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Do multilingual teachers make the difference? Evaluating the potential
language resource of primary school teachers

Do Multilingual Teachers Make the Difference? Evaluating the Potential Language Resource of Primary School Teachers and Their Cultural Beliefs

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Article Info	Abstract
	This paper explores the language usage of multilingual teachers and how this relates to their cultural beliefs. A key question is whether multilingual primary school teachers' experiences of language and cultural diversity relate to cultural beliefs different from those of their monolingual colleagues or from multilingual teachers who do not use their first language in the school context (with students or with parents). Conducting secondary analysis of open access data on primary school teachers from the German National Education Panel Study (NEPS), this question is investigated based on propensity score matching for three subsamples. The results show that only 30% of multilingual teachers regularly use their non-German first language with students; when dealing with parents, this proportion drops even further. Moreover, the potential resource of multilingualism does not appear to result in disparities in the cultural beliefs of primary school teachers. The only difference revealed by the analysis was on the subscale of assimilative cultural beliefs, where multilingual teachers tend to hold weaker pronounced beliefs. Overall, the analysis cannot empirically confirm the expected benefits for multilingual elementary teachers using their first language skills.

Introduction

In German primary schools, social diversity is reflected – for example – in the presence of multilingualism. There was a clear increase from 16% (in 2008) to 21% (in 2021) of children between three to school entry, who speak predominantly a non-German language at home (Autor: innengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2022, p. 107). Both teachers and students bring linguistic diversity into primary schools. This article examines the use of multilingualism as a potential resource in the school context with reference to teachers' cultural beliefs, which is relevant from a perspective of professional theory. The term 'resource multilingualism' refers in this article to the teachers' use of external multilingualism due to origin – referring to a command of other languages in addition to German as the language of

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instruction in the classroom or in school-related interactions (such as informal exchanges with students or in parental work). A sample of primary school teachers surveyed within the framework of the German National Educational Panel Study (NEPS) was used as a basis to investigate the following questions: How common do teachers use their non-German first language in the school context and how frequently do they do so? What differences are there in cultural beliefs between teachers who are multilingual or monolingual? What differences are there in cultural beliefs between teachers who use or do not use their multilingualism in the school context? For this purpose, three comparison groups were identified using propensity score matching (PSM) and their cultural beliefs were compared. The upstream PSM ensured that the primary school teachers were comparable in selected structural characteristics (e.g. professional experience) and that possible biases were excluded. Thus, conducting PSM allowed for the statistical comparison of subsamples which were comparable in selected structural characteristics such as the teachers' professional experience.

Multilingualism as a potential resource

In recent years, a paradigm shift can be observed in the German academic discourse of education: The ability to use several languages is increasingly viewed positively, moving away from the previously dominant deficit-oriented view that equated multilingualism with an expectation of limited German language skills and poor school performance in general (Gogolin, 2017). In this context, multilingualism is increasingly referred to as a 'resource' (Fleckenstein et al., 2018; Hu & Saint-Georges, 2020). In general, a distinction can be made between three resource dimensions: (1) Linguistic competence as "the available multilingual repertoire and all associated additional cognitive effects"; (2) Language usage as "use of the repertoire in the context of multilingual communication practices"; and (3) Language product as "concrete linguistic expression as a result of multilingual use" (Kropp, 2017, p. 116). Origin-related multilingualism is described in e.g. the German Education Report 2016 (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2016, p. 162) as an "additional resource" that can potentially offer opportunities for students' learning. This means, for example, advantages in terms of cognitive development, language awareness or foreign language learning (detailed: Cenoz, 2013). In contrast to existing studies on the potential resource of multilingualism among students, this study focuses on *teachers* and their multilingualism (cf. Lengyel, 2017, p. 154) as a potential resource for pedagogical work in primary schools. For this analysis, the issue is not the teachers' linguistic ability, but how they *actually use* their multilingualism in their dealings with students and their parents. The article thus focuses on the above-mentioned resource dimension (2) "language usage as use of the repertoire in the context of multilingual communication practices". The assumption is that multilingual teachers have a more extensive individual experience of linguistic and cultural diversity, potentially leading to a more pronounced multilingual awareness (Otwinowska, 2017) and manifesting itself in more strongly held multicultural beliefs (Magaldi et al., 2018; Syring et al., 2019). The relevance of focussing on teachers' beliefs is derived from a theoretical perspective on pedagogical professionalism, where teachers' beliefs are attributed an action-controlling function (Baumert & Kunter, 2006). However, there is a dearth of studies that generate differentiated

