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Multilingual classrooms and monolingual mindsets? A study on teachers' beliefs towards multilingualism

Teachers' beliefs about multilingualism influence classroom practices and, in turn, the learning opportunities of multilingual students. This study examines the beliefs of 276 teachers towards multilingualism using a questionnaire, including an internationally recognized scale. The results indicate a basic level of knowledge and awareness of multilingualism but also reveal a need for further development toward a more inclusive and resource-oriented mindset.

Keywords: teachers; multilingualism; beliefs

Mehrsprachiges Klassenzimmer und einsprachige Mindsets? Eine Untersuchung zu den Überzeugungen von Lehrkräften zur Mehrsprachigkeit

Die Überzeugungen von Lehrkräften zur Mehrsprachigkeit beeinflussen das Unterrichtshandeln und damit die Lernchancen mehrsprachiger Schüler*innen. Die Studie untersucht die Überzeugungen von 276 Lehrkräften in Bezug auf Mehrsprachigkeit anhand eines Fragebogens, inklusive einer international anerkannten Skala. Die Ergebnisse zeigen ein grundlegendes Wissen über und Bewusstsein für Mehrsprachigkeit, zugleich aber Entwicklungsbedarf hin zu einer inklusiven, ressourcenorientierten Haltung.

Schlagwörter: Lehrkräfte; Mehrsprachigkeit; Überzeugungen

1 Introduction

In recent decades, Europe has witnessed a significant increase in migration, leading to linguistically diverse student populations across classrooms. This trend is especially evident in Germany, a primary destination for individuals seeking refuge or better opportunities (bpb 2023). Approximately one fourth of the German population has a migration background. In Germany, 28 % of children under the age of six have either foreign-born parents or are themselves foreign-born, although 85 % of these children were born in Germany (Federal Education Report 2024). Of children of the ages between 6 and 10 years, 40 % have a migration background. Among them, one in five speaks a language other than German at home (Federal Education Report 2022). While this shows that children with a migration background are not necessarily bi- or multilingual, the linguistic heterogeneity

within families leads to changes in the mainstream classroom. Teachers must therefore develop both specific pedagogical skills to work with all students in the heterogeneous classroom and an awareness of linguistic diversity as a resource for learning (Lucas & Villegas 2013; Morris-Lange et al. 2016; Witte 2017).

This study examines the knowledge and beliefs of in-service secondary school teachers in Germany regarding multilingualism¹, aiming to understand the perceptions that guide their practices in diverse educational settings.

2 Theoretical Background

Positive beliefs about students' multilingualism are fundamental for implementing pedagogical changes (Lucas & Villegas 2013; Morris-Lange et al. 2016). Beliefs, defined as "implicit or explicit systems of claims that an individual accepts as true" (Gallagher & Scrivner 2024, 823), are subjective and primarily shaped by personal experiences within the education system. They significantly influence how teachers perceive, evaluate, and respond to classroom situations (Reusser & Pauli 2014). According to Lange and Polat (2025), teachers' beliefs can be understood as self-normative and subjective forms of knowledge embedded within a broader personal belief system. This system comprises multiple, interrelated facets that may align, overlap, or even contradict one another. These facets include both cognitive and affective-emotional dimensions, and although they tend to be relatively stable, they can continue to develop and be further shaped through teacher education and professional reflection. While beliefs are often discussed alongside attitudes, they differ conceptually in depth, stability, and function. Beliefs constitute enduring cognitive constructs that represent what teachers hold to be true about teaching, learning and students, shaping long-term instructional reasoning and decisions. Attitudes, in contrast, reflect affective and evaluative orientations or behavioral dispositions toward specific educational practices or contexts and are typically more immediate and situational in nature. Although beliefs and attitudes are closely related and often mutually reinforcing, beliefs generally underpin and shape attitudes, together forming the cognitive–affective foundation that influences teachers' instructional planning and classroom interactions (see also Lange & Polat 2025).

