

# TIRF TODAY

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Promoting research and effective practices in English language education for the global knowledge economy in the 21st century

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## Anaheim University Sponsors Research Initiative

TIRF is pleased to announce a new initiative funded by a major contribution from Anaheim University (AU), for the purpose of investigating online language teacher education. The donation comes as the result of a challenge offered by Dr. David Nunan, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the AU Graduate School of Education, and a member of TIRF's Board of Trustees.

Dr. William Hartley, the AU President said, "Anaheim University's commitment to the betterment of English language teacher education led to our recent donation to The International Research Foundation for English Language Education. Our admiration for the work that is done by TIRF inspired Anaheim University to make a \$30,000 commitment towards a three-year research project which will investigate online language teacher education. It is our hope that through this pledge and research project that Anaheim University and TIRF will have a significant impact on online language teacher education around the globe."

Dr. Hartley added, "Anaheim University strives to assist the fields of TESOL and Applied Linguistics in various ways, including the sponsorship of seminars, conferences, and academic symposiums, as well as through contributions to the various professional organizations that strengthen and promote our field."

The TIRF Board is grateful to Anaheim University for this generous contribution, and to David Nunan for initiating the challenge. Future issues of *TIRF Today* will provide more details about the project.



David Nunan (left) and David Bracey, AU Managing Director of Development (right), present a check to TIRF President Kathi Bailey.

## Needed Research: Online Teacher Education in TESOL

**Editor's Note:** This story was written by TIRF Board member, David Nunan, who has been providing online teacher education for over a decade.

With the emergence of English as a global language has come a massive increase in the demand around the world for suitably qualified English language teachers. Resources for educating these teachers are in short supply. Traditional brick-and-mortar institutions are unable to meet the demand, and, in many remote rural areas, they simply do not exist. Furthermore, many language teachers and prospective teachers need not only pedagogical and subject matter skills and knowledge, but must also enhance their own oral and written language skills.

It is against this background that online TESOL education has emerged as one of a number of solutions to the growing need for English teachers. By undertaking courses online, in-service teachers are able to remain in their posts rather than having to travel to gain access to further education. Thus the online option has a number of benefits, not the least of which is that teachers do not have to give up their jobs, uproot their families, etc., in order to enhance their professional knowledge and skills.

By remaining in employment while they pursue professional development, in-service teachers are also able to contest the content of their academic study against the realities of their local teaching situation. They can try out what they are learning with their own students. Pre-service teachers can also benefit by gaining exposure to and guided practice with a substantial number of ideas before they enter the classroom.

Anyone who has taught online quickly learns that while some face-to-face teaching skills transfer to online learning environments, many do not. When working in the new medium, teacher educators need to develop new skill sets in all areas of program planning, delivery, and evaluation. At present, however, there is not a substantial body of research about effective practices in online teacher education. There is currently a critical need for the generation and dissemination of such research. Through the generosity of Anaheim University, TIRF will be able to expand its current research priority on teacher education to include the online delivery of such training programs.



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**Apologies!**

In the April issue of *TIRF Today*, we erroneously reported that Dr. Kara McBride earned her PhD from St. Louis University. In fact, Dr. McBride received her degree from the University of Arizona, and currently works at St. Louis University.



**Kathleen Bailey,  
Chair of TIRF**

**Sheikh Nahayan Fellow Investigates English in Lebanon**



**Dr. Fatima Esseili**

**TIRF:** Your dissertation entitled, “English in Lebanon: Implications for National Identity and Language Policy,” provides a socio-linguistic profile of English in Lebanon. What were major findings?

**Dr. Esseili:** I would like to discuss five major findings from my research. They include:

1. English is taking over French in many venues in Lebanon. When it comes to communicating with close family members, participants prefer to use Lebanese Arabic (LA). When communicating with their friends or partner, participants were almost equally divided between using LA and a combination of LA and a foreign language.
2. No significant difference was found between Christians and Muslims in relation to language choice.
3. Fifteen percent of participants who learned English as a first foreign language did not have a second foreign language. Being multilingual is considered an identity marker even for those who reported that their proficiency level in the third language is minimal.
4. The concepts of mother tongue, home language, and first language were not found to mean the same thing for participants, but more research must be done on this issue. This finding and the third one above were restricted to public schools.