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knowledge about the connections between a teacher's beliefs and their behaviour. Thus, there is currently a need for research into the extent to which resource-oriented expectations of multilingual teachers are fulfilled. This study investigates connections between multilingualism and the beliefs of teachers that not only possess this resource as a teacher with a migration background, but also actually use it in the school context.

A critical look at education policy expectations and educational research

In 2007 and subsequent years, the Federal Government of Germany called for an increase in the proportion of teachers at German schools with a migration background (e.g. Presse- und Informationsdienst der Bundesregierung, 2007). This demand was linked to the educational policy expectation that teachers with experiences of migration, who often also speak non-German first languages, have special competences in dealing with a migration-related heterogeneous student body in teaching (Rotter, 2015). Similarly, it is also being discussed in the early childhood sector, whether early childhood teachers with a migration background have a specific 'resource' that can compensate for disadvantages based on ethnic origin on part of the children (cf. Kratzmann et al., 2017; Sachverständigenrat deutscher Stiftungen für Integration und Migration, 2014). However, the studies that have emerged in the aftermath show only limited support for confirming this expectation. Within the framework of the German National Educational Panel Study (NEPS), Neugebauer and Klein (2016), for instance, investigated whether children with a migration background benefit in terms of competence development from early childhood teachers who also have a migration background. Furthermore, it was initially assumed that an increasing proportion of professionals with migration background would result in closer parental contact of families with migration background with the day care center. However, their study findings did neither show higher competences nor closer cooperation.

Mantel and Leutwyler (2013) criticise the studies conducted to date for basing attributions in favour of 'teachers with a migration background' on an essentialist understanding of culture. The findings that have so far emerged suggest that the category 'migration background' is too generalising and fails to provide sufficient differentiation. Moreover, as Scarvaglieri and Zach (2013) point out, the term "migration background" is predominantly associated with deficit perspectives and thus discriminating. Further, Pohlmann-Rother & Lange (2020) problematise an unreflective equation of multilingualism and migration background, which is reinforced by the different ways in which the construct of migration background is operationalised (further reading: Maehler et al., 2016). In this context, it is problematic that intersectional overlaps (Walgenbach, 2014) are often not taken into account. As Diehm, et al., (2010, p. 79) point out, a research object is also shaped by the analysis itself, for example by the categories used in the research process. Especially when using socially constructed differentiation categories (such as 'migration background'), Diehm and colleagues warn against the reification of social constructions (further reading: Hummrich and Rademacher 2013).

To discover more about teachers with migration biographies and the possible effects of these experiences on their pedagogical work, it would therefore seem advisable to take a more

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targeted look at possible differentiating characteristics (e.g. multilingualism). It should be noted that quantitative empirical research cannot entirely forgo categories for the operationalisation of theoretical constructs. Rather than focusing on the complex category of 'migration background', this paper aims to focus on a differentiating feature – that of multilingualism – as a frequently highlighted aspect in the context of migration. For this purpose, we distinguish between a socially constructed migration background and multilingualism as an individual characteristic. The aim is to avoid the difference perspectives that frequently overlap in the discourse (cf. Krueger-Potratz & Lutz, 2002) and the associated methodological fuzziness that can manifest itself in the operationalisation of an inappropriate equation. For teachers, multilingualism can be a resource offering five didactic functions in handling foreign first languages in class: i.e. social, identity-creating, supportive of language-acquisition, educational and subject-related functions (Lange & Pohlmann-Rother, 2020, p. 2-3). Further, a complementary function that is sensitive to difference and critical of discrimination is conceivable (cf. Dirim & Mecheril, 2018).

