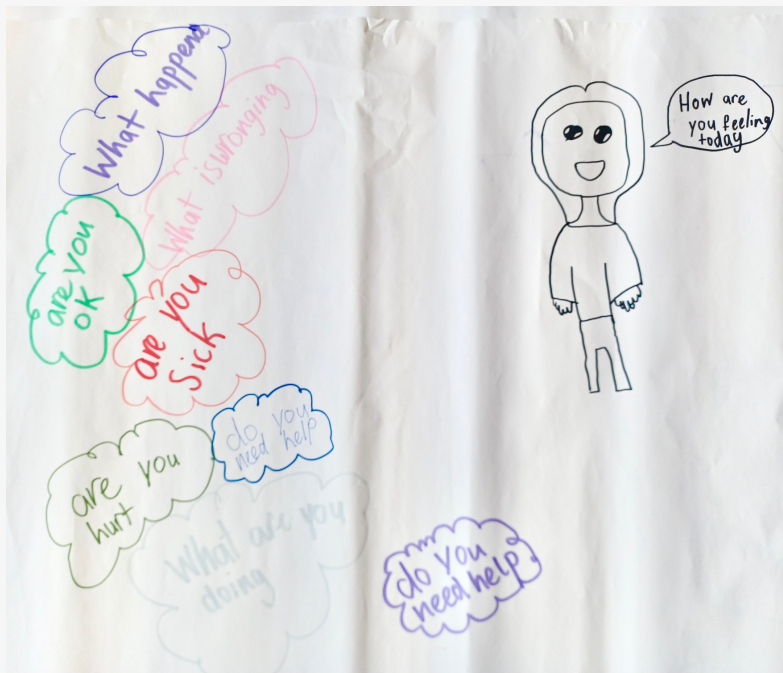
**21 primary school staff (class teachers, EAL teachers, principal teachers, head-teachers, etc)**

**26 Arabic speaking parents/carers**

**32 Arabic speaking children**

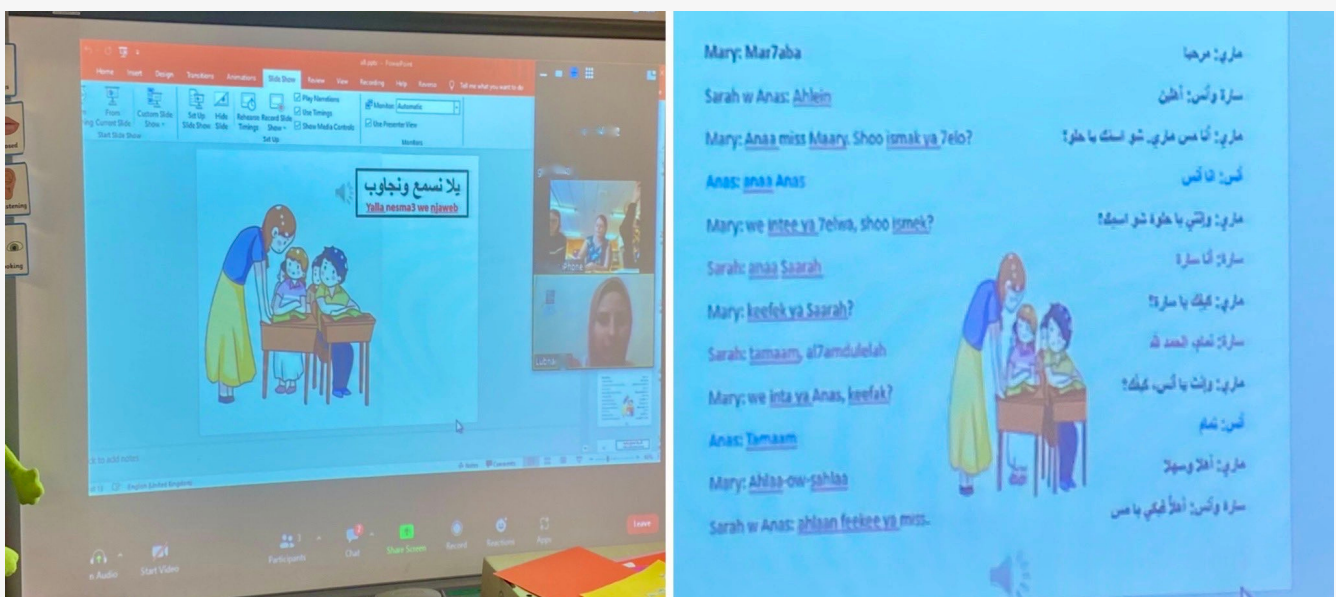
While parents/carers and staff were interviewed (with the language support of the project's Palestinian researcher), the children were invited to write (in English or Arabic) and also draw on group posters what they felt was important for staff in their school to be able to say in Arabic.

