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of Glasgow



Multilingualism and New Scots Refugee Integration.

Experts' Research: A Report

Professor Alison Phipps, O.B.E., D.Litt (h.c), Ph.D., FRSE, FAcSS, FRSA.

UNESCO Chair: Refugee Integration through Education, Languages and Arts,
University of Glasgow



Expert Authors

Professor Antonella Sorace FRSE– University of Edinburgh; Founder, Bilingualism Matters.

Dr Lavinia Hirsu – University of Glasgow.

Dr Dobrochna Futro – University of Glasgow.

Dr Maria Grazia Imperiale – University of Glasgow.

Dr Giovanna Fassetta – University of Glasgow.

Dr Sarah Cox – Open University Scotland.

Dr Esa Aldegheri – UNESCO RIELA Chair.

Dr Sadie Ryan – University of Glasgow.

Dr Hyab Yohannes – UNESCO RIELA Chair.

Dr Julie McAdam – University of Glasgow.

Professor Evelyn Arizpe – University of Glasgow.

Sawsan Abdelghany – Formerly University of Glasgow.

Daniel Calvert – University of Stirling.

Dr Francesca Stella – University of Glasgow

Professor Rebecca Kay, Migration Policy Scotland.

Dr Tawona Sitholé – UNESCO RIELA Chair.

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Part I: Summary.

Purpose and Context

This summary distils findings from two expert roundtables (October 2025) and subsequent contributions from researchers, educators, community practitioners, and New Scots. It aligns with the **UNESCO Global Guide on Multilingual Education (2025)** and the ambitions of the **New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy**.

The core message is clear: **multilingualism is not simply a communication or pedagogical tool; it is a social, emotional, ecological, and cultural asset** that underpins belonging, wellbeing, and integration. Multilingualism is a contribution to society by speakers of other languages, supported by English as one amongst many languages at home in Scotland.

Multilingualism and New Scots Refugee Integration



Multilingualism as a core asset

Supports identity,
confidence,
social connection,
and learning



ESOL provision in crisis

Uneven,
underfunded,
and difficult
to access



Community- based and arts- led practices work

Create safe,
relational spaces
for language use



Schools need sustainable multilingual approaches

Encompass
198+ languages
in classrooms

Key Findings

- **Multilingualism as a core asset:** Supports identity, confidence, social connection, and learning from early years to adulthood.
- **ESOL provision in crisis:** Central to integration yet uneven, underfunded, and difficult to access; one-size-fits-all models fail those with trauma, interrupted education, or low literacy.
- **Communitybased and arts-led practices work:** Storytelling, nature-based learning, libraries, museums, gardens, and cooking classes create safe, relational spaces for language use and healing.-
- **Schools need sustainable multilingual approaches:** Scotland's classrooms encompass **198+ languages**; initiatives such as **Levantine Arabic for staff** show immediate relationship gains with families.
- **Family and ecological perspectives matter:** Language is entwined with land, place, intergenerational ties (including grandparents at a distance), and more-than-human environments.
- **Coordination and governance are weak:** Fragmented services, English-dominant assumptions, and migration/education policy splits undermine long-term planning.

Cross-Cutting Challenges

- **Narratives of scarcity and "what about us?"** risk reframing language plenty as deficit and undermining solidarity.
- **Political climate:** Far-right discourse erodes the conditions of possibility for intercultural, multilingual work.
- **Funding instability:** Short cycles and the loss of strategic frameworks impede equitable access and innovation.
- **Measurement gaps:** Intangible linguistic and cultural heritage is hard to evidence within current evaluation regimes.
- **Workforce strain:** Teachers and community practitioners carry disproportionate loads, often beyond formal roles.

What Works (from practice and research)

- **Trauma-informed, ecological multilingual pedagogy** that values full linguistic repertoires and supports different literacy/orality profiles.
- **Whole-school approaches** with visible leadership buy-in, staff language learning, and recognition of pupils as linguistic experts.
- **Community-led, creative provision** (storytellers, arts programmes, multilingual cafés) that lowers barriers and builds dignity through participation.
- **Relational ethics and radical listening** in classrooms and services—communication that begins with attentive listening.
- **Intergenerational and transnational connection**, e.g., engaging grandparents abroad via digital tools, and validating home language maintenance alongside English.
- **'Confident contexts'**—gardens, playgrounds, arts spaces, and strong pastoral/mentalhealth practices that normalise multilingual identities.

Priority Recommendations

1. Rebuild national ESOL infrastructure

- Develop a new ESOL Strategy for Scotland with long-term, ring-fenced funding and clear governance.
- Provide diverse ESOL routes (trauma-informed, literacy-focused, employment-linked, informal/community-based) with flexible enrolment and childcare support

2. Embed multilingual pedagogies across education

- Include New Scots' languages in the 1+2 policy with formal certification routes.
- Fund professional learning in translanguaging, arts-based, and ecological approaches; recognise staff participation.

3. Resource community-led and creative integration

- Invest in storytelling groups, multilingual libraries, gardens, and cooking classes; remove access barriers (e.g. transport).
- Pay for and platform community expertise; recruit bi/multilingual staff across services.

4. Strengthen interpreting, translation, and linguistic rights

- Set national standards; uphold the right to use mother tongue across public services; counter narratives that miscast language support as preferential.

5. Build the conditions of possibility

- Advance racial literacy and radical listening; enable intergenerational links; normalise multilingual exposure and variation across public life.

How to Implement these Recommendations

- **Scottish Government and Local Authority Policy teams:** Anchor ESOL and multilingual education in long term strategy; continue to coordinate migration and education remits; adopt standards for interpreting/translation.
- **Schools and colleges:** Implement whole-school multilingual approaches; create staff learning pathways; partner with community providers; track outcomes beyond accreditation.
- **Local authorities and third sector:** Co-design flexible, place-based offers; fund arts-led and informal learning; ensure equitable access (childcare/transport).
- **Researchers and practitioners:** Share practice through accessible evaluation (including qualitative and creative methods) to evidence intangible heritage and relational outcomes.
- **New Scots:** working with communities or diaspora and local authorities and local NGOs to continue to develop strong models of community-based language learning for all. Work to offer taster sessions and then language learning opportunities online and with community support as routes to employment, for ensuring mother tongue education for children and families in less widely taught, or untaught, languages.
- **All:** Use International Mother Language Day, Refugee Festival Scotland and International weeks or days of observation to offer opportunities for practical awareness raising and experience of the languages spoken in Scotland.

Conclusion

Scotland's multilingual future depends on integrated, ecological, and human-centred policies that honour language as lived practice, ensure access to education for all through practical enhancement of mother languages (L1)—sustained by stable ESOL systems, multilingual schools, and community-led, creative infrastructures.



Preamble

This research report work delivers an expert review of activities building on the *Sharing lives, Shared Languages* report undertaken by Dr Lavinia Hirsu in 2017. It took as its starting point the research report undertaken on New Scots in 2022 and worked with researchers and New Scots Partners to ascertain the extent of multilingual community education work currently in place in Scotland. It focused on gathering a number of exemplars/case studies revising the 2017 report from researchers who have been undertaking multilingual research with New Scots since the 2017 report.

This report acts as a successor report to *Sharing Lives, Shared Languages* and begins with reflections from Dr Lavinia Hirsu, author of the 2017 report:

https://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Sharing_Lives_Sharing_Languages_REPORT.pdf

This report takes cognisance of the work of Bilingualism Matters, Scottish SCILT; key peer-review academic research projects e.g. Welcoming Languages (Syrian-Arabic scheme); 16+ FE course and is framed by UNESCO's *Languages Matter: Global Guide to Multilingual Education*, for which Professor Alison Phipps acted as draft author. It also complements the findings of the British Council *Language Trends Scotland* report 2024-2025 <https://scotland.britishcouncil.org/language-trends-scotland> which 'highlights Scotland's multilingual classrooms, with teachers reporting over 100 different home and heritage languages spoken in responding secondary schools, and heritage language exam provision increasing from 29 to 36 per cent.'



The Report represents fulfilment of 2 Short-Term Outcomes for New Scots Refugee Integration Delivery Plan 2024-2026.

4.6 Explore and develop multilingual integration training. – desk-based research of multilingual refugee led activities building on from the Sharing Lives, Shared Languages Report

4.6.1 Identify and make available information on multilingual education resources and providers of these especially provision for languages widely spoken in refugee communities and by people seeking asylum.

This represents stage one of a two-part programme of work which will culminate with a New Scots Languages Taster Day at the Royal Society of Edinburgh on 21st February 2026 (UNESCO' International Mother Language Day) at which New Scots will offer taster sessions for learning their languages and this report will be presented. The taster sessions offer a demonstration of the community led languages sharing which is developing as a complementary model of languages provision across Scotland and is led by New Scots in communities.

The Expert Summit included the leading scholars and experienced New Scots and their assessment and recommendations from the state of the art of multilingualism and multilingual education in Scotland.

The Expert Round Table Summit included The Learning Team and Learning Generation initiative reports from global British Council refugee language education teams; UNESCO Chair for Refugee Integration through Education Languages and the Arts; Sustainable Multilingualism; Welcoming Languages, Bilingualism Matters among others from Universities of Edinburgh, Open University, Glasgow, Strathclyde, Stirling, Leeds.

Dr Maria Grazia Imperiale; Dr Giovanna Fassetta; Dr Sarah Cox; Dr Esa Aldegheri; Dr Hyab Yohannes; Dr Tawona Sitholé; Samira Hassan; Hope Wang, Prof Antonella Sorace; Dr Lavinia Hirsu; Dr Dobrochna Futro; Daniel Calvert; Sawsan Ali; Dr Francesca Stella; Professor Rebecca Kay; Dr Sadie Ryan; Dr Julie McAdam; Professor Evelyn Arizpe; Professor Alison Phipps; Administrative Research Assistance; Sharon Gibson.

Part II: Executive Summary.

Executive Summary

This report synthesises insights from two expert roundtable summits held in October 2025 on **Multilingualism and New Scots Refugee Integration**, bringing together researchers, educators, policymakers, community practitioners, and New Scots themselves. Drawing on contributions from leading scholars, Scottish educators, multilingual communities, and arts-based practitioners, the report provides an evidence-based framework for strengthening Scotland's multilingual ecosystem in line with the **UNESCO Global Guide on Multilingual Education (2025)** and the ambitions of the New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy.

Across all contributions, a consistent message emerges: **multilingualism is foundational to integration, educational attainment at all levels, to belonging, wellbeing, and community resilience.**

Language is not only a tool of communication but a **social, educational, emotional, ecological, and cultural resource.**



Key Findings

1. Multilingualism is a Core Asset for Integration

Contributors emphasised that multilingualism supports identity, confidence, social connection, and educational engagement. Learning a language reduces prejudice and enables tolerance of difference. It can be a powerful, practical and pedagogical tool for combatting xenophobia and reducing fear of the unknown. Early exposure to multiple languages provides cognitive and social benefits, while maintaining home languages strengthens family bonds and community belonging. Research shows that linguistic adaptation among young people—such as Polish youths’ use of Glaswegian Scots—is a sign of identity work, not deficit.

2. ESOL Provision Is in Crisis

Across Scotland, ESOL remains central to integration but **uneven, underfunded, and difficult to access**. Structural barriers include long waiting lists, lack of childcare, geographic inconsistencies, reliance on temporary accommodation, and disrupted by the loss of Scotland’s national ESOL strategy in 2020. One-size-fits-all provision does not meet the needs of learners with trauma, interrupted education, or limited literacy in any language. It is also unable to work with the strong, emergent community-based language resources which with some specific policy and resource enhancement could provide much needed linguistic resilience for all the languages spoken in Scotland. At present provision is patchy and often voluntary and based on good will and staff who may have limited teacher education in language provision.

3. Community-Based and Arts-Led Practices Strengthen Integration

Evidence from projects such as **Woodside Storytellers (anon.)**, multilingual art programmes, multilingual nature-based initiatives, and multilingual community cooking classes demonstrates that learning thrives in **relational, creative, and informal spaces**. These contexts promote healing, agency, confidence, intergenerational connection and conviviality, and shared understanding across linguistic groups.