Teachers' beliefs are considered essential components of professional competence, as highlighted by the COACTIV-model developed by Baumert and Kunter (2011). This model asserts that effective teaching is not solely based on pedagogical content knowledge but also on teachers' individual beliefs as a central aspect of instructional decision-making. However, the empirical evidence for a direct and consistent link between beliefs and

¹ We follow the definition of multilingualism as the regular use of two or more languages, however, without reference to competences, active, or passive knowledge (see Li 2008). While inner multilingualism certainly is a factor in German schools, this article does not explore this further.

teaching behavior remains inconclusive. As Baumert and Kunter (2011) note, the assumption that teachers' instructional actions are systematically determined by their beliefs has only been partially substantiated. Similarly, Buehl and Beck (2015) emphasize that the belief–practice relationship is neither linear nor stable across contexts but contingent on a range of internal (e.g., reflection level, self-efficacy, professional experience) and external factors (e.g., school context, institutional conditions). Recent studies (e.g., Li & Ma 2025; Martinez et al. 2024) provide more nuanced evidence for this relationship. They indicate that teachers' beliefs can indeed influence instructional choices, but that these effects are strongly moderated by contextual and individual factors. Rather than contradicting earlier conclusions, these findings refine them: beliefs should not be viewed as deterministic predictors of teaching behavior but as dynamic, contextually embedded components that interact with other dimensions of professional competence. Based on a systematic review of both theoretical and empirical literature, Fischer (2018) proposed a multidimensional model for classifying teachers' beliefs, identifying seven domains: (1) epistemological beliefs, (2) beliefs about teaching and learning, (3) beliefs about the teacher's role (self), (4) beliefs about students, (5) beliefs about school as an institution, (6) beliefs about teacher education, and (7) beliefs influenced by broader socio-political contexts. This framework enables a structured analysis of teachers' beliefs about linguistic and cultural diversity, distinguishing between teaching-related beliefs and those influenced by systemic and societal factors. Fischer's model therefore provides a conceptual lens for analyzing how teachers understand and position themselves in relation to linguistic diversity in education.

Research on teachers' beliefs in Germany has been extensive (Fischer 2020), with an increasing focus on multilingualism in recent years, starting with Gogolin's explorations of the "monolingual habitus" (Gogolin 2008). However, empirical studies on secondary school teachers remain limited. Exceptions include studies by Jost et al. (2017) and Riebling (2013), which primarily focus on language-sensitive teaching rather than multilingualism as a broader concept. Secondary schools, where students spend a significant portion of their educational careers, have therefore been comparatively under-researched, even though they constitute key educational settings in which Germany's high degree of linguistic diversity becomes particularly visible and is crucial for academic development. This underscores the importance of investigating teachers' beliefs in these contexts.

Building on this, prior research has identified several factors that influence teachers' beliefs about linguistic diversity. Demographic variables have been shown to play an important role. Among these, teachers' biographical backgrounds, including multilingual or migration-related experiences, significantly shape their beliefs (Fischer 2020). Teachers from minoritized regions tend to advocate for preserving students' home languages and to distance themselves from monolingual norms. Interactions with multilingual students

are also pivotal in shaping teachers' beliefs (Lucas et al. 2015; Pohlmann-Rother et al. 2023). Gallagher and Scrivner (2024) emphasize that the quality of experience, such as direct, structured engagement, significantly affects belief formation more than teaching experience alone. Studies also report that female teachers generally exhibit greater openness toward linguistic diversity than their male counterparts (Lundberg 2019a; Schroedler et al. 2023).

Beyond demographic characteristics, professional preparation has also been identified as a key factor influencing teachers' beliefs about multilingualism. Studies have shown that teachers who undergo specific training, such as German as a Second Language programs, exhibit improvements in language-sensitive teaching practices (Fischer & Ehmke 2019; Hammer et al. 2016). Pohlmann-Rother et al. (2023) found that elementary school teachers with extensive pre-service training in multilingualism demonstrated more favorable beliefs regarding multilingualism. A meta-analysis showed that teachers engaged in development activities, such as seminars on multilingualism, generally hold more supportive beliefs (Polat & Lange 2025). Generational differences also affect beliefs: older teachers often show less supportive beliefs toward linguistic diversity, potentially due to limited exposure to recent educational advances and a lack of reflective opportunities during their initial training (Bernstein et al. 2021). The subject studied during teacher education also influences beliefs. Those with training in second or foreign language education engage more thoroughly with multilingual settings, both conceptually and practically, resulting in more supportive beliefs (Paetsch et al. 2023; Lucas et al. 2015).

