

**GCRF Development Award: Languaging in post-conflict zones: Educating for success in Colombia,
Lebanon and South Africa**

Final Report

5th March 2021

Funder: AHRC/GCRF

Grant Code: AH/T005408/1

Funded Period: 1/7/2019 - 31/6/2020 - (no cost extension until 31st December 2020)

Amount Funded: £59,997

Principal Investigator: Angela Creese

Co-investigator: Adrian Blackledge

Collaborators: Dr. Jaime Usma Wilches at the University of Antioquia, Medellin, Colombia
Dr. Tamer Amin at the American University of Beirut, Lebanon
Prof. Mbulungeni Madiba at the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa

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Executive Summary and ODA Compliance

This Development Award was directly and primarily relevant to current educational needs in Colombia, Lebanon, and South Africa.

United Nations Strategic Development Goal 4 affirms that inclusive and quality education for all is one of the most powerful and proven vehicles for sustainable development. It ensures that all girls and boys complete free primary and secondary schooling. It also aims to provide equal access to affordable vocational training, to eliminate gender and wealth disparities, and achieve universal access to a quality higher education. In 2013 the World Economic Forum ranked South Africa 121st (of 122) for the 'quality of the education system'. Colombia was ranked 72nd for the quality of its education system. Lebanon faces specific challenges in the education of more than half a million school-aged refugees from Syria, many of them living with trauma and the effects of long-term disruption to learning. This Development Award played a role in furthering the enhancement of language policy in education in Colombia, Lebanon, and South Africa. In doing so it contributed to meeting the SDG4 objective to ensure equal access for all to high quality education, and will meet key development challenges in these three countries.

Outcomes of the Development Award promoted the economic development and welfare of Colombia, Lebanon, and South Africa. It organised a range of activities which aided the investigation of effective pedagogies for the education of minoritised groups in Colombia, Lebanon, and South Africa.

A broad range of activities were organised across the three country contexts. These included network for research and educational practice, the development of websites for community and student groups and the design of new materials for marginalized students.

1. *Introduction*

The Development Grant Awards were managed by AHRC through the Network Plus UKRI GCRF interdisciplinary Collective Programme, “Preventing Conflict, Building Sustainable and Inclusive Peace.” Networks applying to the programme, and selected for interview, were eligible for Development Grant Awards. The grant was intended to put in place a series of networking activities which would support a larger Network Plus application. While we were not successful in our application for the larger Network Plus grant, we were able to make effective use of the Development Award funds to deliver a range of activities related to language policy and planning in multilingual educational environments in which conflict was a defining feature of the historical and ongoing context.

The development activities we report on here centred on Colombia, Lebanon, and South Africa. All three countries have faced extended periods of conflict which have adversely affected the stability, quality, and accessibility of education. In each of these countries efforts have been made to rebuild and improve the education system. However, in each case language-in-education policies have restricted many students’ access to, and success in, school and university education, as governments have often failed to see the needs of marginalised students as a priority when planning recovery and reconstruction.

The Development grant activities in Colombia, Lebanon and South Africa were designed to deliver a range of successful networking activities. From grassroot meetings, to student and staff feedback sessions, all the way to public assemblies and political forums - a plethora of activities were designed to engage and set up the agenda for further research activity around multilingual educational provision.

In this report we describe the context, rationale, and events which took place during the 12-month funded period of the grant. We describe the contingency plans put in place in response to the global pandemic.

The peoples of Colombia, Lebanon and South Africa all faced untold hardship in the face of the COVID crisis. We are extremely grateful for the resilience shown by our collaborators and colleagues in each of the three countries, as they continued to meet the requirements of the grant.

The international collaborators on this grant were:

- Dr. Jaime Usma Wilches, University of Antioquia, Medellin, Colombia
- Dr. Tamer Amin, American University of Beirut, Lebanon
- Prof. Mbulungeni Madiba, University of Stellenbosch, South Africa

2. *Background*

In Colombia, Lebanon, and South Africa many students do not have access to education in their home language. Instead, the curriculum is often provided in a language in which students are not proficient. This policy brings a high risk of failure. In post-conflict zones, where recovery and reconstruction are sensitive and ongoing processes, a successful education system for all is essential. Research has shown that learning is maximized when students use all their existing multilingual skills, rather than when they are prevented from doing so by monolingual or colonial instructional assumptions and practices. Our intention was to use the Network Plus grant to investigate whether students succeed when they learn through languages in which they are already confident. Working in partnership with educators and policy-makers, the network was to inform the development of

multilingual language policy and practice for educational success in Colombia, Lebanon, and South Africa.