Recently, Hoeckel (2020) investigated whether teachers with a migration background affect secondary students' reading competence, showing that teachers with a migration background significantly increased students' reading comprehension. Furthermore, the analysis revealed that the positive effect was more pronounced for students with a migration background, which was attributed to the fact that teachers with a migration background serve as role models for these students. Even more interestingly, the positive effect was particularly large for the subsample of teachers with a non-German first language who significantly increase reading competencies in both native students and students without migrant background. Hoeckel (2020) therefore concluded that, based on their own experience in language learning, bilingual teachers seem extraordinarily well equipped to teach both native and migrant students.

The results of previous studies focusing on the multilingualism of teachers with a migration background have indicated that teachers with a non-German first language perceive and use their multilingualism as a potential resource in the school context only to a limited extent. The results of the Georgi (2011) study showed that teachers rarely use their non-German first languages in class or even consistently reject their use and insist on German as the language of instruction. However, in informal communication situations with students they do use their first language. Edelmann (2008, p. 198) also reported in her qualitative study from Switzerland that teachers use their first language in parental work *if* parents speak the same first language. Both studies provide only limited information about the extent to which teachers with a first language other than German use their multilingualism in everyday school life. There thus remains a need to illuminate the self-reported usage of teacher's non-German first language as potential 'resource multilingualism', which this article aims to address.

Cultural beliefs of teachers with migration background

This analysis is based on a competence-theoretical understanding of pedagogical professionalism, according to the theoretical model of Baumert and Kunter (2006). Beliefs are predominantly assigned to the affective-motivational area of professional competence, but it is assumed that this also includes cognitive components. There is broad agreement that

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beliefs have an orienting and action-guiding function for teachers and are therefore relevant in terms of guiding their actions and justifying their actions (cf. Skott, 2015). It is supposed that beliefs are based on experiences and that they structure and filter world perception (cf. Pajares, 1992). Moreover, it is assumed that teachers' beliefs are closely related to their personal experiences during their own education (Hammer et al., 2016). Various studies point to the close connection between teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning and their teaching actions (Buehl & Beck, 2015; Voss et al., 2011). For example, teachers with strong transmissive beliefs (i.e. learning as predominantly teacher-led) provide less cognitively activating instruction, whereas teachers with constructivist beliefs (i.e. learning as a process) show higher cognitive activation in teaching (Voss et al., 2011). Current research indicates a contrast between on the one hand teachers' open-mindedness in their beliefs towards multilingual practices in class and on the other hand their dominating monolingual teaching practice (Triulzi & Maahs, 2021).

The changes in the (cultural) diversity of the primary school context, especially in terms of the increasing cultural heterogeneity of the student body, has led to increased interest in teachers' cultural beliefs in the context of teachers' action. Beliefs about cultural heterogeneity or cultural beliefs are understood by Hachfeld et al., 2012, p. 107) as "a person's enduring idea[s], subjective opinion[s] and expectation[s] about (the coexistence of) people of different cultural origins". According to this view, teachers differ in their beliefs regarding the cultural background of students and in whether and to what extent this is taken into account as a criterion of difference in their teaching.

How do teacher multilingualism and its use in the school context relate to cultural beliefs? The question of teachers' cultural beliefs and their variability has often been explored in the context of the first phase of teacher education (Felbrich et al., 2010; cf. Schroedler & Fischer, 2020). For example, Syring et al. (2019) investigated whether student teachers with a migration background have differential beliefs about heterogeneous learning groups. They found that such student teachers have more favourable beliefs (e.g. higher motivation and higher perceived competence) than those without migration background. Only in one dimension, valuing heterogeneous learning groups, no significant differences emerge. However, our study focuses on the cultural beliefs of teachers actually *working* in *primary school*. Wischmeier (2012) as well as Edelmann (2008) investigated the significance of certain cultural beliefs of primary school teachers in relation to students with a migration background and found that these can be accompanied by prejudices or ethnic attributions. The only study we know of that differentiates between persons with and without a migration background in recording teacher cultural beliefs is the study by Hachfeld et al. (2012). That study evaluated data from 433 secondary school trainee teachers with and without a migration background to investigate the existence of any connection with cultural beliefs. The analysis revealed higher multicultural beliefs for participants with a migration background, which were in turn associated with higher self-efficacy and enthusiasm and lower levels of prejudice compared to teachers without a migration background. Overall, the results showed that it is not so much the migration background as the *cultural beliefs* that make a difference to facets of