4. Schools Need Sustainable, Multilingual Approaches

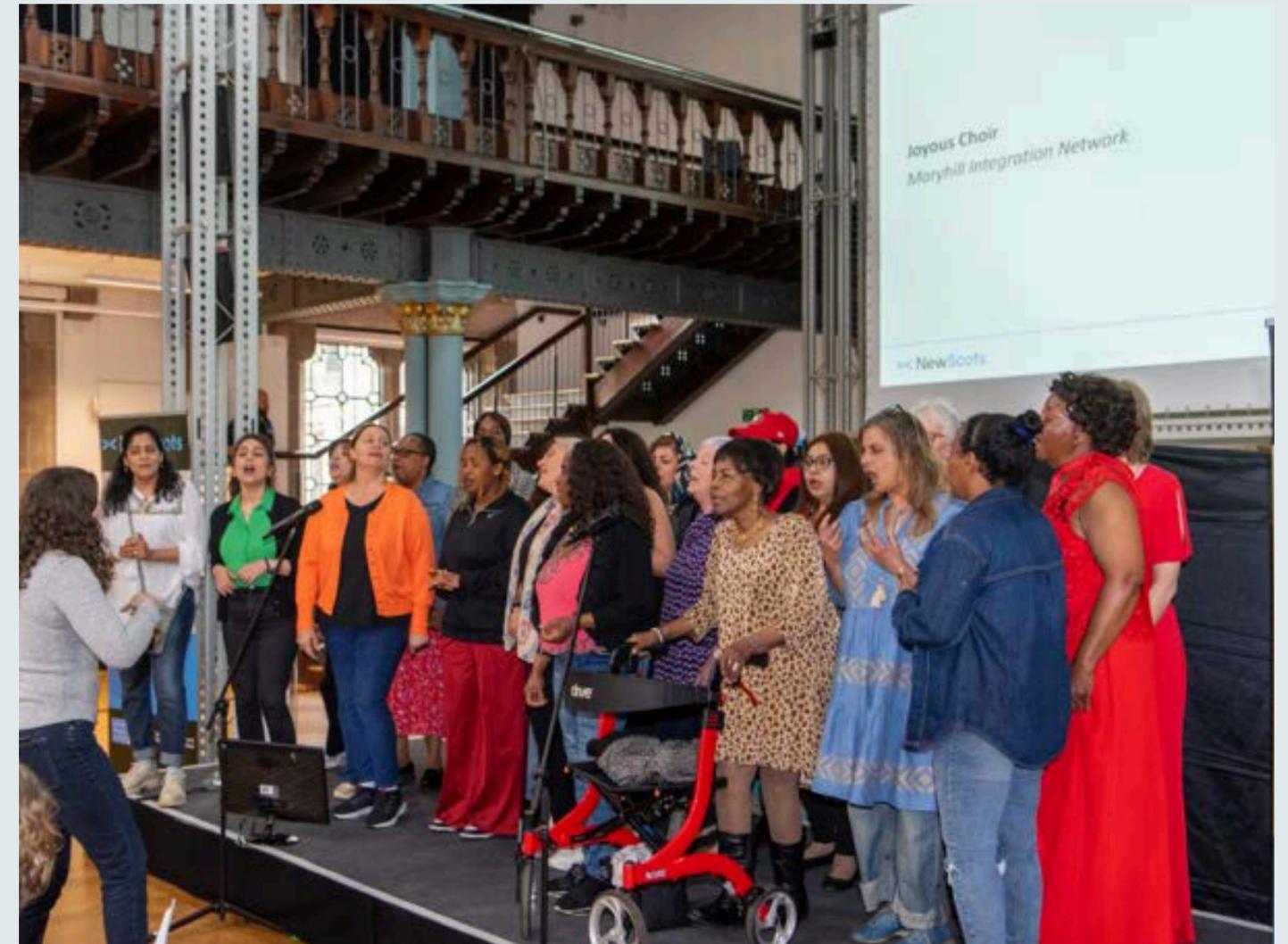
Schools increasingly serve learners in Scotland where over **198 languages** are reported to be present. Teaching staff are eager to welcome New Scots but require training, structured support, and leadership buy-in. Initiatives such as **Levantine Arabic for school staff** show immediate impact on relationships with families and pupils. However, cuts to EAL provision and uneven engagement across schools remain major barriers. Even when endorsed as a method of learning at Ministerial level there are barriers to incorporation of best practice into curriculum and teacher education or continuing professional development.

5. Family and Ecological Perspectives Are Essential

Contributors highlighted the ecological dimensions of multilingualism: relationships with land, place, family, and more-than-human environments. Refugee families often lack grandparents—“the linguistic library of the family”—making community-supported home language maintenance vital. Nature-based integration, permaculture principles, and everyday ecological practices support language learning and belonging. The focus on living well with diversity, developing language learning across the life-course, understanding Scotland, and Scotland’s natural environment as a multilingual classroom in and of itself are important developments since 2017 report.

6. Coordination, Governance, and Policy Coherence Are Weak

Scotland’s multilingual landscape suffers from **scattered services**, poor cross-sector communication, and English-dominant assumptions. Policy often lags behind practice, and fragmentation between migration and education remits undermines long-term planning. Without coordinated governance, even successful local initiatives remain fragile. This is especially true for diasporic communities in rural and urban settings attempting to build confidence in mother languages (L1) and supply the kind of good practice underscored in the UNESCO 2024 Guide *Languages Matter: A Global Guide to Multilingual Education*. However, as the British Council *Language trends Scotland* report highlights there is a strong foundation in formal education from which to build.



Cross-Cutting Challenges

- Persistent “**what about us?**” narratives create tension between support for New Scots and perceptions of fairness for settled communities.
- The rise of far-right discourse threatens conditions of possibility for multilingual, intercultural work.
- Funding cycles remain short-term, unstable, and insufficient to sustain impactful projects.
- Intangible linguistic and cultural heritage remains difficult to measure, evaluate, or scale within existing frameworks, even as the UK becomes a signatory to the *UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Preservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage*
- Teachers, community practitioners, and volunteers often work beyond capacity, at personal cost. Many New Scots base their language pedagogies on methods often inherited from their own language learning in very different educational contexts and do not have easy access to resources such as *Bilingualism Matters*, which can counter English-dominant narratives, or fear of linguaphobia (a fear of languages other than ones known by a speaker, akin to racism).



Recommendations

1. Rebuild National ESOL Infrastructure

- Develop a **new Multilingual ESOL Strategy for Scotland** with long-term funding and governance reform. This would focus equally on the “other languages” part of ESOL (English, for speakers of other languages) rendering audible and visual the multilingual nature of Scotland and aiming at empowering multilingual tolerance and acceptance of linguistic difference.
- Expand diverse Multilingual ESOL pathways (trauma-informed, literacy-focused, employment-linked, informal, community-based).
- Restore ring-fenced resources and ensure equitable access across all local authorities.
- Move from out-dated models of ‘target language’ and adopt multilingual pedagogies over the medium term.

2. Embed Multilingual Pedagogies Across Education

- Include **New Scots’ languages** within the 1+2 policy and provide certification in languages spoken by Scotland’s communities.
- Provide **arts-based, ecological, and translinguaging-informed professional learning** for teachers, both those in the state and private sector and those teaching in community contexts.
- Support whole-school approaches that recognise the linguistic expertise of multilingual pupils.



3. Support Community-Led and Creative Integration

- Fund multilingual, arts-based and informal learning spaces that foster belonging—storytelling groups, multilingual libraries, community gardens, cooking classes.
- Ensure participation is accessible through transport support, childcare, and multilingual information.

4. Strengthen Interpreting, Translation, and Linguistic Rights

- Establish national standards for interpreting and translation.
- Guarantee the right to use one's mother tongue across public services.
- Challenge narratives that misrepresent multilingual support as preferential.

5. Build Conditions of Possibility for a Multilingual Scotland

- Promote racial literacy and radical listening in education and public services.
- Encourage intergenerational connection, including cross-border family engagement supported by digital tools.
- Foster “confident ecological contexts”—gardens, playgrounds, arts spaces, and mental health aware environments.



Overall Conclusion

The evidence is clear: **Scotland's multilingual futures depend on integrated, ecological, and human-centred approaches that honour language as a lived practice and pedagogy, not merely a policy area.**

Sustainable change requires coordinated governance, long-term investment, and deep respect for the knowledge and resilience of New Scots languages and of the official languages of Scotland.

This report calls for a **renewed national commitment** to multilingualism grounded in dignity, creativity, inclusion, and collective flourishing.



Sharing Lives, Sharing Languages: A Pilot Peer Education Project for New Scots' Social and Language Integration

(January - June 2017)
Evaluation Report

Dr. Lavinia Hirsu
Emily Bryson

June 2017



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

SLSL

Alopes

Meet interesting people

Share knowledge & life experiences

Evaluate how best to support refugees' mental health

PARTICIPANTS IN GROUPS WILL ENJOY AND FULLY BENEFIT FROM THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH THE GROUP

Build new relationships (peer educators and peers)

That a group of Syrian refugees feel more relaxed within the Scottish culture

Learn more about different communities in Dundee

To have a positive effect on people's experiences at Dundee

Pilot has wings of ££s

TO GET TRAINING SUPPORT FROM PEER EDUCATORS

TO MAXIMIZE

Sharing Lives, Shared Languages Report 2017 by Dr. Lavinia Hirsu and Emily Bryson, for Scottish Refugee Council.

The 2017 report *Sharing Lives Shared Languages* originated as a pilot supported by the Scottish Refugee Council, designed both to strengthen existing communities and to foster new forms of connection among individuals from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Crucially, the initiative was conceived as a complement to ESOL provision, which underscores the need to consider the broader ecosystem of support surrounding language learning and integration.

Since the time of writing the report, this ecosystem has undergone significant shifts, including pressures arising from underfunding, the demise of Scotland's ESOL strategy, the lack of implementation of ESOL through the new Adult Learning Strategy, and structural tensions produced by resource models for different cohorts of New Scots, and language providers.

The *Sharing Lives, Shared Languages* project took a peer-education model as its design, in effect enabling all to be learners and teachers of the languages in which they possessed expertise and proficiency. At the outset, most peer educators involved in the project were from Syria, alongside several Scottish peers and a small number of participants from Bulgaria, Poland, and Italy. This composition is important to note because, as subsequent work has shown, the demographic profile of those engaged in such initiatives has diversified considerably.

Several recommendations from the original report remain salient. One key recommendation concerned the expansion of social connections, which has been pursued through a range of communitybuilding efforts. However, questions persist regarding the sustainability of these communities, many of which exhibit a considerable degree of transience and precarity. It is therefore important to examine the factors that enable some communities to endure while others disperse more rapidly, leading to linguistic, community and educational resource wastage over the medium term, failing to enable structural capacity to be built.

A further recommendation addressed the need to broaden the scope and context of the project to facilitate wider participation. This aligns with the growing linguistic diversity observed in Scotland. According to the most recent census data, Scottish schools now accommodate speakers of 198 languages, indicating not only the scale of linguistic plurality but also the ongoing need for responsive, adaptable approaches to multilingual support in educational and community settings.

“According to the most recent census data, Scottish schools now accommodate speakers of 198 languages, indicating not only the scale of linguistic plurality but also the ongoing need for responsive, adaptable approaches to multilingual support in educational and community settings”

Part III:
Expert Academic Research and
Recommendations

Methodology

The expert reports and recommendations contribute research and evidence to the 2 short-term outcomes for New Scots Refugee Integration Delivery Plan 2024-2026.

4.6 Explore and develop multilingual integration training. – desk-based research of multilingual refugee led activities building on from the Sharing Lives, Shared Languages Report

4.6.1 Identify and make available information on multilingual education resources and providers of these especially provision for languages widely spoken in refugee communities and by people seeking asylum.

Summary

In order to establish what kinds of multilingual integration training might be needed in Scotland the report convened an Expert Summit focused on academics working in Scotland who have undertaken research across a range of disciplines related to multilingualism and ESOL since the 2017 report. All have conducted empirical and/or theoretical research into multilingualism in Scotland, into the effects of the loss of the ESOL strategy and resourcing, and into the new landscape with 193 languages now at home in Scotland and part of a wide ecology.

Disciplines ranged from cognitive linguistics, multilingual education, teacher education, arts and language education, sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, decolonial and anti-racism education, inclusive education, adult and continuing education, intercultural education and linguistics. Many of the researchers also held a position as New Scots and experts by experience themselves.

The summit was recorded, presentations assembled and the key recommendations based on internationally peer-reviewed publications and funded projects were presented. This then formed the basis of the expert sections of the report. The convener then synthesised the report.