3. *Aims and Objectives*

The aim of the development award was:

To put in place partnerships, structures, and contexts for a research network to contribute to the development and implementation of language policy which provides educational success in post-conflict Colombia, Lebanon, and South Africa for currently under-represented sections of society.

This aim was to be achieved by meeting the following objectives:

- a) To develop capable, equitable, and sustainable research networks connecting academic researchers, non-government organisations, policy-makers, and local stakeholders in each of Colombia, Lebanon, and South Africa.
- b) To develop an international network connecting academic researchers, NGOs, policy-makers, and local stakeholders in Colombia, Lebanon, and South Africa.
- c) To establish structures to identify research needs and opportunities, and co-design and co-develop research agendas, in Colombia, Lebanon, and South Africa.
- d) To establish procedures and protocols to commission high-quality research in language policy in education in Colombia, Lebanon, and South Africa.
- e) To establish structures to co-ordinate, synthesise, and evaluate commissioned research in Colombia, Lebanon, and South Africa.

4. *Originally Proposed Activities and Contingency Plans*

To meet these aims and objectives our collaborators put in place a series of development activities in Colombia, Lebanon and South Africa to establish robust networks. These activities were designed pre-COVID, and included:

- **A Literature Review** in which a synthesis of knowledge-informed discussion would strengthen the evidence base for the development of Network Plus projects.
- **Network Assemblies** to be held in each country to bring together academic researchers and non-academic partners, government officials, local authorities, non-government organisations, and teachers to set relevant questions for future research activity.
- **Community Meetings** to enable grassroots stakeholders including teachers, lecturers, students, and community groups to collaborate in the identification of research themes and challenge areas.
- **Progress and Advisory Boards** to synthesise research themes identified in Network Assemblies and Community Meetings. It is an understatement to say that the world pandemic caused by the COVID virus disrupted the planned networking events.

The global pandemic curtailed these planned activities, as they were largely predicated on face-to-face gatherings. It was evident that contingency plans needed to be put in place immediately which engaged with the original research questions related to language, learning, access, equity and peace.

It was also evident that the grant would need to be extended in order to re-design activities, and put in place a new timeline. PI Creese wrote to AHRC requesting permission to extend the grant until 31st December 2020. This was approved. After consultation with the three collaborators, Amin, Madiba and Usma Wilches, new activities and responses were agreed upon. At this point AHRC were contacted again to describe the changes being made.

Below we set out the activity in each country context. However, broadly the activities aimed to:

- **Extend research networks** between other national universities conducting research on multilingual and intercultural approaches to teaching and learning. These activities included teaching conferences, materials design and multilingual webpages.
- **Extend practitioner and community networks** with teachers and students across all sectors of education including primary, secondary, university (undergraduates and post-graduate). Meeting with community groups for their input.
- **Develop bespoke institutional websites** which foreground research on language, pedagogy and multilingualism
- **Employ additional staff** to support groups of students and teachers most at risk of failure in education settings including schools and universities
- **Survey** particular at-risk groups to design support
- **Design and implement a digital platform** for supporting project outputs and future work.
- **Sustain existing networks** with national, and local organisations following similar mission statements.

Below we set out how each country adapted their plans and describe what they achieved.