Other research has focused on assessing the extent of these beliefs across educational and national contexts. A study by Pulinx et al. (2017) in Flanders explored secondary school teachers' beliefs using a "monolingualism scale" – which is also used in the current study. Findings revealed a prevalence of monolingual beliefs, with average scores of 3.74 on a scale from 1 (highly multilingual orientation) to 5 (highly monolingual orientation). Detailed analyses showed the above-mentioned gender influences, where male teachers expressed more monolingual beliefs. The study highlighted a negative correlation between monolingual beliefs and teacher expectations; more monolingual beliefs were associated with lower expectations for students, potentially exacerbating educational inequalities. Using the same scale, Bosch et al. (2024) examined elementary teachers' beliefs in Greece, Italy and the Netherlands. These teachers exhibited significantly fewer monolingual beliefs compared to the Belgian sample, with scores of 2.17 in Greece and 2.62 in Italy and the Netherlands. Greek teachers expressed the most multilingual beliefs, while Italian and Dutch responses were more cautiously positive. The study also revealed that professional training positively impacted teachers' beliefs. A similar study by Rinker & Ekinci (2025) found pre-service teachers' beliefs at two German universities to be intermediate to those in Belgium and Greece (University A: 2.91; University B: 2.63). It must be noted that the

sample at University B consisted exclusively of future German teachers, while the sample at University A was made up of pre-service teachers in language and non-language subjects. At University B (but not at University A), gender as well as the multilingualism of the pre-service teachers affected their beliefs.

In the context of previous findings, it is of interest to examine how the beliefs of teachers at German schools compare. As outlined in the introduction, Germany has become an increasingly linguistically diverse country, especially in recent years. The current study therefore focuses on secondary school teachers at the Gymnasium level in the federal state of Baden-Württemberg, investigating their beliefs about multilingualism and the factors shaping them and situating the results within the broader international research context.

The two research questions are:

How do German teachers' beliefs about multilingualism compare to those in Belgium, Greece, Italy, and the Netherlands? Based on Bosch et al. (2024), Pulinx et al. (2017) and Rinker & Ekinci (2025) we hypothesize that German teachers may hold moderately supportive beliefs – more open than Belgian teachers, but less than Greek teachers, comparable to Italy and the Netherlands.

We further explore which individual characteristics inform these beliefs, expecting factors such as gender, own multilingual background, multilingual experiences, subject specialization, years of teaching, training in multilingualism, and urban versus rural teaching locations to influence openness towards multilingualism (Bosch et al. 2024; Schroedler & Fischer 2020; Paetsch et al. 2023; Pulinx et al. 2017; Rinker & Ekinci 2025).

3 Materials and Methods

3.1 Procedure

This study follows a quantitative research design situated within the empirical-analytical paradigm. The aim was to describe and analyze teachers' beliefs toward multilingualism and to test predefined hypotheses concerning potential relationships with sociodemographic and professional variables. To this end, a cross-sectional survey design with a descriptive and analytical orientation was chosen. The methodological approach aligns with previous quantitative studies on teachers' beliefs about multilingualism (e.g., Bosch et al. 2024; Pulinx et al. 2017). Data for this study were collected as part of a larger research project titled "Fostering Academic Language: New Perspectives on German as a Second Language in the Classroom" (funded by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport, Baden-Württemberg, under No. 2 43-04HV.1403-98(20)/40/1), conducted in the federal state of Baden-Württemberg. In this region, the proportion of residents with a migration background is slightly above the national average, currently standing at 30.9 % (Statistical

Office of Baden-Württemberg 2023). To ensure a sufficiently large sample, head teachers of all academic-track secondary schools (Gymnasium) in Baden-Württemberg were contacted via email. This email included two documents containing detailed information about the study and its objectives. Head teachers were asked to forward the email to their teaching staff. A similar approach was taken with the coordinators of all regional integration offices, given the close connection between issues of multilingualism and integration. In total, 276 teachers participated by completing an anonymous online questionnaire hosted on the platform "SoSci". By continuing with the survey and submitting their responses, participants provided informed consent for the data to be used in academic publications. The project received formal approval from the Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sport of Baden-Württemberg (Approval No. 31-6499.20/1235).