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professional competence (Hachfeld et al., 2012). Following these results, we are interested in whether the advantages reported for teachers with a migration background can also be shown for multilingual primary school teachers.

Research desideratum & research questions

In summary, the few studies that have examined the cultural beliefs of working teachers do not differentiate between teachers who *have* and teachers who *use* the potential resource of multilingualism. This paper explores the research desideratum of whether multilingual teachers who make use of their multilingualism in everyday school life differ in their cultural beliefs from teachers who do not possess or do not use the potential resource of multilingualism. It seems reasonable to assume that multilingual teachers who use or do not use their first language in interactions with students and/or parents will differ in their cultural beliefs. This leads to two research questions for this paper:

1. How often do multilingual teachers use their non-German first language in the school context?

2. Do the cultural beliefs of multilingual teachers who have a non-German first language and who use that language in the school context differ from those of teachers who are monolingual or who are multilingual but do not use their non-German first language in the school context?

Method

To address these questions a secondary analysis of data from the German National Educational Panel Study (NEPS) is conducted[1]. The NEPS aims to collect data on the educational trajectory and competence development of individuals across their lifespan (cf. Blossfeld et al., 2011). Since the focus of this study is on the language use of primary school teachers, only data from the teachers surveyed in Starting Cohort 2 are analyzed. Due to the representative sampling of the NEPS Cohorts, the data involved 1.349 primary teachers from all Federal States of Germany.

Sample

The sample described below represents the sub-sample of primary school teachers from whom suitable pairs were drawn using the PSM (cf. 3.3). Information on gender is available from 1.349 primary school teachers (94.1% female). In response to the question about year of birth, 0.5% were born before 1950, 22.2% between 1950 and 1959, 24.6% between 1960 and 1969, 27.0% between 1970 and 1979 and 27.8% after 1979 (N = 1.316). The proportion of students with a migration background in their class reported by the teachers varied from 0 to 100 percent; on average, the teachers reported a proportion of just under 30 percent (N = 1.098, M = 29.36, SD = 24.90).

Dependent variable: Cultural beliefs

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[1] This paper uses data from the National Educational Panel Study (NEPS): Kindergarten Start Cohort, doi:10.5157/NEPS:SC2:6.0.1. NEPS data were collected from 2008 to 2013 (Wave 1) as part of the Framework Programme for the Promotion of Empirical Educational Research, which was funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). Since 2014, NEPS has been conducted by the Leibniz Institute for Educational Trajectories e.V. (LIfBi) at the Otto-Friedrich- University of Bamberg in cooperation with a Germany-wide network.

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To capture teachers' cultural beliefs, we used an instrument proposed by Hachfeld et al. (Hachfeld et al., 2012; Hachfeld and Profanter, 2018), which differentiates different areas of cultural beliefs and does not conceptualise them as opposites of *one* dimension; thus, this instrument goes beyond bipolar models (Hachfeld & Syring, 2020). Teachers indicated the extent to which they agreed with a total of eleven statements on a six-point rating scale (from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 6 = "strongly agree"). The subscale *multicultural beliefs* represents a general appreciation of cultural differences and the view that such differences should be taken into account in teaching practice (example item: "In the context of teaching, it is also important to address differences between different cultures."). The subscale *egalitarian beliefs* represents the emphasis on cultural similarities and the equal treatment of all students regardless of their cultural background (example item: "A goal of the school should be to promote commonalities among children from different cultural backgrounds."). The subscale *assimilative beliefs* represents the extent to which teachers expect students to adapt (example item: "Students with a migration background often have difficulties at school because they do not want to adapt to the German culture."). An exploratory factor analysis confirmed the scale structure with satisfactory internal consistencies for all three subscales (multicultural beliefs: 4 items, Cronbach's α = .69; egalitarian beliefs: 4 items, Cronbach's α = .83; assimilative beliefs: 3 items, Cronbach's α = .77).