5. *Country Reports and Development Activity*

5.1 **COLOMBIA**

Context: Colombia is constitutionally recognised as a plurilingual and multicultural country, where 2% of the population speak about 65 indigenous languages, two Creole languages, and one Indo-European language, Romani. While 98% of the population speaks Spanish, the inherited language of colonization, at least 50% of Colombian languages are currently threatened, and 19 are at risk of extinction (Ministerio de Cultura, 2013). The number of young speakers of local languages has decreased dramatically, and Spanish is increasingly predominant (Usma et al., 2018). In national policy a focus on Spanish/English bilingualism predominates, and other dimensions of multilingualism and cultural difference in Colombia are often ignored. In particular, Colombian languages in different regions of the country are overlooked. Spanish/English bilingualism is privileged throughout the education system, while minority Amerindian or Creole languages are often erased, or associated with underdevelopment, poverty, and backwardness. In Colombia people in poor, rural areas have limited access to education. Those living in remote towns are less likely to attend university than those who live in cities. Also, more men access higher education than women, irrespective of where they live (British Council, 2019). Poverty and armed conflict can compromise young people's educational trajectories. Those of the lowest socio-economic status, and those who are exposed to violence, have difficulty accessing university. Participation in higher education is over 60% in cities, but below 10% in isolated and disadvantaged areas.

In Colombia language-in-education policy has set out to regulate the balance between Spanish and minority languages, while at the same time promoting foreign language learning (García & García,

2012). The 1991 Constitution established the right to bilingual education. The 2010 Language Act aimed to protect local languages and cultures. This legislation enabled indigenous communities to develop initiatives to preserve their languages and cultures. However, this has not been straightforward, due to geographic, political, and economic conditions. In the last 15 years there have been reforms to the teaching of English. Language-in-education policy now requires that school and university students attain English at level B1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. This creates challenges for minority ethnic communities, and students from poor and rural areas, as they are less likely to have experience of learning English (Usma, Ortiz, & Gutiérrez, 2018). Teachers and learners of English often face challenges of lack of investment, violence and poverty, and low motivation to learn foreign languages. Learning English has become a struggle not only for indigenous students, but for all students who do not have an academic background. Minority ethnic groups face difficulty in the use of Spanish for academic purposes, and in learning English as a requirement for school and university. This contributes to high student dropout, particularly from university. However, recent initiatives have examined the development of critical interculturality in schools and universities in Colombia. Recognition of local indigenous languages, knowledge, and cultures appears to contribute to a positive reorientation of the education trajectories of minoritised students (Ortiz, Usma, & Gutierrez, in press).

Indigenous and Afrodescendant students who access universities in Colombia often find that their learning styles, languages, forms of knowledge, and histories are excluded (Usma 2018). Language-in-education policy which promotes and includes ancestral Colombian languages and cultures, as well as those of minoritised groups, contributes to the construction of an inclusive education system.

The Development Award set out to pull together resources to respond to this context.

Development Grant Activities in Colombia: Funds were used to create a national network that could contribute to the construction of peace in Colombia through inclusive and intercultural language education policies, programmes and practices.

The network was created among researchers at Universidad de Antioquia, Universidad del Valle and Universidad de Sucre, while resources from this grant were devoted to support research initiatives in these three institutions.

- At Universidad de Antioquia, work continued on a language support programme for indigenous and Afro-descent students moving from rural areas to pursue their university education in the city.
- At Universidad del Valle progress was made on the sociolinguistic analysis of indigenous students at the university, in order to define policies and programmes that respond to their needs.
- At Universidad de Sucre support was put in place for indigenous and Afro-descent school students in two municipalities affected by conflict and poverty. The programme of support was focused on language curriculum development and students' identity.

All three universities were connected in their efforts to learn from each other, and to incorporate ideas that respond to the multiple challenges faced by indigenous students.

Events and activities were:

1. November 19, 27 and December 4, 2020: Research network meetings and presentation of projects.

2. February 25-26, 2021: Research symposium: Plurilingualism in Language Education. Organizer: Universidad de Antioquia. PI Angela Creese joined the symposium by Zoom. Event angled at MA students taking modules on intercultural and peace education.
3. November, 2020 through March, 2021: Research Network Webpage created as a digital window to make visible the work being done to promote language diversity and interculturality in the three universities that constituted the research network
4. September to December, 2020: Language course for new students at Universidad de Antioquia. This course aimed at introducing new students at Universidad de Antioquia to English learning for the promotion of intercultural dialogue, diversity, and personal and cultural identity.
5. September to December, 2020: Professional development seminar for English teachers at Universidad de Antioquia. This was available to English teachers and aimed at the promotion of English language teaching approaches that recognise and contribute to strengthening ethnic, cultural, and language diversity, in tune with critical intercultural approaches and intercultural dialogue.

