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Greek Language and Multilingualism Laboratory (GLML)

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Greek and English (not) taken for granted:
Issues of practiced language policy in the education
with refugee children in Greece.



Strasbourg, September
2021

Outline

- 'Default' language policy for refugees in Greece
- Evidence from research and multilingual interventions in refugee classes
- Implications for language policy: collaborative, 'practiced', context-based decisions

- **Acknowledgement:**

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Language education Policy for Refugees in Greece

From 2015

and the so-called 'refugee crisis' (the other way round, we perceive it as 'reception crisis')
to 2020

and the pandemic outbreak (which meant the almost total exclusion of refugees from Greek schools),

educational policy and schooling in Greece for refugee children and adolescents, despite some achievements and the hard work of people involved, has been criticised as:

- Ineffective (less than half of school-age refugee children were receiving any schooling in early 2020).
- Unfair (DYEP classes were set up segregating refugee from children in mainstream schools).

'Default' Language Policy for Refugees in Greece

The DYEP (Classes for Reception and Education of Refugees) curriculum included intensive **Greek, English**, maths, computer science, physical education, and art.

The choice of Greek and English (among other possible languages) was not documented, not justified, not discussed: a 'default', implicit language policy.

Greek: the national language of the country (& the monolingual ideology)

English: the language of international communication (& the instrumentality in language use).

Greek national school system: (Modern) **Greek** the language of instruction, **English** is the 1st 'foreign' language, offered to more and more early classes (in preschool classes and the age of 4, from the current school year), then French or German is offered from grade 5 (age of 11) as a 2nd 'foreign' language. However, the essential of language learning is considered to happen in **private language schools** that function outside the school system and are a burden on the families budget. Regional and migrant languages are **not** included in the national curriculum.

‘Default’ Language Policy for Refugees in Greece (2)

This “default” choice effects (or coincides with) the policy with other actors and stakeholders working in the field of refugee education in Greece.

Example 1: UNHCR

19 Sep 2019

With global forced displacement reaching historic levels, schools all over the world, including in Europe and in Greece, are welcoming increasing numbers of refugee children. Teachers are facing new challenges in making sense of the complexities of forced displacement and explaining the situation of refugees and migrants to primary and secondary school children. At the same time, they may have limited access to training and guidance on how to better integrate refugee students in their classrooms. In the framework of its efforts to support teachers and schools in Europe, the Regional Bureau for Europe of UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, has created a new collection of teaching materials on these topics, which are available free-of-charge in the [English](#) and [Greek](#) languages.

Example 2: ASB (an NGO)



Funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund of the European Union



Lessons

[Home](#) / [Diavata](#) / **Lessons**



- Children
- Youth
- Adults

- Children
- Youth
- Adults

- Other
- Math

‘Practiced’ language policy and ‘legitimate’ languages in the refugee context in Greece

What happens in refugee education contexts in Greece?

Could this ‘default’ policy with two schools languages be different?

What could be the ‘legitimate’ (=appropriate, Heller 1996) languages for this context?

Classes with refugees in Greece are multi-diverse in terms of languages and cultures. **Translanguaging** is present in the classroom and is dominant in the schoolyard.