Alongside a series of taster language sessions were offered at the Royal Society of Edinburgh by people seeking asylum in Scotland, building on the successful model pioneered by the UNESCO Chair for Refugee Integration through Education, Languages and Arts and published on their podcast channel and offered through their annual Spring School.

These taster sessions offer a model, grounded in the research findings and recommendations, for the development of multilingual integration training 4.6 and work with the resources and communities identified through the research under 4.6.1.

Professor Antonella Sorace, School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences, University of Edinburgh, and *Bilingualism Matters*.

Professor Sorace's research focuses on the linguistic and cognitive science of bi-multilingualism. In her public engagement work, she builds bridges between research and society to support families, parents, schools and learners in their decisions on language learning and multilingualism over the lifespan.

Professor Sorace's work over the last decade has addressed prevailing myths surrounding the perceived "usefulness" of different languages, noting that such judgments are often shaped by the economic and political prestige of the countries in which those languages are spoken. She observed that languages associated with rising global powers are increasingly valued, while many migrant languages continue to be viewed as less useful or desirable, despite the fact that early exposure to ANY multilingual environments—even before birth—has been shown by research to potentially bring a range of cognitive and social benefits.

“Early exposure to multilingual environments - even before birth- has been shown to support a range of cognitive and social benefits”

Drawing on recent UNESCO findings, she shows that migrant and minoritised languages remain insufficiently recognised despite clear evidence of their potential positive developmental impact. These include enhanced literacy skills, earlier awareness of diverse perspectives, and greater tolerance of ambiguity.

Multilingual individuals also tend to demonstrate stronger attentional control, improved capacity for managing conflicting information, and greater cognitive flexibility. Importantly, these advantages are not dependent on which specific languages are spoken; sign languages, for example, may confer comparable benefits through a different communicative modality. However, they are conditioned by different aspects of the bilingual experience, both in individuals and in societies.

Professor Sorace's research highlights a broader shift within scholarship away from binary classifications of "bilingual" versus "monolingual," towards understanding bilingualism as a continuum shaped by diverse experiences or 'repertoires'. In this context she demonstrates, through scientific evidence, that monolingualism should no longer be treated as a default or idealised norm.

Sorace's work draws attention to the pressures many migrants face to abandon their home languages. The recent far-right politicisation of ESOL and home languages in Glasgow is an example of such a non-scientific pressure. Creating environments that actively encourage and value multilingualism is therefore essential. Although approaches such as translanguaging continue to be debated, the importance of positive attitudes toward language diversity is widely recognised. The example of New Speakers of Gaelic illustrates how perceptions of cultural value influence the continuation and transmission of languages across generations.

Professor Sorace's work underscores the need for better informed decision making in language teaching and use. In this respect she points to the ongoing efforts of the public engagement centre Bilingualism Matters, which now has 35 partner institutions world-wide, to make research accessible to different sectors of society and to support researchers in presenting and communicating their findings more clearly and effectively, in order to dispel the misinformation and erroneous idealisation of monolingualism.

Recommendations

- **Challenge myths about “useful” vs. “less useful” languages:** Judgements about language value are shaped by economic and political prestige, not by evidence of educational benefit.
- **Recognise and protect migrant and minoritised languages:** UNESCO-aligned research shows these languages deliver strong cognitive and social gains but remain undervalued.
- **Support early multilingual exposure:** Benefits include improved literacy, broader perspective-taking, tolerance of ambiguity, stronger attention control, and greater cognitive flexibility—even prenatally.
- **Acknowledge multilingualism as a continuum:** Move away from binary labels (“bilingual/monolingual”) and recognise diverse linguistic repertoires.
- **Counter pressures on migrants to abandon home languages:** Social and political forces discourage multilingualism, despite clear developmental advantages.
- **Promote environments that value linguistic diversity:** Positive attitudes—and practical actions—are essential for sustaining multilingualism; examples include work with New Speakers of Gaelic.
- **Improve the evidence base for language policy:** Policymaking and teaching should be informed by robust linguistic science, not assumptions or politicised narratives.
- **Support knowledge translation initiatives:** Organisations like Bilingualism Matters (35 global partners) play a critical role in disseminating accurate information and countering monolingual bias.

Multilingual and AssetBased Approaches

Dr Hirsu and Dr Futro's research has established a multilingual and asset-based approach to understanding how teachers and educators support learners across diverse linguistic and cultural contexts. Their work highlights the growing relevance of art, translanguaging, and multilingual pedagogies, noting that teachers, children, and artists are increasingly concerned with the climate crisis and with policy shifts toward learning for sustainability. A broader ecological framing—drawing inspiration from permaculture—encourages a shift toward understanding what languages do, how they operate in practice, and how they shape social and educational environments. Their work draws on research informed by Indigenous and decolonial methodologies, emphasising how languages shape lived experience and relationships with the world.

This orientation builds on the foundations established in the *Sharing Lives, Shared Languages* report, which explored community connections and ways of fostering relationships between people from different backgrounds. The original pilot project centred on the PEER model, designed to complement ESOL provision by creating a wider ecosystem of support. However, this ecosystem has been affected by long-term underfunding and structural instability, and rapidly increasing diversity of languages in use across all 32 local authorities in Scotland, under the asylum dispersal models. The PEER model focuses on lived experiences, shared artefacts, and collective action in community language learning contexts. However, the post-COVID period has altered the nature of social relations, and teachers continue to return to COVID 19 pandemic as a point of reference.

Forms of sociality that once supported language development have not fully recovered, particularly for young people, and language learning and PEER education models have suffered attrition. Futro's AHRC funded doctoral project on art-based, multilingual learning further illustrated the value of participatory approaches involving peer researchers and learners in P5, P6 and P7. Using multilingual and translingual methodologies in the teaching of Polish as an additional language, the project demonstrated how languages emerge as one of several semiotic resources within creative work.

Art pedagogy became embedded within language teaching and teacher professional learning, supporting knowledge exchange and practical implementation. Findings from Futro's work show that incorporating art—particularly forms that integrate the languages pupils speak and learn—enables co-creation and visualisation of multilingual identities. Futro's evidence demonstrates that this approach supports context dependent, flexible learning and challenges societal hierarchies between “modern” and “community” languages. Arts-based approaches, in Futro's work, create space for diverse worldviews and epistemologies, offering children personally meaningful opportunities for exploration. They also enhance metalinguistic awareness and strengthen learners' agency, motivation, and sense of ownership. Translanguaging-through-art was identified as a particularly effective method for empowering learners

Recommendations

- **Broaden discourse** by promoting multi-sensory and multimodal approaches to meaning making, and emphasising civic responsibility within multilingual education.
- **Embed arts-based pedagogies** into national implementation guidance for the 1+2 languages policy, ensuring policy developments recognise the value of creative, multilingual methods.
- **Support accessible arts-based participatory research** for primary school teachers, including ring-fenced time for professional development and training.

Multilingualism Through Art

In response to teachers' interest the multilingual-through-art programme has expanded beyond its initial focus on Polish to become a broader professional learning initiative for primary and complementary schools. Art continues to demonstrate its value as a powerful tool for inclusion, supporting pupils' participation while strengthening relationships across school communities. Training was subsequently delivered across ten primary schools, with practitioners reporting that motivated and engaged learners contribute directly to increased motivation and engagement among teachers. The approach has been embraced by SCILT (Scotland's Government-funded National Centre for Languages) and implemented in a number of professional learning sessions delivered across Scotland.

Artistic activities also facilitate positive interactions between teachers and parents, indicating the potential for a "third space" that nurtures shared understanding and collaboration. Sustaining these approaches, however, requires structured support and ongoing investment. Community languages play a crucial role in building and maintaining community relationships, and innovative multilingual practices must be carefully scaffolded to ensure consistency, equity, and long-term impact.



“Art continues to demonstrate its value as a powerful tool for inclusion, supporting pupils’ participation while strengthening relationships across school communities”

Recommendations

- **Enhance professional recognition and incentives for teachers**, as reflective and creative practice contributes significantly to effective multilingual pedagogy.
- **Develop case studies across a wide range of languages**, ensuring that academic learning and knowledge creation reflect Scotland's linguistic diversity.
- **Align programme development with UNESCO guidance**, situating multilingual art-based approaches within global frameworks of cultural and linguistic sustainability.

Sustainable Designs

Building on Phipps's pioneering research (2012; 2025) Hirsu and Futro's research has highlighted the importance of integrating permaculture principles and arts-based methodologies to support learning for sustainability.

As political discourse shifts away from an explicit 'green' focus, there remains a need to ensure continuity in sustainability education, they find. This includes connecting pupils' knowledge to their immediate environments—gardens, playgrounds, and local ecosystems—rather than traditional sportsbased spaces.

Activities involving flowers, vegetables, and pollinators foster ecological awareness while opening opportunities for multilingual engagement. Innovative examples—such as the development of a school “polytunnel” to support outdoor learning and the implementation of recycling tasks and composting for children across all classes —demonstrate how creative approaches can be embedded within broader educational structures. However, all these activities are currently challenged by the pressure of achievement targets and a complex educational system that can limit innovation and integrated approaches to learning.



“Activities involving flowers, vegetables, and pollinators foster ecological awareness while opening opportunities for multilingual engagement. Innovative examples include the development of a school “polytunnel” to support outdoor learning”

Teachers recognise the importance of inclusive pedagogies, and the collective efforts within this field have already contributed to a broader shift in awareness. Practices piloted and observed by Hirsu and Futro, such as language portraits and language ambassador initiatives, demonstrate how creativity and linguistic identity can be meaningfully connected.

Linguistic diversity in Scottish schools now extends far beyond Syrian and Ukrainian communities, for instance, with pupils representing a wide range of languages and needs. Cuts to EAL provision have been acutely felt, and efforts around sustainability and multilingual inclusion increasingly converge. Practices remain unevenly distributed; while some schools have embraced multilingualism enthusiastically, others have been slower to engage.

A key challenge is ensuring that school leadership and management—particularly those resistant to change—recognise the value of these approaches. International evidence from PISA and UNESCO provides important levers for influencing such change.

Nonetheless, ongoing cuts to EAL services remain unsustainable, revealing structural precarity that limits schools' ability to innovate. Time pressures and rigid systems further constrain new approaches, experimentation, even as new policy “buzzwords” emerge.

Drawing on insights from scholars such as Barbara Schmenk (2026), these academic discussions highlight the tensions between tradition and innovation in language education. Despite these challenges, the sector continues to benefit from the dynamic, constructive, and deeply committed efforts of practitioners. Many educators work beyond their formal roles, often at personal cost, to create inclusive and responsive multilingual environments. Their work reflects the complex and often messy realities of educational practice, while demonstrating extraordinary resilience and dedication, and revealing resources which have been previously under explored.

Recommendations

- **Embed ecological, place-based multilingual learning across schools.** Integrate permaculture principles, arts-based methods, and outdoor learning (gardens, playgrounds, polytunnels) into the curriculum to support sustainability education while creating meaningful opportunities for multilingual engagement.
- **Stabilise and strengthen EAL provision to meet growing linguistic diversity.** Reverse cuts to EAL, ensure equitable distribution of multilingual practices across schools, and provide structural support so that inclusive language pedagogies can be implemented consistently rather than depending on individual teacher commitment.
- **Develop leadership capacity and system-level incentives for multilingual, sustainability focused innovation.** Use international evidence (PISA, UNESCO) to influence school leadership; reshape inspector training and policy frameworks to encourage experimentation, support creative multilingual initiatives, and overcome resistance within management structures.

Dr Sadie Ryan, School of Education, University of Glasgow

Young People's Linguistic Identities and Experiences

Dr Ryan's research since 2014 explores how teenagers in working-class Glaswegian communities navigate language, identity, and belonging across Scots, English, and a range of migrant languages, including a significant Polish-speaking population (approximately 15%). Her work highlights a strong sense of unity among young people, while also revealing the complexities that shape their linguistic choices in different social contexts.

Drawing on recordings and observations conducted across varied school environments—including playground interactions, informal peer conversations, and more structured interview settings—Dr Ryan found that a group of Polish-heritage young people frequently adapted their speech depending on who they were speaking to and their perception of the social context. Notably, they often used more Glaswegian Scots with their peers than Scottish-born pupils themselves, suggesting a dynamic process of linguistic alignment and identity expression.