3.2 The Questionnaire

To collect data on background variables, a total of ten items were formulated. These covered teachers' sociodemographic characteristics, including age and gender (4 items), as well as their own language use (2 items) and linguistic background (1 item). Further items captured their teaching experience (1 item), the school subjects they taught (1 item), and whether they had received any formal training related to multilingualism (1 item).

Drawing on literature from linguistics and educational pedagogy (Hammer et al. 2016; Sorace 2007), a total of 18 items were used to explore teachers' beliefs on multilingualism. Of these, 15 were close-ended and 3 were open-ended (the results of the open-ended items are not reported here). For the close-ended items, participants either selected from predefined response categories (categorical variables, 5 items) or responded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "totally disagree" to "totally agree" (quantitative variables, 10 items). Teachers' beliefs were assessed using six scales. Table 1 presents the items grouped according to the dimensions outlined in Fischer's (2018) model.

Tab. 1: Items measuring teachers' beliefs as used in the online questionnaire with selected dimensions from Fischer (2018)

Dimension (according to Fischer 2018)	Scale(s)	No. of items	Items shown in full (not reported in Results section)
Epistemological	myths about multilingualism	6	1) What are your connotations of the term 'multilingualism'?
Teaching-related	use of L1 in classroom; relevance of	4	8) When planning lessons, I observe these principles (see below).

	academic language		9) In which subjects could your multilingual students' language background affect their performance? 10) Explain why your multilingual students' language background could affect their performance.
Teacher-related	language support; value of multilingualism	5	12) Give reasons for your answer.
School-related	responsibility to ensure linguistic inclusion in parent communication; value of multilingualism	3	16) In your opinion, how should the following languages be taught at school?

Note: Open-ended questions (items 1, 10, 12 and 16), as well as items 8 and 9, were omitted from the quantitative analysis. Responses to item 11 are reported separately. For reasons of conciseness, only items that are not discussed in detail in the Results section are displayed; all remaining items are addressed in the Results section.

In addition to the items outlined above, an eight-item scale developed by Pulinx et al. (2017) and adapted to the context of German secondary education was used to assess the extent of monolingual beliefs (hereafter referred to as the “multilingualism scale”). All items are reported and analyzed in the Results section in Tab. 3.

3.3 Analysis

Data was entered in SPSS 29.0 and the data of the second set statistically analyzed. To calculate the multilingual index, the procedure used by Pulinx et al. (2017) was employed. Items 1, 2, 5, 7, and 8 were calculated on a scale of 1–5, with 5 denoting strong agreement to monolingual beliefs, whereas the scale was reversed when coding items 3, 4, and 6, for which 5 denoted positive agreement toward multilingual beliefs. The sum of the items was then divided by eight. Thus, in sum, a higher value denotes a more monolingual belief. As the data were normally distributed, parametric t-tests were conducted to compare groups.

4 Results

4.1 Teachers' backgrounds

In the sample, 69.6 % of the participating teachers identified as female and 30.1 % as male; one respondent indicated a diverse gender identity. The average age of the teachers was 43.4 years (SD = 10.6), with a mean teaching experience of 14.3 years (SD = 9.7). A majority of 77.9 % (n = 215) reported using only German at home and were thus categorized as "monolingual". The remaining teachers – those who indicated speaking another language at home occasionally (15.2 %, n = 42), equally alongside German (6.2 %, n = 17), or predominantly (0.7 %, n = 2) – were classified as "multilingual". Among the languages spoken were widely used heritage languages in Germany, such as Turkish, Greek and Russian, as well as less common languages like Tamil and Mandarin. A substantial portion of the sample (73.2 %) reported teaching at least one foreign language as a school subject. However, 84 % stated that they had received little to no instruction during their teacher education regarding second language learners or language-sensitive teaching. Teachers were employed in diverse school locations: 61.2 % worked in urban areas or larger towns, and 38.8 % in small towns or rural villages. The composition of classrooms in terms of linguistic diversity varied: 43.8 % of teachers reported that 0-25 % of their students were multilingual, 37.5 % reported a proportion of 25-50 %, and 17 % indicated that more than half of their students were multilingual. Interestingly, teachers with more teaching experience (above the sample mean of 14.3 years; n = 125) were more likely to report having few or no multilingual students in their classrooms (43.2 %) compared to their less experienced colleagues (34 %).