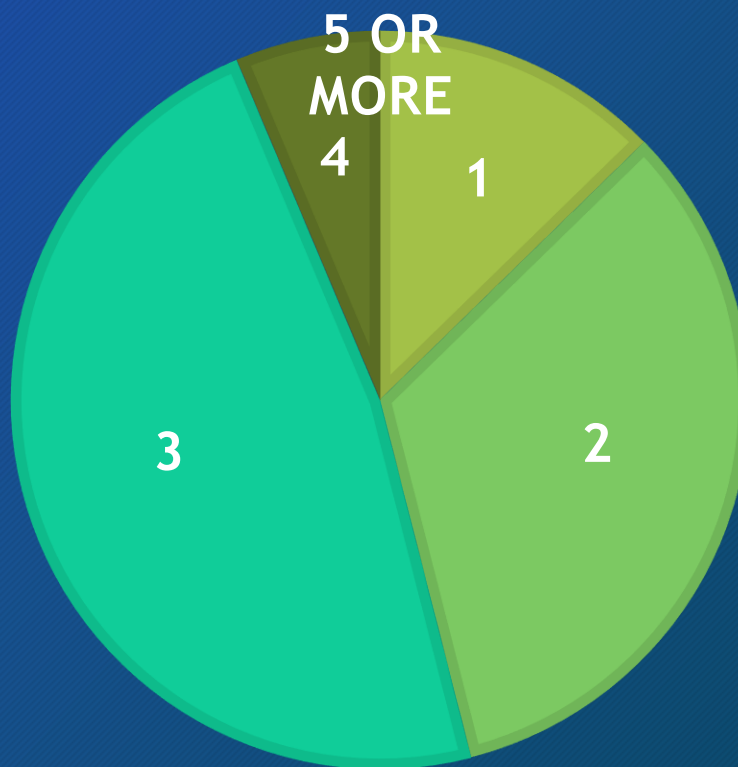
Let’s not be simplistic with this complexity!

This diversity is observed by the researchers, and is also revendicated by the young refugees, and their families.

Here are some findings from our research in 2019 and 2020 in two refugee camps in Thessaly with two groups of refugee students, one with Arabic and one with Kurdish language background.

Children and adolescents (8-15 years old) with Arabic as main family language (N=63)

HOW MANY LANGUAGES DO YOU SPEAK?
(SINGLE ANSWER REQUIRED)

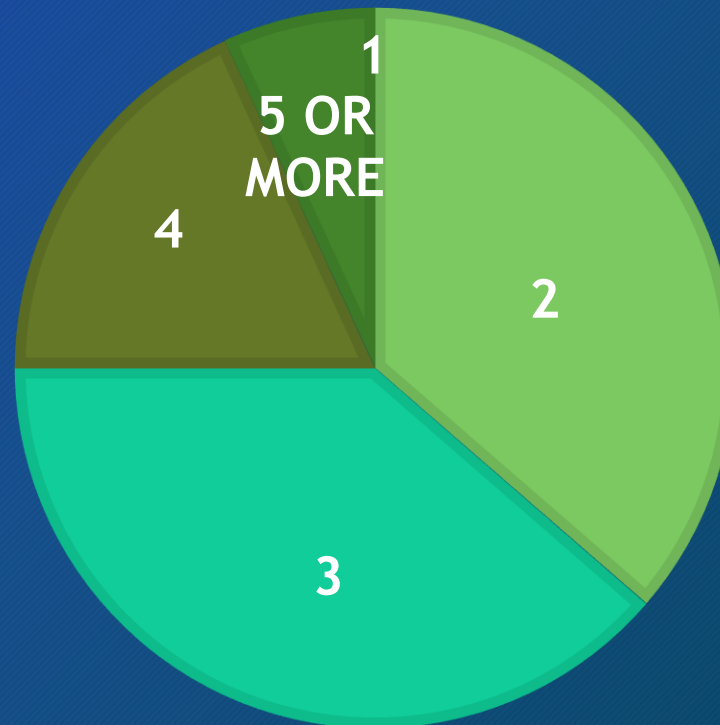


1 L. = 8
2 L. = 21
3 L. = 30
4 L. = 4
5 OR MORE = 0

Children and adolescents (8-15 y) with Kurdish (Kurmanji, Xwarin, Sorani) as main family language (N=44)

HOW MANY LANGUAGES DO YOU SPEAK?
(SINGLE ANSWER REQUIRED)