Media interpretations of these patterns were often framed as “cute” or as straightforward expressions of belonging. However, Dr Ryan's analysis indicates a more nuanced reality. Some young people expressed anxiety about their accents, particularly in English or Scots, and several Polish-speaking pupils reported that their home language was perceived as “unwelcome.” Ethnographic observations included instances where children were discouraged from speaking Polish at school and were told that using a language other than English did not understand was “rude.” These experiences contributed to stigma, including often leading young people to anglicise their names, and to reject their heritage languages and cultures.

Recommendations

Dr Ryan's findings point to the need for:

- Recognising that **language use extends far beyond purely instrumental purposes**, shaping identity, belonging, and confidence.
- Supporting pupils in **exploring accents and linguistic variation** in positive and affirming ways.
- Addressing persistent **gaps between school policy and everyday practice**, particularly around the treatment of community languages.
- Understanding why current experiences **differ significantly** from those reported in 2015—whether due to school-level variation or broader systemic change.

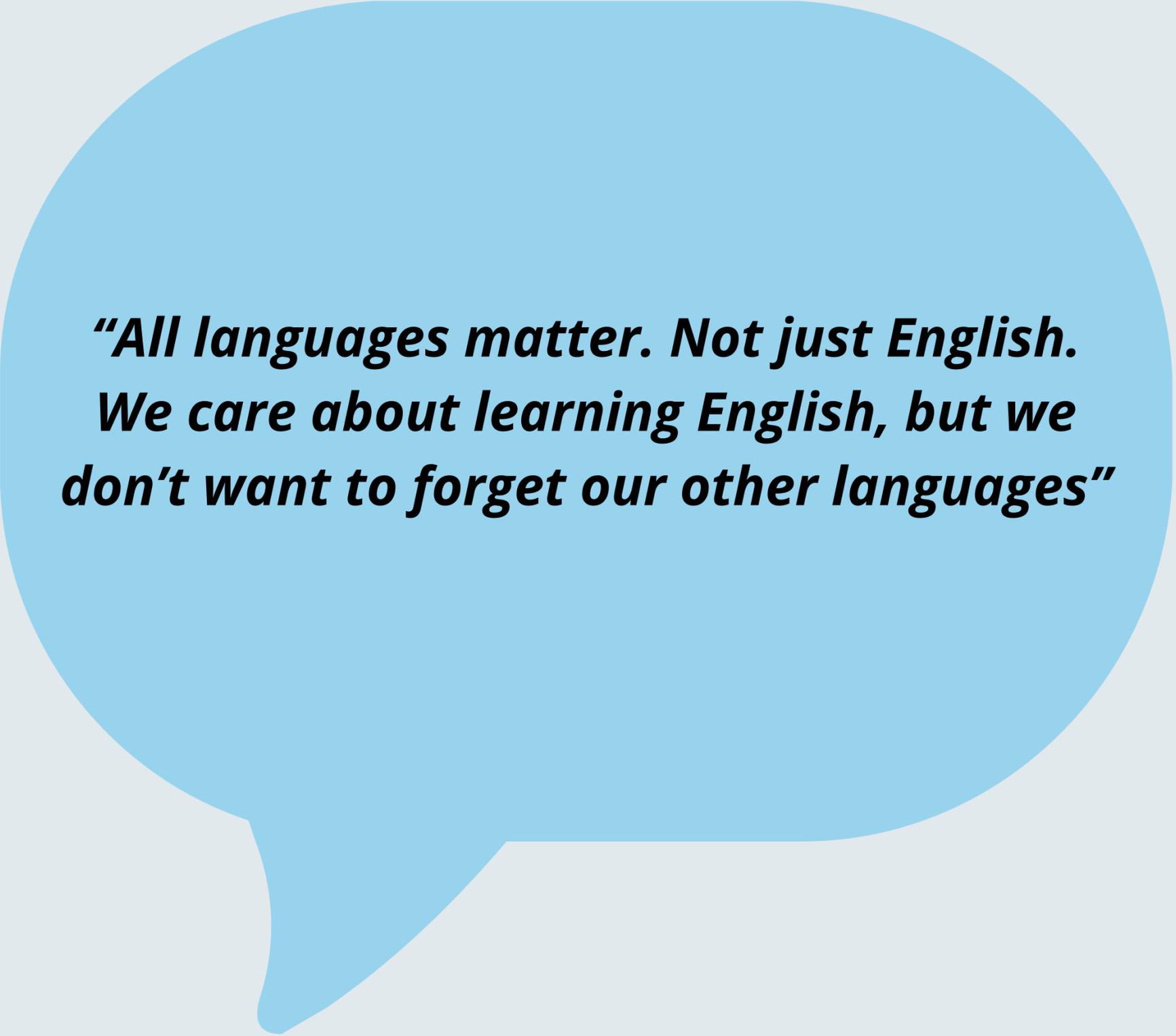
My Voice, My Glasgow

Dr Ryan's ongoing project, *My Voice, My Glasgow*, funded through an AHRC Early Career Research Grant, uses participatory podcasting as an arts-based research method. Analysis is currently underway, with co-created podcast episodes scheduled for release in May/June 2026. The project is producing recommendations designed by young people (a group of New Scots living in a working-class Glasgow community) for the stakeholders who shape their educational and social environments. One of their recommendations is that opportunities be created for young people like them to use their heritage languages in school. They collectively state that:

"All languages matter. Not just English. We care about learning English, but we don't want to forget our other languages."

The group involved in this on-going research are highly multilingual and described an environment in which they often learned each other's languages and shared their own languages with peers. At the same time, they recognised that some peers required opportunities not only to maintain but also to re-gain their heritage languages, especially when reading and writing skills had not been preserved.





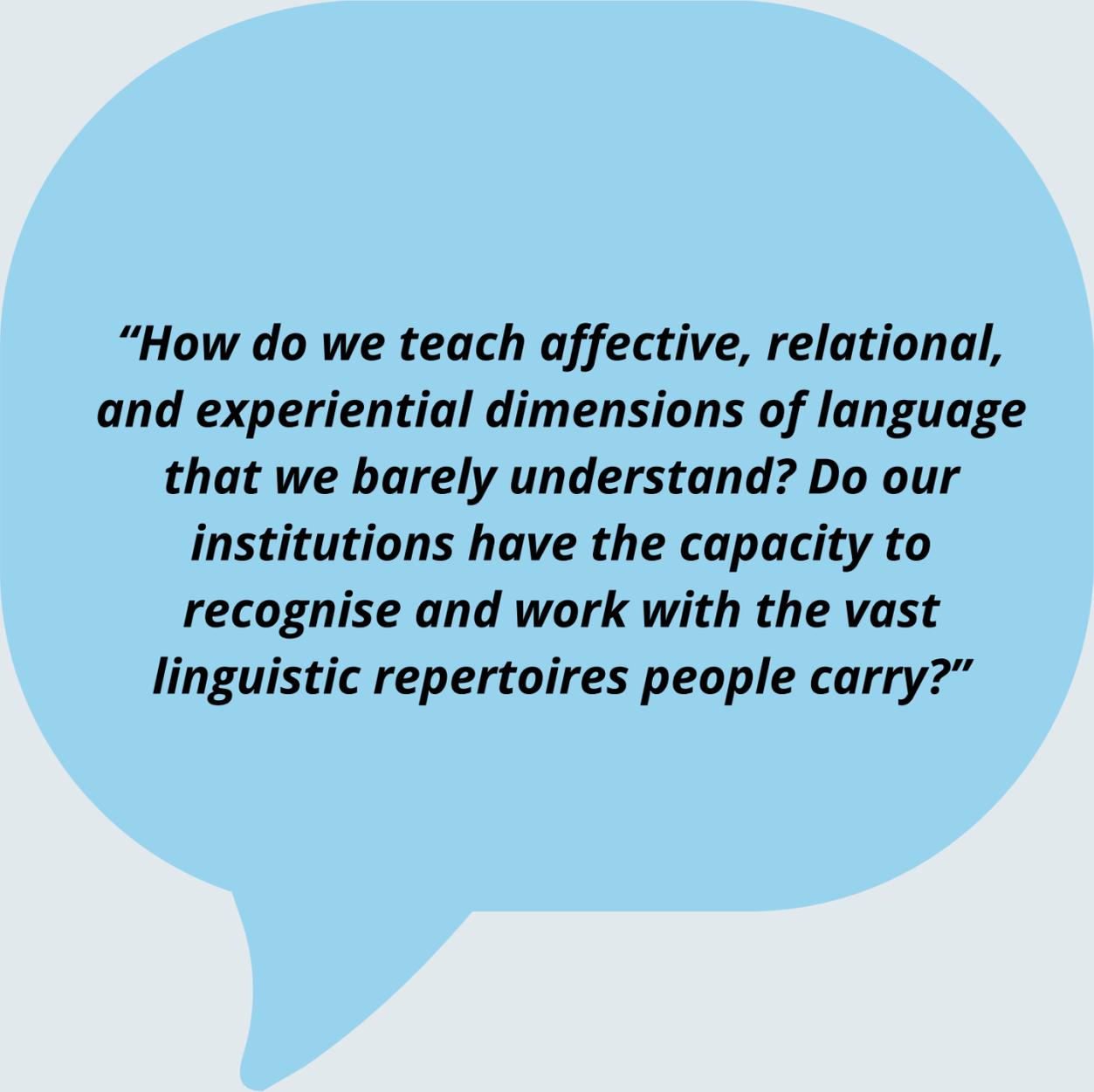
***“All languages matter. Not just English.
We care about learning English, but we
don’t want to forget our other languages”***

Dr Hyab Yohannes, UNESCO RIELA Chair, School of Education, University of Glasgow

Will my daughter speak my language?

Dr Yohannes's work draws on philosophies of language and existence, and his own lived experience as a New Scot of refugee background. For Dr Yohannes, multilingualism in Scotland is not merely a social fact but a form of knowledge in its own right. Its very existence—whether formally recognised or lived informally across families and communities—constitutes a mode of resistance. It raises urgent questions for curriculum design: How do we teach affective, relational, and experiential dimensions of language that we barely understand? Do our institutions have the capacity to recognise and work with the vast linguistic repertoires people carry?

Dr Yohannes's research (2025) shows how this multilingual existence is also poetic. It resists neat institutionalisation and instead generates alternative ways of knowing and belonging. Longing and belonging are shaped across borders, extending into transnational communities and exchanges. People think with and through other languages, inhabiting a space mediated by multilingualism itself—one that exceeds policy categories.