An additional report written by Dr. Jaime Usma Wilches and the Colombian team is available on request.

5.2 LEBANON

Context: Lebanon is a diverse, multicultural country, which has a trilingual education system, in which the majority of subjects are taught in Arabic and English, or Arabic and French. Proficiency in both English and French is required to access the secondary school curriculum. This is a particular challenge for Syrian refugee students who are used to learning in varieties of Arabic. However, this challenge is not limited to Syrian refugees, as many students from poor, rural regions of Lebanon also have limited access to English and French. Furthermore, many students in Lebanon attain low levels of literacy in Arabic, as they are faced with literacy instruction in MSA rather than in their spoken variety. The Network Plus will examine the implications of current language policy in education for students in post-conflict Lebanon. The country's colonial history, the 1975-1989 civil war, and regular waves of migration, have created significant challenges for education. Lebanon gained independence from the French Mandate in 1943, declaring Arabic its official language. But French still has a strong institutional presence, not only as a foreign language, but also as a medium of instruction for many school and university subjects. English is also employed extensively as a medium of instruction. Attempts to Arabise education in Lebanon have been thwarted by successive violent conflicts, and by the global power of English and French.

Lebanon is currently living through a refugee crisis resulting from the Syrian war. There are 1 million registered Syrian refugees in Lebanon, including more than half a million school-aged children (UNHCR, 2019). Around 45% (280,000) of Syrian children and youth are not enrolled in schools. In Lebanon English and French dominate as the languages of instruction for STEM subjects in schools, with Arabic reserved for the social sciences and humanities. This presents challenges, as many Lebanese students have limited proficiency in English or French. Lebanon performs below the international average in science and mathematics. Foreign language instruction of STEM subjects contributes to school and university dropout, with underachievement particularly pronounced for Syrian refugees. For those who are able to access schooling, the requirement to use English and French in learning science and mathematics often results in failure, as it excludes many students'

existing language proficiencies. These challenges are compounded by the mismatch between the language of literacy instruction and students' spoken varieties. 78% of refugees between the ages of 15 and 17 drop out of school. Only 6% of Syrian refugees who qualify for a university place are currently enrolled (Yassin, 2018).

Development Grant Activities in Lebanon:

The current COVID-19 pandemic which took hold of Lebanon in 2020, as it did in much of the world, put an additional strain on an educational system in Lebanon already facing many challenges. The multilingual challenges mentioned above were further exacerbated by the need for remote, online teaching and learning. Lebanon conducted much of its K-12 teaching online in 2020 and this is expected to continue well into 2021. The additional challenge that this presents to teaching and learning in a multilingual setting is that it results in the absence of many crucial contextual cues (e.g. diagrams, gestures, what other students are doing) to support meaning making when linguistic proficiency in the language of instruction is limited. Science and mathematics teachers, in particular, have needed support and with the likely increased reliance on online instruction in the coming years, this is likely to be a long-term need.

The project reconceived in light of these circumstances posed the following questions:

- What are the translanguaging and multimodal teaching practices engaged in by science and mathematics teachers in Lebanon when they teach online (e.g. what platforms do they use, how do they make use of the available tools on these platforms and what translanguaging strategies – implicit or explicit – do they use to support student learning in these online environments?)
- What can we glean from existing research literature and recommendations for best practices in translanguaging (and multimodality) in science and mathematics instruction when a foreign language of instruction is used? How can these be adapted to online environments? Indeed, has any research begun to address this topic in online environments?
- What recommendations emerge from 1 and 2 for improving translanguaging / multimodal teaching practices when teaching science and mathematics online in Lebanon?
- How can we best support school administrators and teachers in improving their online instruction of science and mathematics in the light of knowledge of existing practices? What can be learned from the research literature and documentation of best practices internationally?

Colleagues in Lebanon conducted the following activities to answer the questions above:

1. Survey science and mathematics teachers and subject coordinators to document current practices and tools and conduct an online meeting to discuss existing translanguaging / multimodal teaching practices in the context of online teaching in Lebanon. The output of this will be a report on current practices, reported challenges, and the beliefs and recommendations emerging from practitioners.
2. Prepare a literature review on best practices in translanguaging (and multimodality) in science and mathematics instruction when a foreign language of instruction is

used with a particular emphasis on how these could be adapted to online environments.