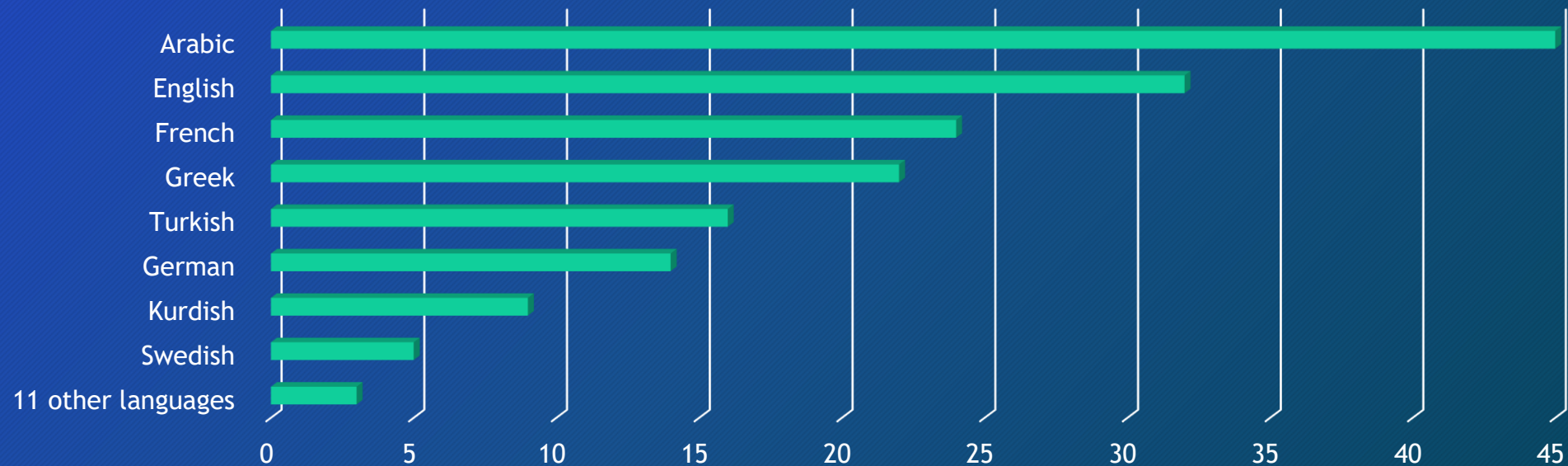
■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5 or more



1 L. = 0
2 L. = 16
3 L. = 17
4 L. = 8
5 OR MORE = 3

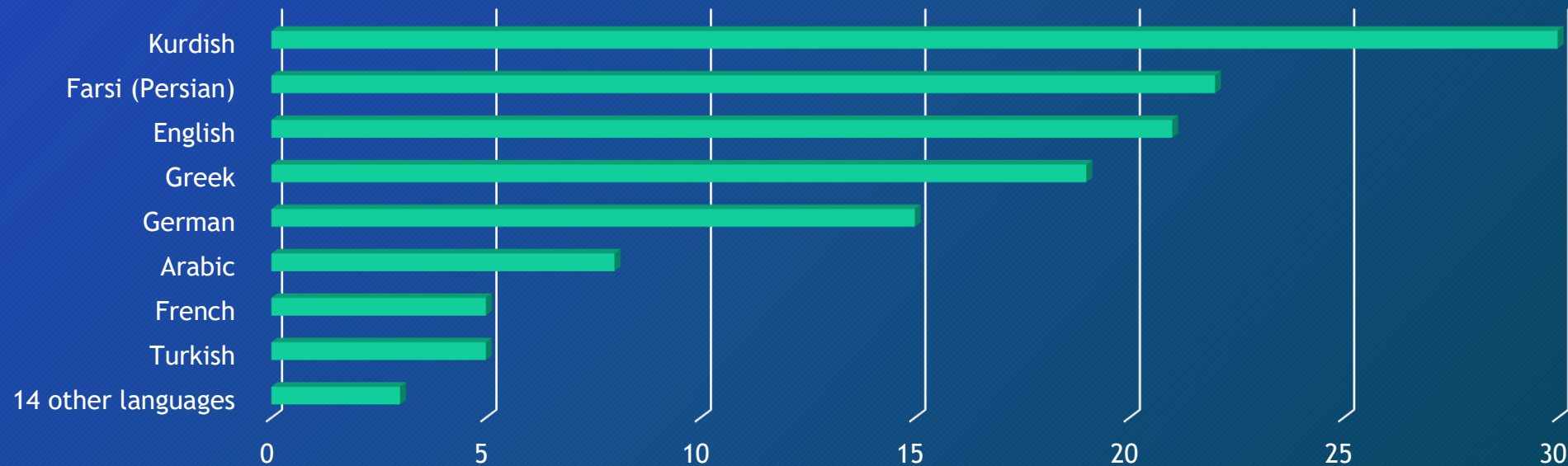
Children and adolescents (8-15 y) with Arabic as main family language (N=63)