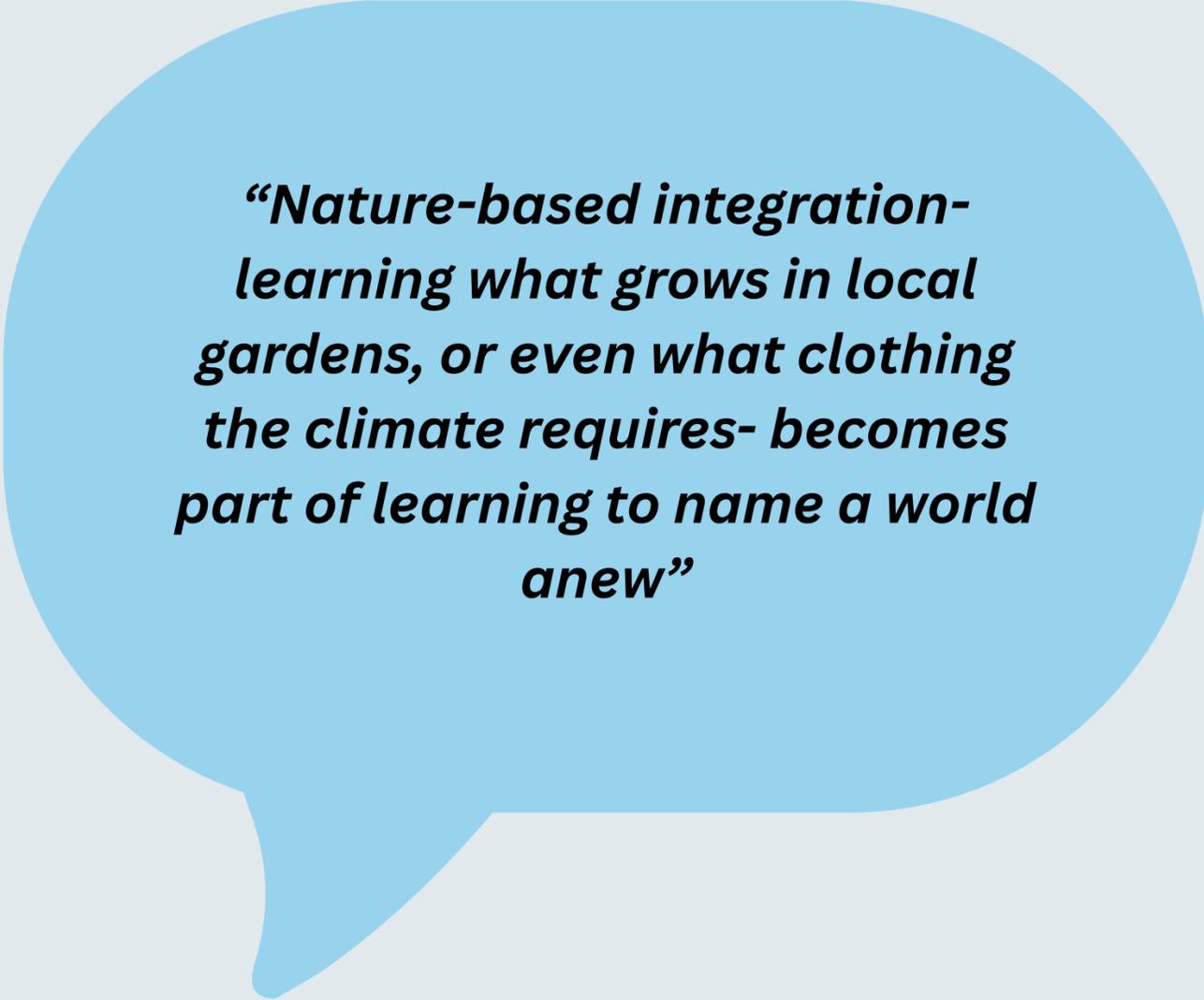


“How do we teach affective, relational, and experiential dimensions of language that we barely understand? Do our institutions have the capacity to recognise and work with the vast linguistic repertoires people carry?”

Multilingualism Exists in Scotland

Yohannes's recent research (2024) has focused on refugee experiences from rural and island locations like Stornoway illuminating the porosity and permeability of languages vividly. Syrians who have settled in the Western Isles have children who speak Gaelic; a local shopkeeper has learned Arabic from the New Scots families; and together they have created new social and economic spaces. Nature-based integration—learning what grows in local gardens, or even what clothing the climate requires—becomes part of learning to name a world anew.

These small pockets reveal what becomes possible when languages flow both ways. At the same time, many New Scots arrive with broken or nonexistent links to state structures due to persecution or displacement. Integration thus requires the creation of new forms of connection through education, language learning, and shared civic life. Plant names in English or Gaelic become “strangerplants”: new linguistic presences that extend a speaker's mother tongue as translanguaging and language adoption reshape expression.



***“Nature-based integration-
learning what grows in local
gardens, or even what clothing
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anew”***

Family reunions also unfold multilingually, Yohannes demonstrates, flowing across borders and bureaucratic systems. People navigate competing administrative languages in order to reestablish rights, status, and kinship.

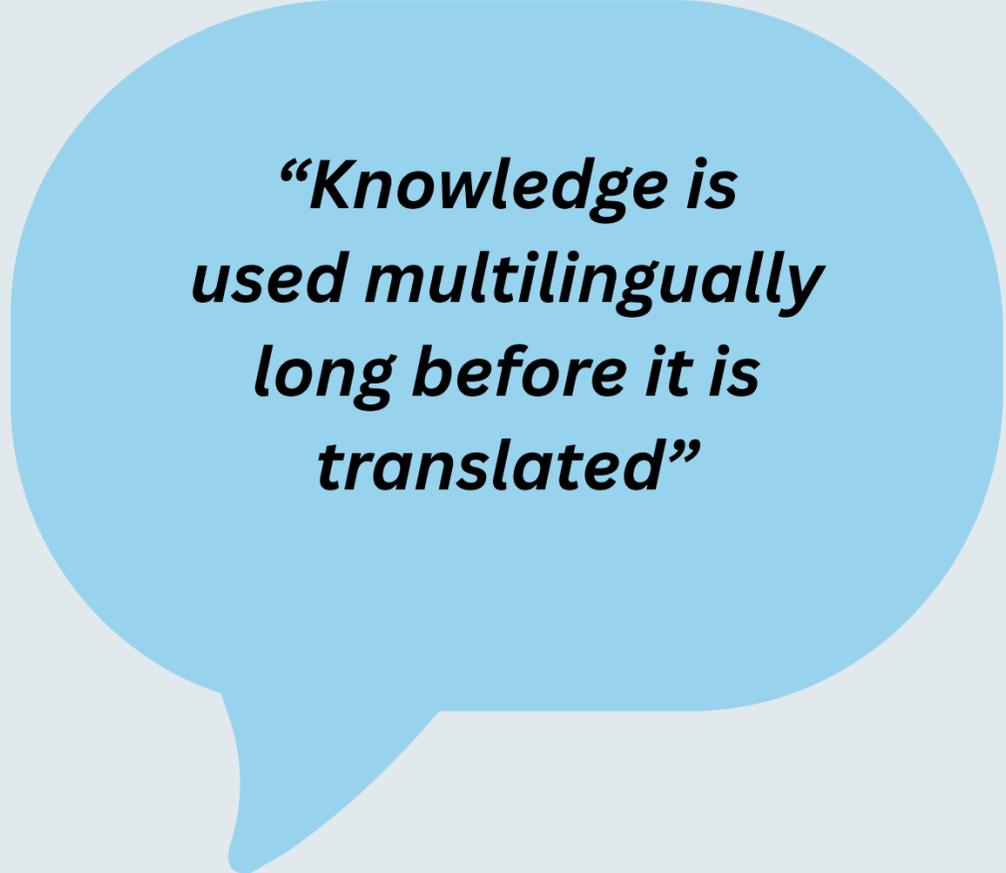
Knowledge is used multilingually long before it is translated. Interpreters support this process, but interpretation in legal and asylum contexts raises questions about justice: What is lost, created, or imagined in these multilingual exchanges? Underlying these concerns is a profound anxiety: Will my daughter speak my language? Families feel themselves to be standing at the threshold where their languages and histories may disappear for lack of resources or support. This is the landscape of language grief - and echo of ecological grief, reflecting the fragility of linguistic ecosystems.



Multilingualism should therefore be approached not as an adjunct to ESOL but as a core strategy and organising principle. Yet many nature-based and multilingual initiatives remain underfunded, unable to sustain the place-based learning that makes them effective. As new words are learned, languages creolise and evolve, revealing vitality rather than decline. But the key question remains: Do we have access to the conditions of possibility that allow multilingualism to flourish? Or are we simply naming the empirical reality while lacking structures to support it?

Fear, anger, and racialised stigma—amplified by the rise of the far-right—damage these conditions. Resource shortages, English-dominant assumptions, scattered services, weak coordination, and insufficient monitoring further undermine multilingual outcomes. They also raise questions about whether intangible linguistic heritage can be meaningfully measured or scaled.

Ultimately, the essence of this work demands creative, oral, and relational methods. The suggestion of producing a podcast is apt: multilingualism itself is lived, sounded, and narrated. Capturing these dimensions requires formats that honour voice, story, and the sensory material of lived experience.



***“Knowledge is
used multilingually
long before it is
translated”***

Recommendations

- **Establish Multilingualism as a Core Organising Principle Across Education and Integration Policy** Scottish Government, local authorities and third sector organisations should embed multilingualism as a foundational principle in policy design—on equal footing with ESOL—recognising it as essential to identity, wellbeing, learning, and integration. This requires shifting from English-dominant assumptions toward approaches that value and utilise the full linguistic repertoires of New Scots. Policy frameworks should explicitly support translanguaging, heritage language maintenance, and recognition of linguistic rights across public services.
- **Provide Stable, Long Term Investment in Place-Based and Ecological Multilingual Initiatives:** Sustained funding should be allocated to community rooted, nature-based, and ecological learning programmes that support multilingual engagement, such as gardens, outdoor classrooms, storytelling groups, and local intergenerational practices. These initiatives currently operate with minimal or no stable resources, despite strong evidence that they create the conditions necessary for belonging, language learning, and social cohesion. Long term investment would strengthen Scotland’s multilingual ecosystems and support equitable access across all regions.
- **Develop National Guidance for Creative, Oral, and Relational Approaches to Multilingual Experience** The Scottish Government should introduce guidance enabling public services, schools, and community organisations to use creative and oral methodologies—such as storytelling, narrative-based assessment, and podcast production—to understand and evidence multilingual experience and intangible linguistic heritage. These approaches are essential to addressing language grief, strengthening justicecentred interpretation, and ensuring that multilingual realities are recognised in evaluation and monitoring frameworks.



Dr Julie McAdam and Professor Evelyn Arizpe, School of Education, University of Glasgow

Literature, Migration, and Multimodal Approaches to Integration

Dr McAdam and Professor Arizpe have collaborated with colleagues over the past 20 years to offer a historical perspective on the role of children's literature, multimodality, and cultural mediation in supporting newly arrived learners in Scotland. Their work began in 2007 in collaboration with Professor Jim McGonigal, during the period of asylum dispersal when Scottish schools were suddenly accommodating pupils who spoke a wide range of languages. This context highlighted longstanding issues around language hierarchies, including the expectation that children first learn English rather than Scots, and prompted renewed attention to Scots literature and Scottish children's books.

One early strand of their work with colleagues in Australia and the US, involved the use of wordless picture books with children from diverse backgrounds—including Hispanic, Iraqi, Australian, Sudanese, and local Glasgow communities—to facilitate communication, expression, and shared meaning making-. The project title, Visual Journeys enabled pupils to use the books to engage with themes of migration without requiring proficiency in English, positioning visual storytelling as an equitable communication tool.



“These books enabled pupils to engage with themes of migration without requiring proficiency in English, positioning visual storytelling as an equitable communication tool”

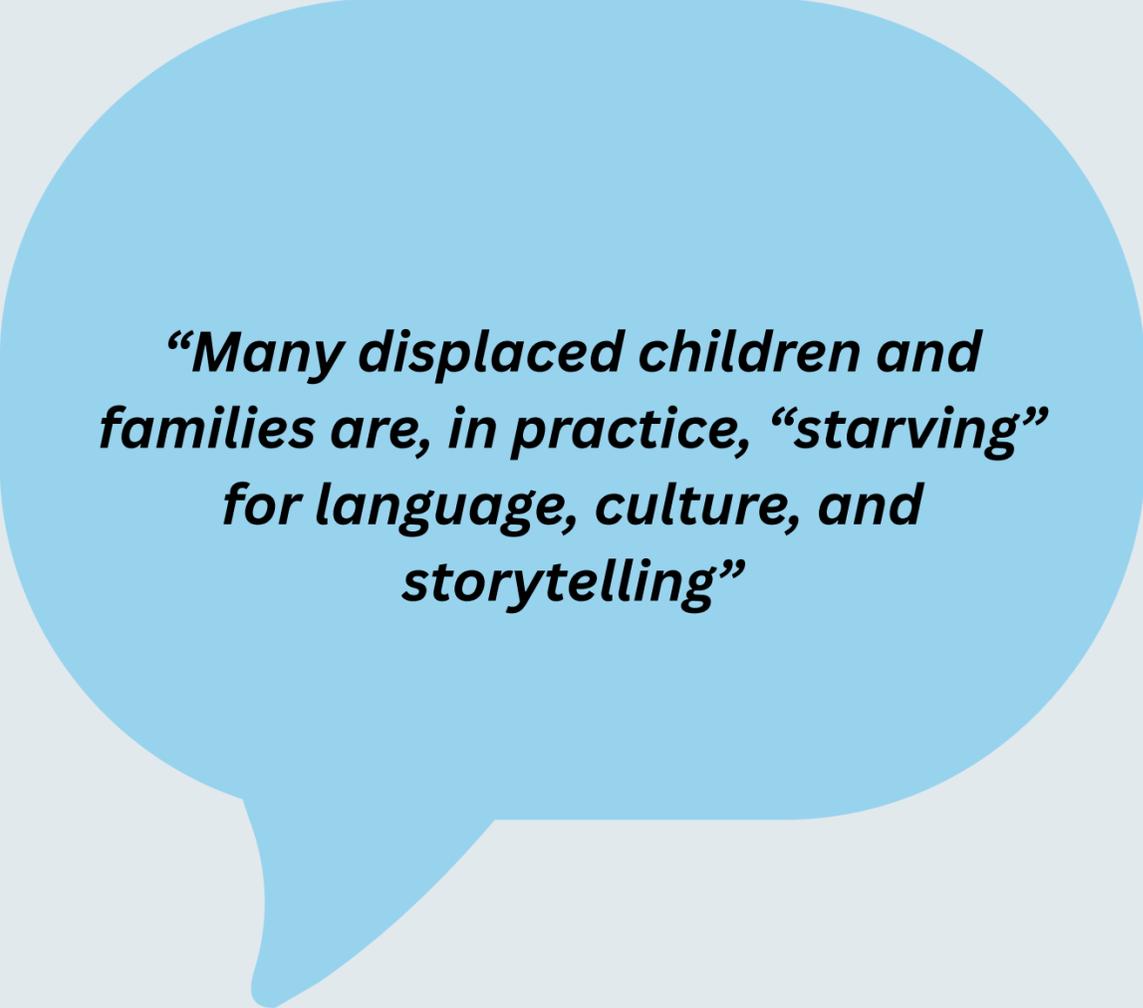
Their subsequent project, *Journeys From Images to Words* (2014), developed a multimodal and multilingual toolkit to support newly arrived children. The toolkit was grounded in the idea that children experiencing displacement have needs not only “hungry for food” but also hungry for culture, for culture, language, and opportunities for expression. This work was later adapted by mediators responding to environmental disasters, including earthquake recovery efforts, demonstrating the wider relevance of multimodal approaches for trauma-informed education.