Independent variables

Information gained from teachers about the language(s) they learned in the family and the use of these languages in the school context was divided into categories, which were used as independent variables[2].

Multilingualism: To determine whether teachers have the potential resource of multilingualism, they were asked "What language did you learn in your family as a child?". The majority of the teachers surveyed stated that they had only learned German (*n* = 1270; 97.8%). Only 1.0% (*n* = 13) of the teachers stated that they had learned German and at least one other language, and 1.2% (*n* = 16) stated that they had exclusively learned a language other than German in their family as a child. The first languages most frequently reported were Russian (*n* = 7; 24.1%) and Polish (*n* = 6; 20.7%), followed by Italian (*n* = 3; 10.3%) (Table 1 shows an overview of teachers' first languages).

Table 1. Overview of teachers' first languages

	Multilingual	
	N	%
Arabic	2	6,9
French	1	3,4
Greek	1	3,4
Italian	3	10,3
Kurdish	1	3,4

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[2] Teachers who did not state in the initial survey that they had learned a language other than German in the family were nevertheless able to answer the questions about the use of their other language with pupils or their parents at a later survey period. This results in inconsistencies in the sample size depending on the independent variable.

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Latvian	1	3,4
Polish	6	20,7
Romanian	2	6,9
Russian	7	24,1
Slovenian	1	3,4
Turkish	1	3,4
Not specified	3	10,3
	29	100%

Use of non-German first language with students: To record whether teachers use their multilingualism in the school context, they were asked "If you learned another language than German in your family as a child: How often do you use this language with your students?". The response options were "never" (1), "rarely" (2), "sometimes" (3), "often" (4), "always" (5).

Use of non-German first language with parents: As a second indicator of whether teachers use their multilingualism, they were asked "If you learned a language other than German as a child in your family: How often do you use this language with your students' parents?" with the response options "never" (1), "rarely" (2), "sometimes" (3), "often" (4), "always" (5).

Analysis strategy: Propensity score matching

The analyses are based on a PSM which controls for systematic biases in selected structural characteristics between subsamples. This allows a robust comparison of the variable of interest (cultural beliefs) between teachers who have and use the potential resource of multilingualism (study group) and teachers who are monolingual or do not use their first language in the school context (control group), as selection bias can be excluded. The estimation of propensity scores and the matching were carried out with the statistical programme STATA (command: psmatch2, Leuven & Sianesi, 2003). For this purpose, the probability (propensity scores) of belonging to the group of teachers with multilingualism or using the first language in dealing with students and parents were calculated from the available NEPS data using logistic regression (Caliendo & Kopeinig, 2005).

To estimate the propensity scores, the gender and age of the teachers as well as the proportion of children with a migration background in the class (in percent) were used as covariates as an indicator of the teachers' experience in dealing with multilingualism. This was because these are assumed to have a confounding influence. Independent sample t-tests conducted before the matching process confirm that the groups of teachers differ significantly in the covariates. Using the estimated propensity scores, corresponding cases were then drawn from the comparison group for each subsample that were as similar as possible to the distribution of the propensity scores of the study group. In doing so, the "single-nearest-neighbour without regression" method was used, whereby the random arrangement of the cases was considered in order to obtain equally sized, well-balanced samples against the background of the small numbers of cases in the study groups.