5. Interviews with teachers identified many challenges facing policy makers in Lebanon. The most important finding was related to textbook choice in private schools, and how books are often adapted from the US without consideration of the local needs. Teachers identified locally published government textbooks as a total failure. Another important finding was related to teaching conditions: Teachers are overloaded with work, have no support, and are underpaid.

**TIRF:** Based on your research, what language policy changes would you recommend in Lebanon?

**Dr. Esseili:** There are a number of language policy changes that could be done. First, the government could encourage the use of Arabic more. Currently, the language policy indirectly encourages the use of foreign languages at the expense of Arabic. Students in schools are not able to function in all domains of Arabic, and teachers in some private schools are forced to use foreign languages to explain Arabic texts. In addition, Lebanese youth use a mix of languages when they speak because they are unaware of any Arabic equivalent for the word they would like to use. Language mixing is also a sign of status and an identity marker since many young people believe that only the Lebanese speak that way and are unique. Another recommendation could be related to textbook choice, teacher preparation, and teaching conditions. Textbooks must be adapted to the local context. Teachers believe that the textbooks currently used do not pre-

pare students for official exit exams, and students are not encouraged to use foreign language for communicative purposes. Lack of government inspection and support in public schools adds up to teachers' lack of motivation.

**TIRF:** With so many recent political changes in the Middle East, do you see language skills and cultural knowledge as keys to peace?

**Dr. Esseili:** Ideally, language skills and cultural knowledge, among other things, play a role in peace and opening bridges of communication with other cultures. However, in the Middle East, the situation is complicated and other things need to be solved before we are able to achieve peace. In terms of education and languages, there's inequality. There's inequality in acquiring foreign languages and in access to education in the Middle East in general and Lebanon in particular. There's inequality in terms of hiring qualified individuals. Even if such individuals get into important positions, they're often not allowed to make significant changes. Favoritism and nepotism are two major ailments that the Middle East suffers from. The problem in Lebanon is not that we are not educated enough to be able to achieve internal peace. It is a multicultural society, and many people speak two or three languages. The problem is with the entire sectarian system, and with the fear of the *other* that political leaders have been infusing in the hearts and minds of the youth. We don't have citizenship education, but unfortunately we have good sectarian education. This is how our future generations are raised: with sectarian spirit where one's sect and political party are more important than one's country. Of course there are exceptions, but I am talking about the general trend. It is when you change the education system to make it inclusive rather than exclusive, when you unify history textbooks, when you focus on citizenship education, when you create equality in opportunities, and when you start focusing on similarities while acknowledging differences that we might achieve peace.

**TIRF:** If you could influence TIRF donors, what kind of research initiatives would you like to see TIRF support? That is, what topics do you think are most important to investigate?

**Dr. Esseili:** I would like to see more support for research related to public schools and universities, and teacher preparation. I would also like to see more support for research that aims at designing local curricula and creating foreign language textbooks (with authentic materials), rather than importing curricula (and universities, as is the current trend) and textbooks from the US or the UK and implementing them without adaptation to the local environment. Finally, the status of Arabic is deteriorating in many venues in the Arab world. This is partly due to associating Arabic with Islam and implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) associating the latter with terrorism, and partly due to the rise of the US as a global power and the spread of English as a world language.

**Report from the Chair — “All Things Seem Possible”**

At the risk of seeming northern hemisphere-centric, I want to use a quote from the naturalist Edwin Way Teale, who wrote, "The world's favorite season is the spring. All things seem possible in May." Indeed it seems for TIRF that May has been a month of amazing possibilities!

First, we have received many case reports for the new workforce

training research project. Our wonderful team of authors, Tony Fitzpatrick and Robert O'Dowd, are working with the case contributors now and soliciting further case reports from regions and sectors that are not yet represented in the data base.

In terms of new business, I am delighted to announce the fantastic three-year gift from Anaheim Uni-

versity. This grant will be used to expand TIRF's current research priority on teacher education to include a new focus on online teacher education. I am grateful to the administration and Board members of Anaheim University, for their support and their vision in making this gift.

*Kathi Bailey*