3. Prepare an online workshop to share recommendations and train teachers in the use of best practices to improve science and mathematics instruction online, with particular attention given to translanguaging / multimodal strategies.
4. Prepare a website to disseminate more widely recommendations for best practices and available support materials (e.g. sample lesson / unit plans, worksheets to scaffold language use during learning activities).

Final Remark in Relation to Lebanon

This work was conducted in the last few months of 2020, in the aftermath of the August 4th explosion, which seriously damaged many schools in Beirut. As a result, the work conducted has been channelled to offer help first to schools most affected by the explosion. The needs of teachers and co-ordinators at these schools are being determined before others, and they will be given priority when open the training workshops for registration. Moreover, the output of this project is being woven into the crisis response efforts of the Department of Education at the American University of Beirut. Given that additional funding has been obtained to support this departmental crisis response effort, aspects of the work reported here that weren't completed under the present grant will be sustained through additional funds.

An additional report written by Lebanese collaborator, Dr. Tamer Amin, is available on request.

5.3 SOUTH AFRICA

Context: When South Africa transitioned to democracy in 1994, nine indigenous African languages were adopted as official languages alongside English and Afrikaans. English is the home language of less than 8% of the population. Despite this, the school curriculum is available only in English and Afrikaans from Year 4 onwards. The requirement for learners to be proficient in academic English privileges a small minority of students, at the expense of the majority. Less than half of children graduate from secondary school. At university level, language-in-education policy continues to be a barrier for many, as African languages are not employed as media of instruction. Since the establishment of the Department of Higher Education and Training in 2009, efforts have been made to expand access to post-school education and training. However, while there is increased participation in higher education overall, the participation rate of black students is considerably lower than for white South Africans. Completion rates for white university students are 50% higher than for black students. In total, there are estimated to be over three million young people not in education, employment or training in South Africa (British Council 2018).

Language-in-education policy in universities in South Africa does not currently match the skills and proficiencies of most students. The dominance of English means that for many students access to, and success in, higher education is not straightforward. Translanguaging pedagogy in higher education can enable students to learn through languages in which they are proficient. A policy of translanguaging as pedagogy in universities accords with the 2002 Language Policy for Higher Education (LPHE), which promotes equity of access and success for all students. Although steps have been taken to develop translanguaging policy for multilingual education in some universities, the policy has not been uniformly implemented. Full implementation of language-in-education policy in universities are likely to bring economic and welfare gains, especially for working-class and black students. However, universities face resource challenges in implementing policy which values the

language competencies of students. The Development grant set out to pull together resources to respond to this context.

Development Grant Activities in South Africa

Two types of development activity took place in South Africa.

1. The expansion of teacher education programmes in four networked universities: University of Cape Town; University of Stellenbosch; University of Witwatersrand, and University of Limpopo.
2. Continued support for the work of *Universities South Africa's* (USAF) Community of Practice on the Teaching and Learning of African Languages (CoPAL)

In relation to the second of these points, there has been particular concern in South Africa about the impact on minority languages in relation to the advancement of technology. For this reason, the Development Fund Grant in South Africa funded a national level gathering on African Languages in the Age of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. It set out to address the following two questions:

- Should South African universities focus only on their own African languages? What is happening about the digitisation of indigenous language literature?
- Is interdisciplinarity essential for the success of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and has 4IR been used to enable economic growth and transformation?

These questions were posed to the speakers at a Round Table event on "African Languages in the Age of 4IR" on the 29th October 2021. The Round Table was hosted by the Community of Practice for African Languages (CoPAL) of the Teaching and Learning Strategy Group of Universities South Africa (USAf), the umbrella body of the country's 26 public universities.

A further report is available from Prof. Prof. Mbulungeni Madiba on request.

6. Conclusion

The development award facilitated the inception of an international network of highly qualified professionals, policy-makers, academics, and grassroots stakeholders, which made a significant contribution to the development and implementation of language policy which enhanced access to, and success in, education for all.