With this procedure, 29 pairs could be drawn for the subsample 'multilingualism', 70 pairs for the subsample 'use of first language with students' and 34 pairs for the subsample 'use of first language with parents'. Tests of matching using t-tests for independent samples show

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that the subsamples no longer differ in the covariates after the matching process, indicating successful matching in each case[3]. These three subsamples form the starting point for the further analysis, which was carried out with the statistical software IBM SPSS Statistics 24. Using t-tests, group differences were examined in terms of the dependent variable, i.e. cultural beliefs, between:

- the group of multilingual teachers and monolingual teachers (= subsample 'multilingualism'),

- the group of teachers who use the non-German first language with students (study group) and those who do *not* use the non-German first language with students (control group) (= subsample 'use of first language with students'),

- the group of teachers who use the non-German first language with parents (study group) and those who do *not* use the first language with parents (control group) (= subsample 'use of first language with parents').

Results

Teachers' use of non-German first languages in the school context

Responses to the question about the use of their non-German first language with students were available from a total of 242 teachers. The distribution of responses was as follows: 114 "never" (47.1%), 58 "rarely" (24.0%), 41 "sometimes" (16.9%), 22 "often" (9.1%), and 7 "always" (2.9%). These descriptive results showed that the proportion of primary school teachers who rarely or never use their first language is over 70%. In contrast, only 12% of teachers said they often or always use their first language in interactions with their students.

The results for interactions with parents were even more clearly to the disadvantage of the use of non-German first languages. A total of 237 teachers answered the question about how often they use their non-German first language with parents. The distribution of responses was as follows: 151 teachers stated that they "never" (63.7%), 52 "rarely" (21.9%), 20 "sometimes" (8.4%), 10 "often" (4.2%), and 4 "always" (1.7%) use their first language with their students' parents. In summary, the results showed that over 85% of teachers rarely or never use their first language with parents, while only just under 6% use it often or always.

Combining these findings about teachers' use of their non-German first language in interactions with students and parents, the following picture emerges: Within the group of teachers who use their non-German first language with parents, just under 80% of teachers also use their non-German first language in interaction with students (n = 27). Conversely, only about 40% who use their non-German first language with the students also use it with the parents (see Table 2).

Table 2. Consistency in teachers' use of their non-German first language with students or parents

	Use of first language with parents		
	yes	no	total

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[3] The tables of the t-tests verifying that the conditions for the matching are met can be requested from the authors.

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Use of first language with students	yes	27	39	66
	no	7	163	170
	total	34	202	236

Differences in cultural beliefs

The following analysis was conducted with the three named subsamples 'multilingualism', 'use of non-German first language with students', and 'use of non-German first language with parents' (cf. 3.3). The descriptive and inferential statistical measures are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Summary of the average value comparisons

	Control group			Study group					
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	t	df	p
Cultural beliefs									
Use of first language with students									
Multicultural beliefs	53	4,81	,54	41	4,69	,69	,965	92	,34
Egalitarian beliefs	53	4,84	,70	41	4,72	,68	,836	92	,41
Assimilative beliefs	51	3,49	,90	41	3,62	1,03	-,65	90	,52
Use of first language with parents									
Multicultural beliefs	24	4,74	,55	22	4,69	,50	,34	44	,73
Egalitarian beliefs	24	4,93	,81	22	4,66	,65	1,21	44	,23
Assimilative beliefs	23	3,80	,85	21	3,58	1,17	,71	42	,48
Multilingualism									
Multicultural beliefs	18	4,58	,59	19	4,88	,56	-1,58	35	,12
Egalitarian beliefs	18	4,69	,69	19	4,91	,69	-,96	35	,34
Assimilative beliefs	18	3,63	,68	17	3,12	,96	1,84	33	,075

The comparison of the average values in the 'multilingualism' subsample revealed that multilingual teachers tended to show higher agreement with multicultural beliefs (*M* = 4.88, *SD* = .56) and egalitarian beliefs (*M* = 4.91, *SD* = .69) than teachers who are monolingual (*M* = 4.58, *SD* = .59 and *M* = 4.69, *SD* = .69). However, these differences were not found to be significant. With regard to assimilative beliefs, multilingual teachers showed on average marginally significantly lower agreement (*M* = 3.12, *SD* = .96) in comparison to the monolingual teachers (*M* = 3.63, *SD* = .68) (*t*(33) = 1.84; *p* = .075).

