



Exploring the importance of Mayan-language healthcare provision in rural Yucatán: Sharing perceptions from parents, teachers, and healthcare providers: Executive Summary

This briefing paper outlines the conclusions reached by a research project that took place in January 2020, on the cusp of the Covid-19 pandemic. Researchers from The University of Sheffield in United Kingdom and Loughborough University in the United Kingdom, and Universidad Modelo and Cinvestav of Mexico, collaborated on gathering qualitative data via focus groups and interviews, in a rural community. The project gathered support from the Secretariat of Education and the Secretariat of Health in Yucatan. The research was funded by the Royal Academy of Engineering, and the British Academy.

Our **findings** suggest the following:

- There remains a strong reliance on the Mayan language, especially among the older generation (grandparents), but also at parental level. This reliance is embedded both at an emotional level (to encourage family cohesion, identity, and belonging) and at practical level, i.e. in being able to understand healthcare information in Mayan.
- The current generation of parents carries a significant burden as enablers, translators, and as the language “bridge”, both between older and younger generations, as well as in healthcare contexts, providing support and translation as necessary.
- Teachers in schools, and healthcare staff, do generally not feel confident in their Mayan language skills, and state that they rely on support from community members. This support is often opportunistic, relying on chance or luck, which is problematic in instances where urgent or consistent language support is needed.
- Schools have an important role within the community to educate children about basic healthcare, including personal hygiene such as washing hands, use of antibacterial gel, how to take care of hygiene materials, and handling of clean drinking water. There is, at the moment, no clear pathway to utilise these communication channels to influence community behaviour at a higher level, and all such teaching takes place in Spanish.
- Professionals working in the community (both teachers and healthcare staff) have had erratic opportunities to develop Mayan language skills as part of training and professional development, and are typically not confident in using the Mayan language professionally. They state they understand some Mayan words but will be at a loss to understand full sentences and, in many instances, to contextualise the very few words they understand.

We therefore, based on our findings, make the following **recommendations**:

- Conduct further research into reliance on community members as translators, especially in light of current Covid-19 crisis.
- Increase and enhance training opportunities both in teacher training and in healthcare education, to increase competence in the Mayan language, and understanding of links between language and identity.
- Work with communities to gain a better understanding of how community members view and utilise the healthcare centre in conjunction with traditional healers.
- Explore opportunities for schools to take on an enhanced role in becoming a conduit for healthcare communication in both Spanish and Mayan, building on parental engagement in order to drive community healthcare education. Through this, acknowledge and validate the multilingual Mayan identity.

A full academic paper outlining the study in more detail has been submitted for publication.