The language needs analysis revealed that, according to the people we consulted, the Arabic language course should develop along three main themes, which we termed: (a) *language for hospitality*, which includes simple expressions to make newcomers feel welcome; (b) *language for wellbeing*, which includes language to express basic needs, feelings and emotions, to be able to respond to pupils' needs, especially at times of distress; (c) *language for school*, which includes instructions, school routine, and simple subject-specific language. All the people consulted also concurred that learning the Arabic alphabet/script would also be important, as well as making Arabic visible within the schools through multilingual posters (Imperiale et al, forthcoming).



# COURSE DESIGN AND TEACHING

The project had budgeted free lessons for 12 primary education staff. However, in the **four Glasgow schools** we contacted we found over 30 people interested in taking the course. While a few had to withdraw before the start of the course as they could not make the dates/times available, **25 primary staff** became Arabic learners as part of the project. To ensure all had the opportunity to take the course, the lessons were designed for pairs of learners rather than the one-to-one lessons originally anticipated. We also contracted two new Arabic teachers to ensure that all Scottish staff could find a suitable date/time for their lesson.



As mentioned earlier, the Welcoming Languages project provided funding to teach a short **20-hour beginner course** (10 lessons for a total of 20 hrs) to Scottish educators. A team of language experts, designers and teachers based at the Arabic Center of the Islamic University of Gaza (Palestine) are designing and developing materials to address the language needs identified during the needs analysis stage. The process of selecting the Arabic variety to be taught, and of tailoring it to the needs identified, is being recorded through a reflective journal during each of the regular meetings with course designers and language experts in Gaza.

The designing process includes: a) deciding which Arabic variety to teach; b) creating a map of common expressions; c) discussing a situational syllabus presented through a storyline; d) developing the first unit (two lessons), piloting them and discussing the challenges; and e) developing the rest of the units after getting regular feedback from learners and teachers.

The overall course is structured around five situational units: (1) Greetings and Hospitality; (2) School Instructions; (3) School Requests; (4) Emotions and Wellbeing; (5) Engaging with Parents. The course also includes some cultural aspects and offers insights into different Arabic dialects (beside Levantine dialect, the main variety chosen for the course) to raise Scottish education staff's awareness of Arabic's diversity.

Expertise of developing TAFL tailored courses and teaching them efficiently in this project is allowing for a 'reversal' of the usual dynamics of needs/expertise in international projects that involve Low- and Middle-Income Countries. The LMIC partners are, in this project, the ones who hold the knowledge, expertise and skills required to design and deliver solutions that respond to the needs identified in a High-income country.



# INTERIM EVALUATION

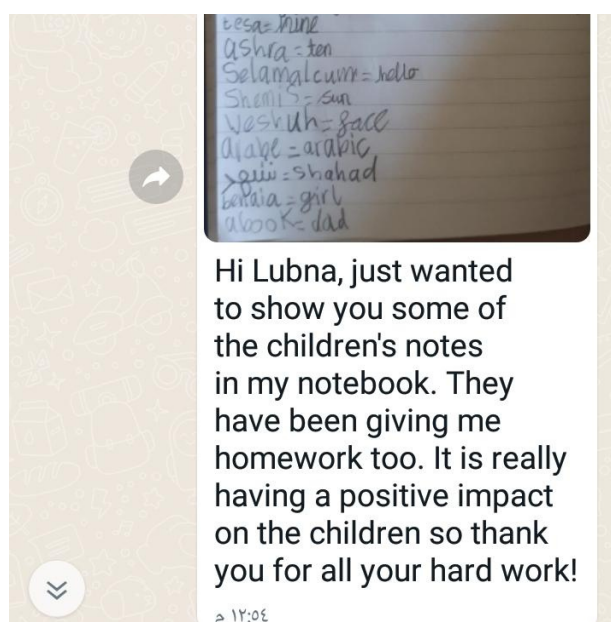
At the end of the first block of lessons, at the end of June 2022, we interviewed the Scottish educators who had been learning Arabic. Not all educators were able to meet with us, and this highlighted timing as a limitation of the project: the end of the school year is, in fact, an incredibly busy time for primary schools and some of the Arabic learners had to prioritise end of year tasks over meeting with us. Nevertheless, we managed to interview 15 out of the 25 Scottish education staff involved in the Welcoming Languages project. We asked all the staff to tell us what had worked well; what had been the challenges they had experienced; and what suggestions they had for the next block of Arabic lessons.

This interim evaluation indicates that, thus far, the course has been very effective in taking on board the language needs collected at the needs analysis stage. The staff feel that the Arabic they are learning is practical and immediately useful in their day-to-day interactions with Arabic speaking children and families. It also shows great satisfaction with the teaching and with the Palestinian teachers' skills, which were praised very highly by all the Scottish educators interviewed. This validates our choice to rely on professionals for the course design and development - as well as the teaching - as concerns of appropriateness and usefulness are crucial to sustaining motivation. In relation to challenges, technology and timing were identified as tricky. Glasgow City council requires that schools use Teams, which is data hungry and thus created some connection difficulties. However, in all cases the challenges were worked around after the first session and a range of alternatives were found. The fact that the first block of lessons was close to the end of the school year meant that some educators were not able to complete the first block and needed to postpone the last lesson. The busy time of year for educators also meant that, finding time to practice between lessons was a bit trickier.