In the subsamples 'Use of first language with students' and 'Use of first language with parents', no significant differences in the multicultural, egalitarian, and assimilationist beliefs were evident between teachers who use their first language with students or parents and teachers who do not use their first language.

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Overall, there were very few differences between the multilingual and monolingual teachers in terms of cultural beliefs. Both groups show strong multicultural and egalitarian beliefs. However, multilingual teachers tend to hold fewer assimilationist beliefs. In the subsamples 'Use of first language with students' and 'Use of first language with parents', no significant differences were found on any dimension of cultural beliefs.

Summary and discussion

The focus of this article is a topical issue with high socio-political and educational relevance, which ties in with current discussions within (empirical) educational research. Currently, the role of teachers' *beliefs* on multilingualism is intensely discussed in the international teacher research discourse (e.g. Lundberg & Brandt, 2023). A current scoping review reveals the increase of the research interest in multilingualism-related beliefs of primary school teachers on an international level within the period of the last ten years. Often the focus was on scale development or on connections with other aspects of professional competence. Thus, studies that focus on how these beliefs *affect* teacher behaviour or teacher-student interactions and performance are missing. At the same time, in recent years, many studies have surveyed migration background in a rather undifferentiated manner and have disregarded other lines of difference. Among many others, the first language/s of a teacher is one distinguishing facet of difference; the present article focuses on the possible resource of multilingual competencies and asks whether multilingual teachers have benefits in regard of their cultural beliefs due to them using their non-German first languages. The results presented shed light on the use of teachers' non-German first languages and the relationship to their multicultural, egalitarian, and assimilative beliefs.

The discussion on the potential of teachers with a migration background is strongly driven by education policy and is often normative. Viewing 'multilingualism as a resource' also is strongly normative, expressing a positive expectation of the advantages of people who have several languages at their disposal. However, and in contrast to the existing research on teachers with a migration background and its disparate body of findings (Mantel & Leutwyler, 2013), our study focused specifically on the multilingualism of primary school teachers – as a frequently emphasised characteristic from which advantages are expected. With this focus on the characteristics of multilingualism instead of a teacher's immigrant background, a more differentiated examination was aimed for, following the criticism of a categorisation practice that has turned out to be culturalising.

Our key findings can be summarised as follows: (1) The proportion of multilingual teachers who use their non-German first language in the school context in interactions with their students is only about 30%; in their dealings with parents, the teachers surveyed use their non-German first language even less frequently. It was also found that teachers who use their first language with students do not necessarily use it in communication with parents and vice versa. Thus, the potential of multilingualism as a meaningful social, identity-creating and supportive function hardly seems to be used in practice. So although there are efforts to open the school context for cultural experiences, monolingual practices at school are still

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prevailing. (2) Very few differences were evident in the cultural beliefs of primary school teachers depending on multilingualism as a potential resource. Only on the subscale of assimilative cultural beliefs it was found that multilingual teachers tend to have lower multilingual-oriented beliefs. Overall, the hoped-for advantages for primary school teachers who use their multilingualism in the school context could not be empirically proven. The extent to which multilingual teachers can thus function as "cultural bridge builders" (Georgi, 2013; Neugebauer & Klein, 2016) thus appears questionable. One possible explanation is the still powerful monolingual habitus (cf. Gogolin, 1994) in the German education system. The recorded relatively low frequency of the use of non-German first languages in the school context is an indication that in terms of the recognition of non-German first languages there is still space for development. Whether or not the teachers, who use their multilingualism, engage it for exchanges on content *relevant to teaching* remains an open question. It also remains unclear to what extent the teachers' low use of their first language can be attributed to a lack of fit with the first language of the students or their parents. While it can be assumed that parents and students usually speak the same first language, there is no particularly high agreement in the teachers' statements on the use of the first language with students and the use of the first language with parents. This can be interpreted as an indication that teachers do not only use their first language because the corresponding linguistic fit prevails, but that there are motives beyond this.