Arizpe, Abou Ghaida, Hirsu, McAdam and Zárate also contributed to the development of a two-volume publication produced through the UNESCO Centre in Latin America, focusing on symbolic shelters, books, reading, and publishing in contexts affected by displacement. The resources offer extensive guidance on language-rich, culturally sustaining practices, although geopolitical changes—such as those along the Mexico-US border—continue to reshape this field.

Drawing on international engagements, including work in Palestine and Jordan, McAdam and Arizpe’s work has underscored the importance of the stories we live by, drawing on the philosopher Edward Said’s insights into narrative, culture, and identity. Through knowledge exchange collaborations with mediators worldwide, McAdam and Arizpe have explored how picture books open access to cultural knowledge and provide a foundation for crosscultural understanding.



Their work highlights the paradox within Maslow's hierarchy of needs: while culture is traditionally positioned as a higher order- need, many displaced children and families are, in practice, "starving" for language, culture, and storytelling. Much of this work takes place with community organisations such as The Regional Center for the Promotion of Books in Latin America and the Caribbean (CERLALC) and Tamer Institute for Community Education, who work outside formal institutional settings, such as libraries and informal learning spaces, where families can engage with literature more freely for aesthetic and cultural reasons.



“Many displaced children and families are, in practice, “starving” for language, culture, and storytelling”

Literature as a Resource for Hope, Agency, and Imagination

Through global collaboration, McAdam and Arizpe gathered details on the curations of stories used in mediation work across different regions. Although many books were used, five emerged as particularly impactful, often because they addressed silence, voice, and transformation. For example, in Fatma Sharafeddine's *Amma Osha*, a humorous story about "a woman who talks too much" helped highlight issues of voice and visibility, while *Eloisa y los Bichos* by Jairo Buitrago featuring an "old bug" captured the sense of arriving, integrating, and navigating difference. Picture books such as Shaun Tan's *The Arrival* served as universal narratives of migration, offering symbolic anchors through which children could explore their own experiences.

Across these texts were what McAdam and Arizpe describe as "resources of hope"—narrative elements capable of "making hope normal again." Literature, they show, nurtures children's agency and provides future possibilities, allowing them to imagine new forms of belonging. Texts become anchors that help children make connections, experiment with identity, and interpret their surroundings.

Dr McAdam and Professor Arizpe also developed a "wheel of reading", comprising themes such as hope, playfulness, authenticity, assurance, grounding, sense of community, space and place, and memory work. These elements help educators identify how texts support wellbeing, orientation, and connection.

Understanding Displacement and Intergenerational Perspectives

McAdam and Arizpe's research emphasises that newly arrived learners often **want to discuss topics beyond migration**, as constant displacement shapes their identities in complex ways. Many children experience **multiple displacements and multiple losses**, and both wordless and multilingual literature provides a conduit for exploring these experiences safely. Texts can support **intergenerational perspectives**, connecting memory, culture, and history across time and family contexts. Importantly, McAdam and Arizpe advocate for **accessible evaluation criteria** that enable teachers to assess the impact of literary and multimodal approaches in meaningful and nuanced ways.

Sawsan Abdelghany, formerly University of Glasgow, Language, Access, and Ecological Approaches to Integration

Sawsan Abdelghany's research in 2022-23 investigated the role of language in enabling and constraining integration for New Scots, with classroom observations and interviews conducted across the Borders region, Dundee, Edinburgh, and Glasgow. Her findings confirm that ESOL remains central to integration but is **not consistently accessible** due to limited hours, long waiting lists, lack of local provision, childcare barriers, and frequent moves from temporary accommodation.

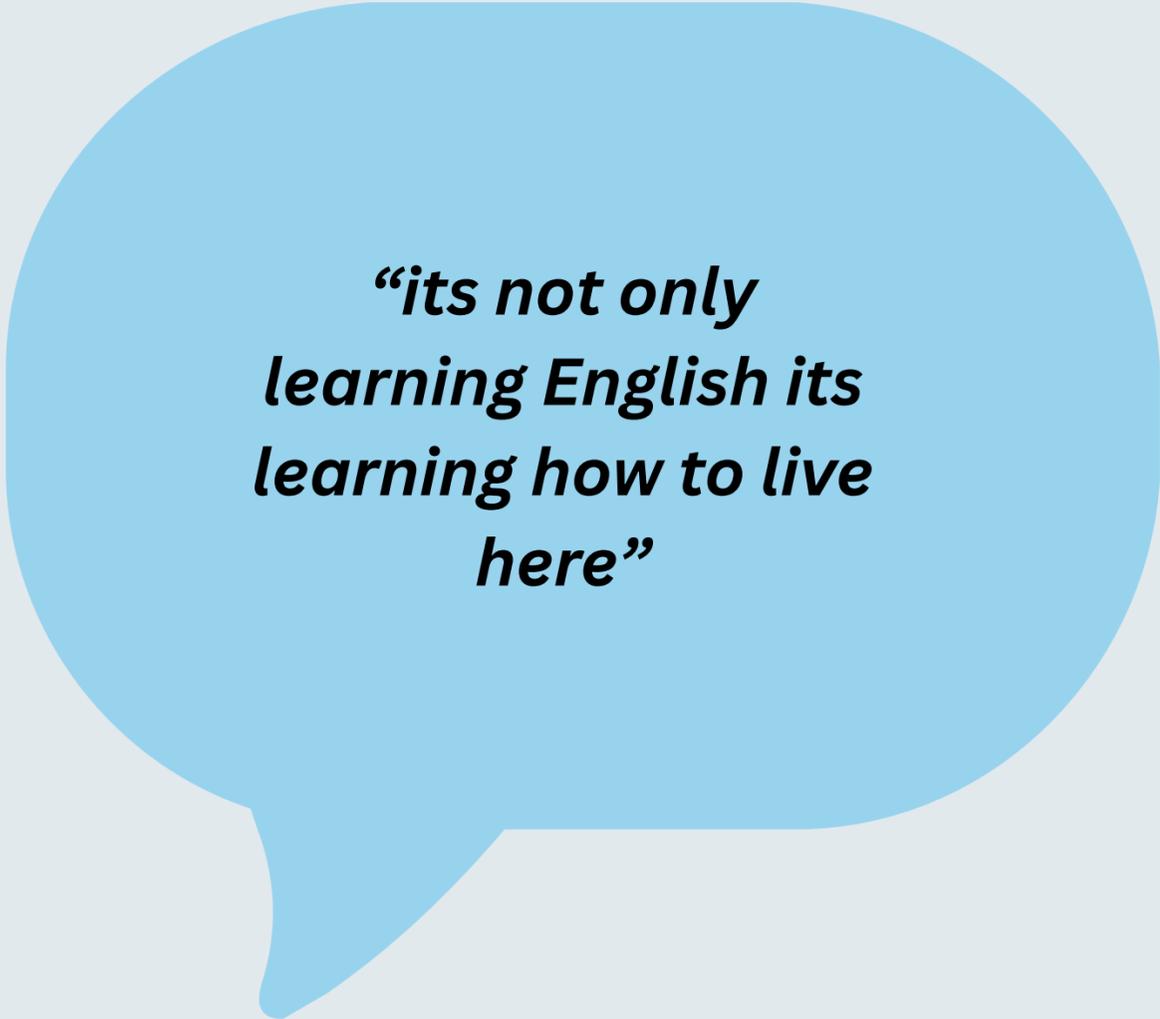
These disruptions affected the research itself, underscoring the precarity in learners' lives. Consequently, Abdelghany found, women are structural disadvantaged and excluded through existing ESOL provision.



“A community-centre cooking class, for example, fostered multilingual co-creation and laughter, while modelling humility, equity of language power, and trauma-sensitive practice”

Beyond functional language acquisition, participation in English learning **builds confidence, social bonds, and community connections**. Informal and placebased learning—libraries, shops, museums, field trips, gardening— were all found in Abdelghany’s empirical research to create authentic opportunities for communication and belonging.

A community-centre cooking class, for example, fostered multilingual co-creation and laughter, while modelling humility, equity of language power, and trauma-sensitive practice. This research demonstrates the power, from empirical examples, of an **ecological, multilingual approach** that recognises literacy/orality differences, adopts trauma-informed methods, and values learners’ full linguistic repertoires



***“its not only
learning English its
learning how to live
here”***

Recommendations

- **Prioritise ESOL access**, adapting delivery to unsettled lives (flexible timetabling, rolling enrolment).
- **Value learners' home languages** and train ESOL teachers in multilingual methods.
- **Diversify ESOL pathways** for different needs (e.g., anxiety, literacy, employment focused).
- **Improve access for women and caregivers**, including translated information and childcare support.
- **Increase ESOL funding** to meet demand and reduce employment barriers.
- **Broaden delivery venues** (community centres, churches, halls) to mirror successful local models.
- **Provide trauma-informed training** for ESOL staff and coordinated work with therapists.
- **Promote multilingual learning**, especially for learners with trauma or interrupted education.
- **Strengthen informal learning routes** (befriending, arts based, Sharing Languages projects).
- **Empower learner choice** through flexible curricula and learner led provision.

Daniel Calvert, University of Stirling

Inclusion, Listening, and Community-Led Multilingual Practice

Daniel Calvert's sociolinguistic research, which is on-going, presents a system-level view of multilingualism in Scotland, focusing on adult emergent speakers of English who struggle to access essential support. His research notes that while policy relies on two inclusion levers—ESOL and language interpreting support—neither is sufficient on its own, and together they can still reproduce a monolingual model of “inclusion.” In contrast, bottom-up social inclusion practices—co-production, community leadership, and plural language use—create non-exclusionary spaces.

Two examples illustrate this shift:

- A **community-run Afghan telephone advice service** offering housing and amenities support in Pashto and Dari;
- **Community-led transitions** from service user to staff, where one-to-one support is delivered in the client's preferred language and full repertoires are encouraged.

Calvert's ethnographic work with groups such as **Woodside Storytellers** demonstrates the ethics and practice of listening: audiences attending to an Arabic story with intent, even without shared language, embody **relational ethics**—proximity, sensory attention, and responsiveness—where communication begins with listening and recognition of the other.



