

Tony Capstick: Non-formal education and ELT in Iraq

Department of English Language and
Applied Linguistics



Applied Linguistics Research Circle Weekly Talk

Non-formal education and English language teaching in Iraq: teacher development and materials design for teachers of IDPs and refugees

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Abstract

Iraq experienced very high levels of displacement as a result of the conflict between coalition forces and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS/Daesh). Of the more than 6 million Iraqis who have fled their homes since 2014, 1.2 million remain internally displaced in Iraq (NRC 2021). Over 4.8 million Iraqis have returned to their areas of origin, though many NGOs and humanitarian agencies believe that many of these returns have been premature or involuntary. Iraq is also home to 241,000 Syrian refugees living largely in the Kurdistan region of Iraq (KRI) (ibid). As part of their life skills courses or psycho-social programmes, English language learning has become an increasingly popular vehicle for NGOs targeting refugee and IDP learners who are outside formal education or attending catch-up classes before re-entering formal schooling (Capstick and Ateek 2021). In this talk I report on findings from several research visits to Iraq over the past seven years in order to shed light on the way English is taught in some of these settings. Findings reveal that rarely do English curriculum documents exist as NGOs focus more on the non-English language goals of the course (e.g., psycho-social competencies)

and rarely are textbooks used as teachers are encouraged to produce their own materials for teaching. Teachers interviewed for several of these projects often describe their lessons as being 'communicative' in nature, i.e., they are meant to develop learners' ability to use English functionally. However, lesson observations reveal that the way English is typically taught does not reflect these principles and that a gap exists between the intended curriculum and the enacted curriculum. The talk ends with discussion of the interdisciplinary approaches that are being taken to informing language teaching in these settings.

References

- Capstick, T., & Ateek, M. (2021). Translanguaging spaces as safe space for psycho-social support in refugee settings in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 1-16.
NRC (2021). Country profile: Iraq. Erbil: NRC. Available from <https://www.nrc.no/countries/middle-east/iraq/> (Accessed 12 November 2021)

Tony Capstick is Associate Professor of TESOL and Applied Linguistics at the University of Reading. His main areas of interest are teacher education, multilingualism, and migration. He carries out research in formal classrooms as well as informal out-of-school contexts drawing on sociolinguistics and discourse analysis, but, as an ethnographer, he is most at home working in diverse settings, tracing the educational trajectories of learners and finding pedagogic solutions to the challenges faced by teachers. His most recent book is *Language and Migration* (Routledge, 2021)