The results of the article can be connected to the discussions on the current demands on educational institutions, such as day care centres and schools, in terms of dealing with linguistic and cultural diversity. However, in line with the existing studies which often have so far kept to the broad category of 'professionals with a migration background' (e.g. Neugebauer & Klein, 2016) – even when looking at the potential resource of multilingualism in more depth as opposed to considering the more global category of 'professionals with a migration background' – our study reveals no different results. Research findings indicate that individuals with more pronounced multicultural beliefs deal with cultural differences in a more sensitive and prejudice-conscious manner than individuals who focus more on commonalities and less on cultural background (e.g. Wolsko et al., 2006). Our findings suggest that teachers who do and do not possess the potential resource of multilingualism differ in their assimilative beliefs. According to these findings, multilingual primary school teachers are less likely to display an 'ethnic-oriented' attitude, in which belonging to one's own group is viewed more positively than belonging to the foreign group, and adaptation is expected from individuals of the minority groups. This can be seen as an indication of a broad understanding of inclusion, according to which the potential resources of the students or parents are taken as a starting point. From a competence-theoretical point of view, teachers' cultural beliefs can therefore serve as a starting point for professionalisation processes for dealing with heterogeneity in training and further education (cf. Fischer & Lahmann, 2020). Such processes can initiate a culturally sensitive approach in educational institutions or culturally sensitive teaching, independent of the subjective experiences of teachers with a background of migration or multilingualism.

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In summary, multilingualism cannot be described as a 'resource' for primary school teachers regarding its expected relevance for cultural beliefs. There is a need for more research to identify which resources offer advantages for dealing with heterogeneity (and specifically multilingualism) in the school context in terms of the quality of teaching and developing student learning and performance. It would also be desirable for future research to make assumptions behind the assumed construct 'with a migration background' more explicit (cf. Maehler et al., 2016) and to collect data in a more differentiated manner.

Since teaching profession-specific differences in teachers' beliefs are indicated (Moser et al., 2014), the focus of this study was on the beliefs of *primary* school teachers. We examine this hitherto neglected target group that use their first language in the school context with a view to characterising them in terms of their cultural beliefs. This is motivated firstly by the limited differentiated discussion on the topic of 'teachers with a migration background' to date. Secondly, it can be assumed that most of the studies conducted on this topic did not include a sufficiently large number of cases to be able to conduct targeted quantitative analyses. The extensive NEPS sample makes it possible to analyse the specific sample of primary school teachers with non-German first languages in more detail – although the resultant sample size is nevertheless relatively small and only 29 teachers could be identified to know/speak a language other than German. Due to the methodological procedure with the PSM, however, our results can still be assumed to be reliable as systematic biases between the study and control groups were controlled for. Further studies should not only examine the teachers' self-reports on (first) language use in the school context, but also, for example, record the intention to use the first language with students or parents. It should also be pointed out that, although the instrument recorded three sub-areas of cultural beliefs, distortions due to socially desirable response behaviour cannot be ruled out regarding the self-reports. Another potential point of criticism is that the scale is theoretically based on an interethnic cultural model, the starting point of which is cultural differentiation (Costa, 2020, p. 55-56). In addition, the analyses are based on comparisons of average values; other evaluation methods (e.g. empirical typification) could provide additional insights. Further research should also consider multilingual pedagogical strategies including translanguaging (e.g. Li, 2018; Garcia & Kleyn, 2016) and other flexible forms of multilingual teaching, which can and often are encouraged even by 'monolingual' teachers.

In future studies on the use of multilingualism in teaching by primary school teachers, the operationalisation of corresponding constructs could be sharpened by basing them on a more constructivist understanding of culture to capture the self-critical reflection of one's own cultural beliefs, as well as normative ideas derived from them (cf. Costa 2020, p. 50-52). A starting point here could be qualitative or multi-methodological research designs, which aim to address the cultural-theoretical and complex contexts of multilingualism as research object with more differentiated methical and methodological approaches as currently expected from the BLUME-study[4].

Conflict of interests

The author(s) declare no conflict of interest.

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