Some very exciting findings emerging from the interviews concern the effects of the project on Arabic speaking children, which we discuss in greater detail in the next page. Below are some extracts from the interviews and a screenshot of a conversation between one of the educators and their Arabic teacher, which exemplify the general feedback we received from the Scottish educators.

“ It makes them happy that you're putting in this effort to learn their language because they're putting in so much effort to learn ours. And some of them still struggle with it, so being able to drop in little words that they'll recognise from home engages them a bit more, even if it's just 'hamam' to go to the bathroom. You can see it in their face that they go 'Oh, I know what that is!' and this makes them feel more welcome.

[The children] respond really well and are taking great joy in correcting my pronunciation!



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## LEARNING A 'REFUGEE LANGUAGE': INTERIM FINDINGS

As listed at the start of this report, the main goals of the project are: to allow education staff to meet and greet children and families in their own languages and to learn sentences useful for immediate communication needs; to help teachers to expand their language repertoire and to add language tasters to their everyday classroom routine; to show children from refugee backgrounds that staff in their school are interested in the languages they bring and even want to learn them; to offer a very practical example to all children, regardless of their linguistic background, that all languages are worthy of being learnt; to help Scottish education staff reflect on the challenges of learning a new language.

The interim evaluation shows that the project is on track to achieve the goals listed above. In particular, the Scottish staff note how the fact that they are learning Arabic has had already a positive impact on Arabic speaking children, who are happy to hear the teacher speak even just a few words of Arabic and really appreciate the effort that staff in their schools are making. A few teachers also highlighted how learning Arabic is also having an impact on non-Arabic speaking children, who are curious to know about the teacher learning a new language, something that, arguably, helps them become more aware of the importance of languages beyond the traditional ones that have a place in Scottish education. Even at this early stage in the project, one of the Arabic speaking children was doing an Arabic lesson for their peers.

The project has also engendered a reversal of the role of 'the expert'. According to the primary staff interviewed, Arabic children were quite excited to know that their teacher would be learning their language and were very impatient before the lessons started. Once the lessons did start, some of the Arabic speaking children helped staff in their school practice the language, and took great pleasure in correcting staff's pronunciation. One of the teachers was also given homework from a child, who compiled a list of words and a worksheet for her teacher complete. Another child asked their teacher questions in Arabic or answered in Arabic to a question in English to help her teacher learn. These observations point to a shift, both for staff and pupils, in the predominant 'deficit' approach to the needs of children who speak English as an additional language, i.e. a view that focuses on what the children lack rather than on what they bring. While it remains crucial that the children learn English, their knowledge of another language is openly and publicly recognised as a valuable asset in a place of learning.

Another point the interim interviews have highlighted is that some of the staff have come to appreciate how difficult it must be for the children/families to learn English ("you just take it for granted", as one of the teachers said). Awareness of the challenges that language learners (children as well as parents/carers) experience is a very important learning in itself.

### IN BRIEF

The interim evaluation of the project was carried out after the first block of Arabic language lessons through interviews with Scottish primary staff learning the language. It shows that making space for a refugee language in Scottish schools has a positive impact on Arabic speaking children but also on the wider school community. Moreover, the evaluation shows that inclusion of languages other than the 'usual suspects' (e.g. French, German, Spanish, sometimes Mandarin) in Scottish education is possible, and that Scottish education staff are keen for their schools to be welcoming places for New Scots also by moving towards them linguistically, thus making practically visible/audible the principle of inclusion as a two-way process at the heart of the New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy.



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# THE PROJECT TEAM

THE PROJECT IS CARRIED OUT BY TWO TEAMS BASED IN GLASGOW AND IN PALESTINE AND WORKING IN CLOSE COLLABORATION:

## University of Glasgow (School of Education) - UK

**Giovanna Fassetta** - Principal Investigator

**Maria Grazia Imperiale** - Co-Investigator

**Lavinia Hirsu** - Co-Investigator

**Sahar Alshobaki** - Research Associate

**Lorraine Shekleton** - Project Officer

## Islamic University of Gaza (Arabic Center) - Palestine

**Nazmi Al-Masri** - International Co-Investigator

**Lubna Alajjar** - Course Developer/Teacher

**Ola Lubbard** - Course Developer/Teacher

**Yousef Diab** - Course Developer/Teacher

**Jehad Abujazar** - Course Developer/Teacher

**Alyaa Abushaban** - Project Administrator

**Hala Shreim** - Internal Coordinator

**Mohammed Almasri** - Motion Graphic Video Designer

**Nour Mezeid** - Digital Designer



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