“Language policy relies on two inclusion levers-ESOL and Language-interpreting support- neither is sufficient on its own, and together they can still reproduce a monolingual model of “inclusion”

Recommendations

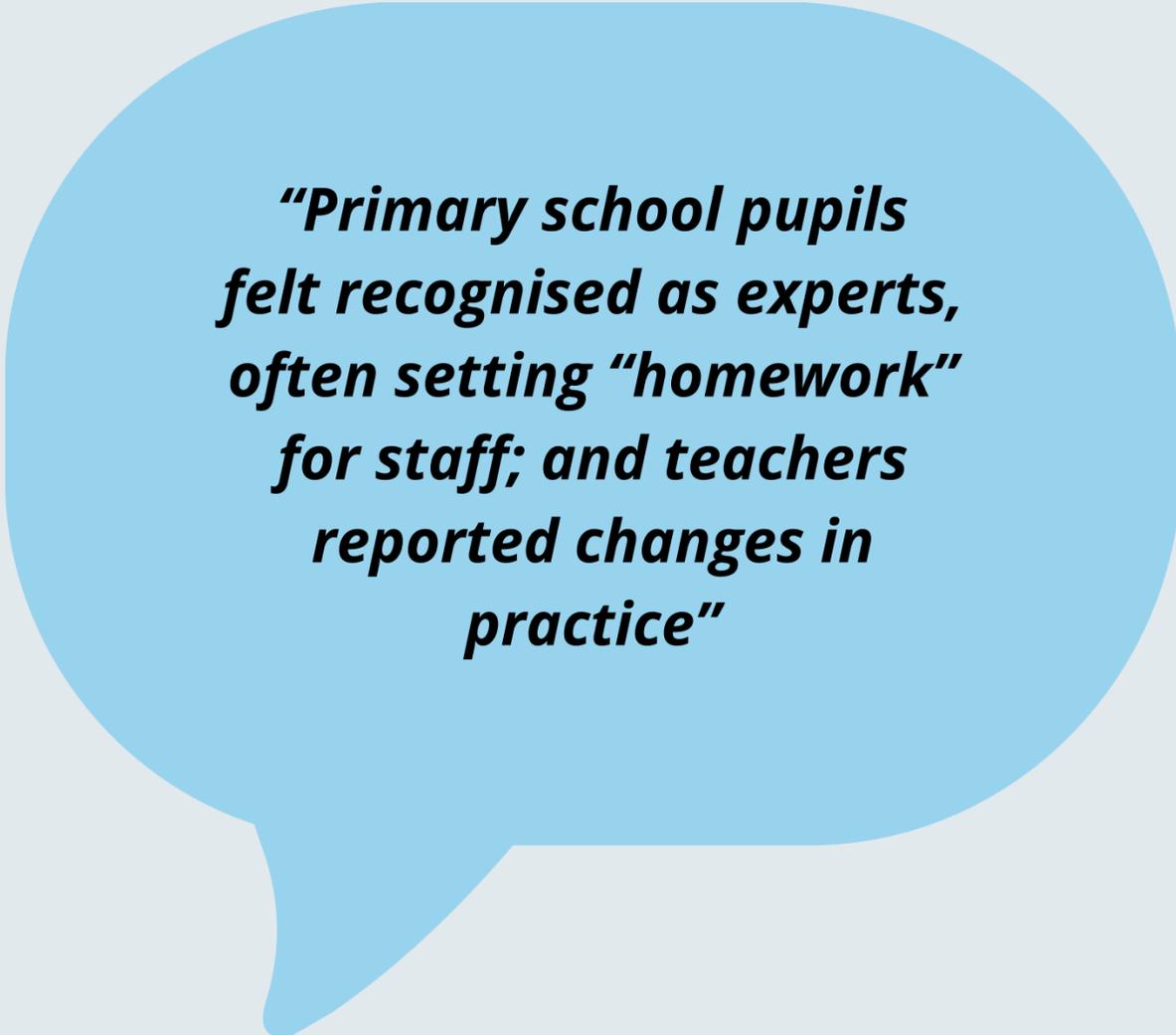
- **Fund arts-based, participatory spaces** such as community storytelling organisations in which New Scots can build long-term connections with settled communities.
- **Remove access barriers**, e.g., through the New Scots transport and asylum pilot.
- **Recruit bi/multilingual staff** so that services are as linguistically and culturally diverse as the people they support, making the most of **language plenty**.
- **Build the capacity of community-led organisations** so that they can grow and connect across sectors.

Professor Giovanna Fassetta and Dr Maria Grazia Imperiale, school of Education, University of Glasgow
Diversifying School Languages—Levantine Arabic for Staff

Fassetta and Imperiale's research since 2020 provides a **proof of concept** for language diversification in Scottish education. Beginning with Levantine Arabic—reflecting community connections—their research and pilot programme combined needs analysis and co-teaching with partners (including IUG) to train Scottish school staff. Demand quickly **doubled**, and the model expanded to Edinburgh.

Impacts of this research were immediate. Staff used Arabic to communicate with parents and children; all Arabic learning staff highlighted the **symbolic value** of making the effort on Arabic speaking families; pupils felt recognised as **experts**, often setting “homework” for staff; and teachers reported changes in practice through reflection on their own experience as language learners. The course has proven adaptable (to other languages and educational settings) and resilient through disruption.

Stakeholder support (e.g., crossparty interest, KE workshops, policy engagement) is strong, but sustained **funding remains the key barrier**. The team emphasises the professionalism of Arabic teaching and cautions against any **infantilisation** of specialist expertise.



“Primary school pupils felt recognised as experts, often setting “homework” for staff; and teachers reported changes in practice”

Recommendations

- **Adopt the model nationally** across all schools.
- **Recognise staff language learning formally** and align with a **wholeschool approach**.
- **Include New Scots' languages in 1+2 policy**, with **official certification** routes for those languages (e.g., parity with Italian).
- **Resource the programme** sustainably and maintain high professional standards.

Dr Esa Aldegheri, Leverhulme Research Fellow, UNESCO RIELA Chair, School of Education, University of Glasgow

Policy Complementarities, Perceptions, and Conditions of Possibility

The language recommendations (30-33) from the New Scots Refugee Integration Report (2022), for which Dr Aldegheri was a research assistant and co-author are considered **urgent** and complementary in her ongoing research today. Recommendation 34 has now been implemented with the Scottish Languages Act 2025. Dr Aldegheri's research warns of the **“what about us?”** discourse that can cast support for New Scots as preferential treatment. In this climate, **language plenty** is easily reframed as deficit, and double-booked interpreting appointments can be portrayed as subtracting from the “local population.”

Dr Aldegheri's research calls for **core standards for interpreting and translation** (aligned with UK benchmarks) to uphold the right to use one's mother language and for a review of how support is delivered across communities (e.g., Falkirk). Embedding **intercultural and community development skills** across sectors—from ESOL and adult learning to Cities/Schools of Sanctuary—remains essential. She frames implementation within Yohannes's (2025) **“conditions of possibility”**, asking how to scale what works without stoking division.



Recommendations

Approaches that work

- **Restorative intent:** restore dignity for all participants.
- **Narrative-based:** centre shared stories and dialogic processes.
- **Process-oriented:** long-term journeys rather than quick wins.
- **Genuinely participatory:** involve New Scots at every stage (notably absent in some drafting groups).

Recommendations: Languages

Sharing lives, Sharing languages offers a positive blueprint for moving forward with mutual, mother language supportive programmes for multilingualism in Scotland and for supporting translanguaging as part of a pathway to greater linguistic capacity across Scotland. This report recommends that:

- 30 The practice and learnings from Sharing lives, Sharing languages should be extended and consolidation across Scotland, giving a context for the practice of new languages by new speakers and enabling environments where integration is happening through a common interest in practicing languages. This will complement the ESOL system adding time for practice as part of intercultural dialogue but does not take away from the need to increase the number of hours available for formal ESOL learning.
- 31 A core set of standards for interpreting and translation in statutory and non-statutory contexts is required - like those developed for the UK as National Standards in Interpreting and also in Intercultural Working. These will allow the New Scots partnership to set a benchmark for interpretation and translation and to uphold the right to the use of the mother language, whilst at the same time developing language resources, ESOL services and translanguaging support in communities (see also below).
- 32 Intercultural communication and community development skills should be embedded across sectors – these will enable service delivery professionals to better support language learning of populations who may be experiencing trauma, and whose language learning pathway is not freely chosen but has come through necessity. Intercultural listening and some aiding of the translanguaging that will make up intercultural encounters and dialogue can be embedded into the training and attitudes for professionals working in the sector. In addition, community development workers are critical to community-based language initiatives success as part of restorative integration whilst ESOL provision is a baseline for ensuring a developing approach to learning as part of efficient and effective service delivery, scaffolded by translation services.
- 33 If not provisioned under the forthcoming Human Rights Act for Scotland, ungirding the role of languages in Scottish society will be greatly enhanced by the provision of a Languages Act for Scotland, complementing the Gaelic and Sign Language Acts for Scotland.

Dr Francesca Stella and Professor Rebecca Kay School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Glasgow and Migration Policy Scotland, (also steering committee for NATECLA Scotland with ESOL remit):

Governance Gaps and the ESOL Crisis

Dr Stella and Professor Kay's long term research into ESOL with migrants (as opposed to forced migrants) in Scotland, documents the policy landscape across their original study and follow-up report (report published 2023). They show how ESOL sits uneasily **between migration (reserved) and education (devolved)**, producing governance complexity. Until **2020**, Scotland had an ESOL strategy with dedicated funding; its removal, combined with austerity, has had **profound repercussions** for provision, stability, and equity.

Key findings from their research include:

- **Diversity** of learners, providers, and geographies (urban/rural), with unmet demand now worse;
- **Inconsistent access** and uneven local intelligence on who needs ESOL;
- The **third sector** stepping into gaps but on insecure footing;
- An **ad hoc** national response and overemphasis on accredited classes, creating disparities;
- An overemphasis on accredited classes, creating disparities;
- Evidence that the **loss of strategy** has been as damaging as predicted.



“ESOL sits uneasily between migration (reserved) and education (devolved), producing governance complexity”

Recommendations

- A national **mapping exercise** to establish accurate need as per recommendations of 2023 report: *Language Learning and Migrant 'Integration' In Scotland: Exploring Infrastructure, Provision and Experiences* and New Scots Delivery Programme.
- **Governance reform** with a long-term vision and ring-fenced funding.
- A **joined-up approach** that reconnects ESOL with migration and education policy—and aligns with multilingual aims.

Dr Sarah Cox, Open University Scotland

Multilingual Pedagogy Bridging Policy, Practice, and Research

Dr Cox's research identifies a persistent gap between policy, practice and research: policy now recognises New Scots' languages and academic literature validates multilingual realities, yet **most classrooms remain monolingual** in practice. Employing an **ecological, translanguaging** approach within a participatory action research spiral, and drawing on her own beginner learning in Tigrinya, Tamil, Farsi, Arabic, and English, she examined how classroom language practices meet learners' lived repertoires.

Key Findings

- **Practical gains** from multilingual approaches: improved accuracy and comprehension, confidence to enter ESOL classes, and gentle orientation for new arrivals.
- **Empowerment and symmetry:** "Using my own language in class gives me power"; role-reversal moments rebalance classroom authority—"you and I are the same."
- **Two-way integration** enacted in class: welcome, comfort, repetition, and patient reentry.
- **Teachers need not speak all languages** to facilitate multilingual work; cafés and multilingual events shift narratives about who is learning and contributing.

Policy & Practice Implications

- **Stable, sustainable ESOL funding** is essential; piecemeal models prevent planning.
- Increase both **accredited and unaccredited** routes; fund practitioner inquiry into multilingual strategies.
- **Share learning** across policy, practice, and research; make language learning available **from day one**.
- **Multilingual, trauma-informed, restorative approaches are needed.**
- Review the impacts of the **loss of the Adult ESOL strategy**; develop a replacement.

Dr Tawona Sithole, UNESCO RIELA Chair, School of Education, University of Glasgow
Abundance, Radical Listening, and The Creative Multilingual Curriculum

Dr Sitholé's creative and indigenous-informed research challenges the "myth of scarcity" or resource, noting that reactions to hearing other languages can reveal racialised discomfort. Communities are seeking **constructive containers** for frustration, longing, and desire; **listening**—as pedagogy and practice—becomes foundational to multilingual education. Teams that make the multilingual dimension visible learn from **global majority contexts** where multilingualism is the norm and they resist possessive, monolingual notions of ownership.