Which languages would you like to study (or continue to study) while staying in Greece? (*multiple answers possible*)



Children and adolescents (8-15 y) with Kurdish (Kurmanji, Xwarin, Sorani) as main family language (N=44)

Which languages would you like to study (or continue to study) while staying in Greece? (*multiple answers possible*)



The greater picture ...

(UNHCR Report, 2020)

- 73% of refugees live in neighbour countries of their countries of origin
- 60% of refugees live in cities
- 80% of refugees are displaced for at least 5 years
- 55% of refugees have lived for at least 1 year in at least 3 different countries

... and back to the 'default' language policy

So, why **Greek** and **English** as languages that refugees should learn?

Behind this choice: the assumption that they would stay in Greece...

... but this happened in 2016 - it hasn't changed as language policy decision, but policy changes!

Refugee policy changes ... this way!



Language policy for refugees: to do what?

- to face uncertainty and make a place
- to prepare for mobility
- to become aware of inequities and opportunities
- to build a future.

Need to move:

from an instrumental approach of languages
towards more inclusive, relational language practices.

Interventions based on multilingualism and creativity

- a number of projects coordinated by GLML¹ with task-based language learning as a starting point, and with translanguaging and arts-based pedagogy as key factors: examples of ‘practiced’ language policy made more explicit.
- Context-dependent language policy decisions: **every class chooses its own target-languages** (‘situated language policy’), and we pilot materials, and train teachers to adapt ‘pluralistic approaches’² to languages and cultures, and creative inquiry³.

1 greeklanguagelab.pre.uth.gr

2 carap.ecml.at

3 <https://creativeinquiryaila.wordpress.com>

Prerequisites for application at school level

- In countries with a centralized education system and language policy, schools are generally not seen as possible fields of language policy. It is crucial that **educators are trained** and acquire, among other capacities, a common understanding of concepts and methods.
- A **feeling of belonging and ownership** of any intervention must be shared **by all participants**, and this takes time and effort. Continuous attention must be paid to participants' questions, reflection and interpretation on all stages and issues of the intervention.
- A mindset of **research and collaboration** is a key element for any teachers' capacity building.

Implications and Conclusions (1/2)

- Evidence from the evaluation of our multilingual interventions in non-formal and formal education settings shows an important **satisfaction** felt by both teachers and students, and a **raise of awareness**.
- Language policy is shaped by “**discursive practices**, which in turn are embedded in the multiple **contextual and semiotic resources** available in specific social activities and environments” (Leppänen & Piirainen-Marsh 2009)
- Emphasis is placed on **political clarity** rather than political correctness. Language educators talk, and classes discuss about rights, oppression, and causes of inequities, so that students understand the processes and develop the tools to disrupt the system generating them.

Implications and Conclusions (2/2)

- A more open, situated and practiced view of language and language-in-education policy meets the principles of critical linguistics, with a primary concern for (in)equality, (in)justice, linguistic discrimination, and language rights.
- Legal, economic, cultural factors should be taken into consideration, but inclusion or exclusion **policies** are object of **political** debate, especially in times of COVID-19.
- “What?” and “How?” are important in the process of language policy selection and design! But a focus on “**why?**” is crucial!

Thank you!

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