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# Why English lessons are not the answer to radicalisation

David Cameron has announced £20m of extra funding to provide classes for Muslim women in the UK

Frank Monaghan | Monday 25 January 2016 |  14 comments



The Prime Minister's announcement has come in for harsh criticism *Getty Images*

David Cameron used an article in [The Times](#) and an interview on

Radio 4's **Today** show to announce £20m of extra funding to provide English lessons for Muslim women in the UK to prevent them from becoming “second-class citizens”.

The Prime Minister's announcement has come **in for harsh criticism**, particularly **his implication** that not speaking English was tied up with a person's identity and could make someone “more susceptible to the extremist message”.

As a researcher studying the teaching of English as an additional language, my main problem with the proposal is the underlying assumption that if mothers could only speak English fluently then their children would not become radicalised.



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This monolingual view of family life ignores the fact that these same mothers will be doubtless trying to raise their children to have sound ethics and morals, ready to make a contribution to society just like any good English-speaking mother – just through another language.

We have no evidence to suggest that there is any link at all between parental level of English and extremism, quite the opposite. Look, for example, at how **some of the appeals** made by parents of would-be Jihadis who have run off to Syria, are made in entirely fluent Standard English, often with regional accents.

Parents of Aqsa Mahmood, wife of ISIS...



An appeal made by a man whose daughter has gone to Syria.

A **2014 study** on people's vulnerability to radicalisation found that migrants not born in the UK, from poorer backgrounds and with strong links to their community were less likely to be radicalised than those from more privileged backgrounds. The English language is not the only form of "social capital" that fights extremism.

## Hypocrisy in a landscape of cuts

Others have expressed further concerns about the new policy. **Martin Doel**, chief executive of the Association of Colleges, pointed out that this new funding, though welcome, "does not make up for a 50% (£160m) reduction in the funds available for teaching ESOL [English for speakers of other languages] courses between 2008 and 2015". Of this, **£45m** was as recently as July last year.

This recent cut alone was, according to Doel, likely to lead to the closure of as many as 47 colleges offering ESOL classes affecting

17,000 students. While £20m in extra funding may sound a lot, if there actually are some 190,000 Muslim women in need of English tuition – as the **Prime Minister claimed** – this would amount to £100 a head. That won't go far and appears hypocritical in the face of the **wider funding squeeze** facing adult education.



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Others, including the National Association for Teaching English and Community Languages, **have questioned** the prioritisation of Muslim women, arguing that to “ensure all migrants integrate successfully into British life ... more funding needs to be made available to support both men and women from all religious backgrounds so that they can learn English”.

The main concern over the initiative appears to be suspicions about the government's motives, with critics alarmed at **the association** the Prime Minister has made between a lack of English and vulnerability to extremism.

A further concern is over the possibility of deporting mothers if they fail to make sufficient progress in English after two and a half years. “You can’t guarantee you’ll be able to stay if you’re not improving your language,” **Cameron said**.

Any question that **a spousal visa** application could be denied to women who fail an English language test could have extremely serious implications for families. Legal experts **have been quick to point out** that such deportations could be challenged under the Human Rights Act.

## Security creep into language lessons

Perhaps the answer to why the government insists with a ramping up of these kind of policies lies in the concept of **“securitisation”**. This has been explained by language scholar Kamran Khan as the process through which successive UK governments since 9/11 have forged the link between language, immigration and the threat of extremism.

The links are not hard to trace. Back in 2001, speaking in the **House of Commons** following local rioting involving Asian youths, Anne Cryer, the Labour MP for Keighley, said:

We need to examine why those young Asian men were so keen to join in the criminal activity ... There is little point in blaming the situation simply on racism and Islamophobia ... The main cause is the lack of a good level of English, which stems directly from the established tradition of bringing wives and husbands from the sub-continent who have often had no education and have no English.

In 2002, the National Immigration and Asylum Act required that immigrants have “sufficient knowledge” of English for citizenship. Three years later the **Life in the UK** citizenship test was introduced, testing both English and knowledge of British life. A speaking and listening component was added to the test in 2013 – adding on another layer of difficulty to passing the test.

We knew that there would be further incentives and penalties introduced in order to make people learn English, thanks to indications given in a 2015 speech by the home secretary,

**Theresa May.**

But if the government is seriously considering it acceptable to break up families because a mother has failed to make “sufficient progress” in her English, then we should all start to worry about who exactly are the extremists and just where the real threats to our civil society and its values lie.

***Frank Monaghan, Senior Lecturer in Education and Language Studies, The Open University***

***This article was originally published on The Conversation. Read the original article.***

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101 days ago

Very nice mosque ,wonder if I could build a Christian church like that in a Muslim state?

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**Indy Rhodes**

101 days ago

You could build a church (if you wanted to) in Pakistan, or Egypt, or Tunisia, or Iran, or Turkey, or Jordan, or Qatar or Kuwait. Glad to help you answer your question.

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+1 likes

**scepticism50**

102 days ago

Mohammedanism is in its central beliefs opposed to western liberal democratic values - the only wonder is that more of its adherents do not act on the precepts of their faith to attack more of the non-believers in societies that have (misguidedly) allowed them to settle and given them refuge. No education of any kind is going to alter the facts nor their faith.

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"Mohammedanism"? Do you mean Islam?

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**dogs\_crapping\_on\_jupiter**

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Same shyte

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**Wally**

101 days ago

mohammedanism is the terroristic practice that was started by the arab mohammad. he called it islam, he started it with the sword and proclaimed himself commander in chief. he also made the rules up as he pillaged his way around arabia. Glad to help you answer your question.

Reply Share

0 likes  **David**

102 days ago

Surely Frank is not opposed to education; hard to see any real substance to this.

Reply Share 1 reply

+1 likes  **FrankMonaghan**

100 days ago

Yes, I do believe in education and I welcome the small claw-back this represents in relation to the previous cuts. What my argument is with is the linking of the English language to anti-extremist values and Muslim women to the spread of extremism. Identifying the wrong target is dangerous for all of us.

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0 likes  **bobby**

102 days ago

The Females are as conniving as their males. They are hedging their bets that this mid east invasion will meet a final successful goal for them collectively, hence they will stick with their own ilk in every way, shape and form.

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+2 likes  **Indy Rhodes**

102 days ago

 I think you are paranoid.

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-1 likes  **real\_\_world**

102 days ago

The answer is simple -

Hanging for terrorist offenses and castration & penectomy for sexual attacks on women, they won't be repeat offenders with these punishments. Problem solved !

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0 likes  **Happy2**

102 days ago

Learning English isn't sufficient answer...

...educating Muslim women that they don't have to succumb to 7th century Sharia modesty & segregation rules...written by

men for men...would be the greatest leap forward!

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+3 likes  



**FrankMonaghan**

100 days ago

I agree with you, as do many Muslim women and men and the education about that truth need not and indeed does not come through English language classes.

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0 likes  

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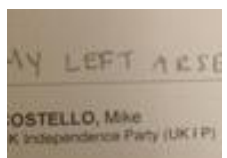
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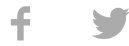
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