Sitholé's research points to the **power of the arts**—from Little Amal's symbolic walk to poetry slams—to create multimodal spaces where belonging and voice can flourish. Practical interventions (e.g., using budgets to secure **birth certificates** that unlock access to services in Global Majority contexts) show how cultural work and bureaucratic activism intersect



“Communities are seeking constructive containers for frustration, longing, and desire; listening-as pedagogy and practice- becomes foundational to multilingual education”

Recommendations

- Develop a **multilingual curriculum** that is both symbolic and skillsbuilding, advancing **epistemic justice**.
- Centre **creative practice** (improvisation, poetry, roleplay) to cultivate imagination, empathy, and perspective taking.
- Build **racial literacy** among educators and adopt **radical listening** (after science education work on listening) as a cross-cutting competency.
- Resource **arts-based infrastructures** (e.g., Scottish Book Trust poetry initiatives) so participation reflects the diversity of languages present.
- Encourage learner leadership—**“We need to take charge”**—so children’s spontaneous language exchange becomes a recognised asset.





Part IV:

Key Themes and Insights

Key Themes and Insights

1. Scotland's Linguistic Landscape Has Transformed

- Scottish schools now include **speakers of 198 languages**, demonstrating rapid and sustained diversification across all 32 local authorities.
- This diversification has **outpaced national structures**, especially as ESOL strategy and funding have diminished.

Implication:

Existing systems—ESOL, EAL, teacher training, and community learning—are no longer equipped to meet current linguistic realities.

2. Multilingualism is Scientifically Proven to Benefit Learning, Integration, and Wellbeing

- Early multilingual exposure improves **literacy, attention control, cognitive flexibility, and perspectivetaking**.
- These benefits apply to all languages, including sign languages and minoritised migrant languages.
- Research rejects monolingualism as a normal or ideal baseline; **multilingual repertoires are the global standard**.

Implication:

Policy should treat multilingualism as an asset embedded across education and integration—not an adjunct to English language provision.

3. ESOL and EAL Systems Are Under Severe Strain

- **The loss of Scotland's ESOL Strategy** and continued underfunding have created unstable, inconsistent provision and significant unmet demand.
- Learners face long waiting lists, limited hours, and childcare barriers; **women are disproportionately excluded**.
- Cuts to EAL provision are described as **unsustainable** in the research limiting schools' ability to respond effectively.

Implication:

Reinstating a coordinated, funded ESOL/EAL strategy is essential to meeting statutory duties, reducing inequity, and supporting integration.

4. Arts-Based, Ecological, and Community-Led Approaches Are Demonstrably Effective

Research shows that:

- **Arts-based multilingual pedagogies** strengthen identity, confidence, teacher engagement, and parental involvement.
- **Permaculture-inspired outdoor learning** fosters sustainability awareness, language development, and community cohesion.
- **Storytelling, libraries, gardens, and community cooking classes** create authentic multilingual learning spaces and support trauma recovery.

Implication:

Funding ecological and arts-based approaches yields high social return and should be integrated into national guidance.

5. Young People's Experiences Reveal Both Strengths and Serious Gaps

- Young people show strong **multilingual adaptability**, often using Scots, English, and heritage languages fluidly.
- Yet many face stigma, are discouraged from speaking home languages, or experience pressure to anglicise names.
- Teenagers express a clear desire to maintain their languages: *“All languages matter... we don't want to forget our other languages.”*

Implication:

Schools need structured support to ensure policy commitments to inclusion and linguistic rights are implemented consistently

6. Families Experience “Language Grief” and Fragile Conditions for Multilingualism

- Refugee families fear losing their heritage languages due to lack of support, unstable services, and English-dominant systems.
- Nature-based, community-rooted integration in rural areas (e.g., Stornoway) demonstrates what becomes possible when linguistic exchange flows both ways.

Implication:

Policies must recognise heritage language maintenance as a wellbeing and rights issue, not only an educational one.

7. Interpreting, Translation, and Linguistic Rights Require System-Level Reform

- Current systems risk framing language provision as zero-sum, reinforcing “what about us?” narratives.
- Researchers call for core national standards for interpreting and translation, aligned with UK benchmarks.

Implication:

Robust standards and communication strategies are needed to protect linguistic rights and reduce misinformation-driven tensions.

8. Community-Led and Participatory Models Build Trust and Inclusion

- Community-run services, peereducation, and storytelling groups show high impact in overcoming service barriers.
- Learnerled and community-led models promote empowerment, dignity, and genuine inclusion.

Implication:

Scaling community-led models can reduce pressure on statutory services while improving outcomes.

Clear Areas for Policy Action

Across contributors, there is shared consensus on priorities:

1. Re-establish a national, funded ESOL strategy building on the initiatives undertaken in 2025-26 under New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy Delivery Plan.

To stabilise provision, reduce inequity, and align ESOL with education, migration, and integration policy.

2. Embed multilingualism as a core organising principle across all languages in Scotland, producing synergies between 1+2 model and Scottish Languages Act 2025

Not an add-on to ESOL, but central to identity, wellbeing, community pedagogy and integration.

3. Provide long-term investment in ecological and arts-based multilingual programmes in formal and non-formal education

These programmes show sustained impact on inclusion, confidence, and community cohesion. A small grants programme for community language delivery and training would catalyse the model and recommendations .

4. Strengthen EAL provision and teacher education at all levels

Cuts are inhibiting schools' and communities' capacity to respond to linguistic diversity.

5. Develop national guidance for creative, oral, and relational approaches as well as standards for interpreting and translation in formal settings.

To address linguistic rights, trauma, and heritage language maintenance and build on the UNESCO *Languages Matter: Global Guide to Multilingual Education*.

Clear Areas **FOR POLICY ACTION**



Summary

The discussion revealed strong synergies across the ecological, artistic, cognitive, and community-based strands of the work, pointing toward the value of a shared framework for understanding **New Scots multilingual ecosystems**. Contributors emphasised the convergence of an **ecological turn** and an **arts-based turn**, aligning with UNESCO's focus on sustainable, relational, intergenerational forms of learning. Themes such as cultural resilience, oral traditions, and the more-than-human world highlight how languages endure and evolve through everyday practices beyond formal schooling.

Participants noted the cognitive benefits of multilingual adaptability, the importance of intergenerational and family-based knowledge, and the role of confident, inclusive environments in supporting linguistic flourishing.

Persistent challenges—such as poor coordination, resource shortages, and English-dominant policy assumptions—were also identified. Overall, the expert group stressed the need for more integrated, collaborative approaches that honour multilingualism as a lived, ecological, and relational practice.

“Scotland’s rapidly expanding linguistic diversity presents both a major national asset and a critical policy challenge, requiring renewed strategic leadership, stable funding, and coordinated, multilingual, ecological, and community-based approaches to ensure equitable, sustainable integration for all New Scots”

Synergies Across the Languages Research Landscape in Scotland

The discussion highlighted significant synergies across the contributions, pointing toward the value of developing an edited volume—*New Scots Multilingual Ecosystems*—that would bring together the ecological, artistic, linguistic, and communitybased insights emerging from this work. Participants noted how recent UNESCO guidance and wider international scholarship reinforce an **ecological turn** and an **arts-based turn** in multilingual education, both of which emphasise sustainable structures aligned with **SDG 16** and the development of “new rituals and practices that are fed through time.”



- A recurring theme was the understanding of **culture as the connective tissue between people and nature**, resonant with animist traditions in which languages endure despite centuries of attempted erasure. These languages persist through sophisticated strategies of survival, often cultivated not within formal schooling but through **oral, community-rooted practices**—coffee ceremonies, gatherings under trees, and other more-than-human, place-based interactions.
- Several contributors reflected on the importance of **viscerality and ecological attunement** in shaping multilingual experience. Everyday acts—such as “checking the weather” and being guided by one’s embodied relationship to nature—illustrate the deep interconnections between environment, language, and identity. This aligns with emerging work on **eco-social programmes** and **ecosociality**, which frame multilingualism as embedded within wider ecological systems.
- Professor Sorace emphasised that exposure to new languages can **enrich rather than damage** an individual’s native language; change and creolisation are signs of vitality, not decline. This fed into wider reflections on the need to make visible the connections across different disciplinary angles. For example, from a cognitive and linguistic perspective, Dr Ryan’s findings—that Polish young people adapted their speech more readily than their Scottish peers—were interpreted as evidence of **adaptive cognitive advantage**, not simply linguistic insecurity.
- At the same time, participants acknowledged ongoing **coordination challenges**, calling for more systematic opportunities to work together and engage critically with each other’s research. Storytelling emerged as a shared methodological thread, with Dr Ryan highlighting how multiple stories can illuminate even small pieces of research, and how sustained interaction with participants enriches interpretation.

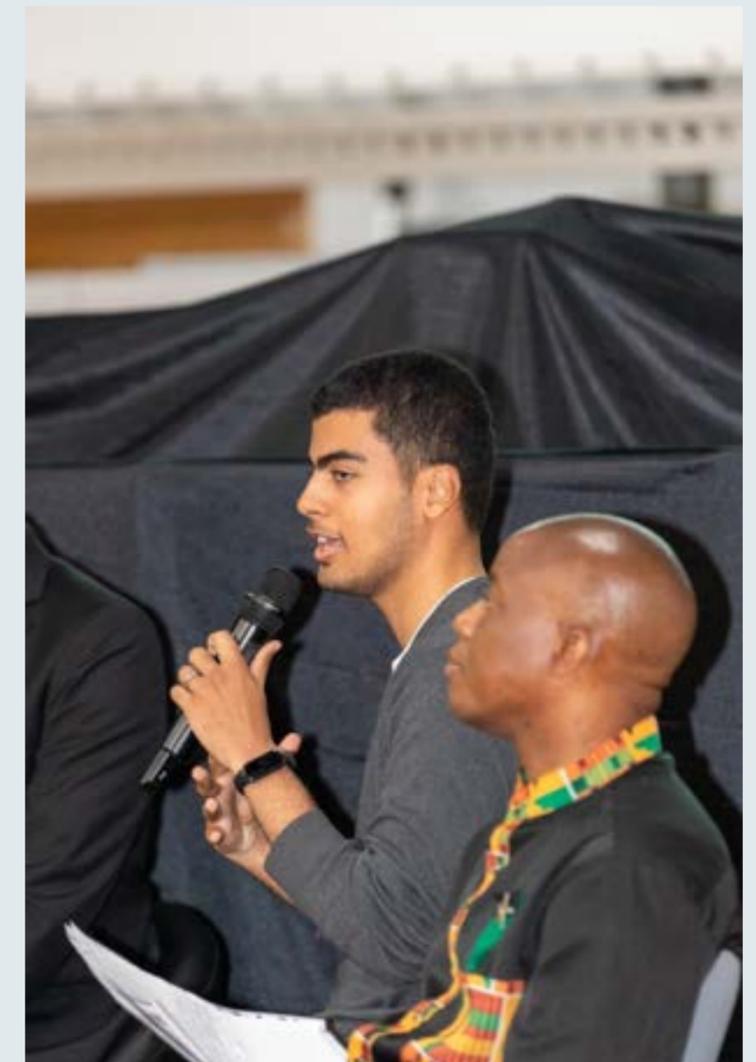
- Contributors also discussed how **linguistic insecurity appears less evident among younger generations**, who often display confidence in their languages when supported by affirming school environments. “Confident contexts”—gardens, playgrounds, antiracism initiatives, activist histories, art projects, and comprehensive mental health policies—create the conditions in which multilingual identities can flourish.
- Dr Beth Christie’s work was referenced in relation to ecological learning, underscoring the idea that sustainable, resilient structures in education should mirror ecological principles.
- Dr Yohannes offers important insights into the **role of family configurations** in language transmission. In many refugee contexts, the absence of grandparents—often described as “the linguistic library of the family”—creates challenges for maintaining intergenerational linguistic heritage. With early years provision delivered mainly in English, children may have limited exposure to their home languages. Yet this same context can also lead to linguistic expansion, where a mother tongue grows through the incorporation of English and place-based vocabulary.
- The Expert Summit reflected on the importance of **offering one’s language to the wider world**, positioning multilingualism not only as an individual resource but as a collective gift. They also discussed the potential of intergenerational and transnational connections—such as involving grandparents abroad through digital technologies—to enrich children’s linguistic experiences, as Prof Arizpe noted.
- A final point concerned the need for **improved information sharing, coordination, and exposure to linguistic variation**. Regular contact with diverse language practices helps children and young people develop flexible, confident multilingual identities.

Synergies

- Multilingual ecosystems integrate ecological and artistic perspectives
- Language resilience is rooted in oral traditions and lived practices
- Daily, embodied experience of language and culture
- Multilingualism viewed as a source of cognitive flexibility
- Supportive, intergenerational family networks build fluency
- Enhanced collaboration builds inclusive, language-rich environments

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University of Glasgow

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