4.2 Responses to the scale by Fischer (2018)

Tab. 2: Results: Items to the scale by Fischer (2018). Percentage of teachers answering 'agree' and 'totally agree' are shown (n = 276)

Items	(Totally) Agree
EPISTEMOLOGICAL	
2) Children that grow up with more than one language in their first years end up not speaking either language properly.	5.0 %
3) Children are able to acquire multiple languages without any difficulties.	71.4 %
4) Children have to reach a certain level of proficiency in one language before they start to acquire another language.	19.6 %
5) Mixing languages (e.g., // 'Ask our lehrer' //; lehrer (German) = teacher) is a manifestation of proficiency.	36.6 %

- 6) Parents that speak other languages than German should always talk to their children in German even if their proficiency is really low. 31.9 %

TEACHING-RELATED

- 7) In your opinion, may multilingual students use their heritage language in the classroom? 31.8 %

TEACHER-RELATED

- 13) Teachers should ask for the languages spoken at home at the first parent-teacher conference. 56.2 %
- 14) Teachers should provide parents with information on the acquisition of multiple languages. 52.2 %
- 15) Teachers should encourage parents with low German proficiency to come to parent-teacher conferences with a translator. 92.7 %

SCHOOL-RELATED

- 17) Schools should organize parents' evenings in different languages so that all parents understand the central issues related to their child's academic career (e.g., transitions to other schools, grading system...). 40.2 %
- 18) Schools should provide written information in German only. 51.7 %

Note: Open-ended questions (1, 10, 12, 16) as well as items 8 and 9 were omitted from this analysis. The responses to item 11 are reported below.

Follow-up Question to 7:

While only about one third of participants agreed that the use of heritage languages should be permitted in the classroom, a follow-up question asked teachers to indicate the situations in which these languages were used (multiple responses were possible). The most frequently mentioned contexts included: partner or group work (35.5 %), comprehension-related questions (26.4 %) and specially designed exercises (11.2 %). Additionally, 22.8 % selected "Other" and provided open-text responses ($n = 63$). The majority of these comments referred to private conversations among students ($n = 28$), instances of (potential) insults directed at teachers or classmates ($n = 16$), and spontaneous, content-related comparisons between languages (e.g., grammar or vocabulary parallels) ($n = 15$). Four entries did not fit into these categories (e.g., "There are no two students with the same heritage language in the class").

Response to Question 11 (In your opinion, who should provide German language support for multilingual students, if necessary?):

To gather information on teachers' beliefs regarding the responsibility for German language support, participants were asked to indicate who, in their view, should provide such support for multilingual students, if necessary. Multiple responses were possible. 44.2 % of the respondents selected "all teachers", 18 % chose "external teachers, e.g., with expertise in German as a second language", and 8.6 % identified "German (subject) teachers" as responsible. Additionally, 2 % selected "others", such as families or community centers.

4.3 Teachers' beliefs on multilingualism on the multilingualism scale

Tab. 3: Results: Items on multilingualism scale from Pulinx et al. (2017). Percentage of teachers answering 'agree' and 'totally agree' are shown (n = 276)

Multilingualism scale	(Totally) agree
1) Non-German speaking students should not be allowed to speak their home language at school.	52.9 %
2) The most important cause of academic failure of non-German speaking students is their insufficient proficiency in German.	35.1 %
3) The school library (classroom library, media library) should also include books in the different home languages of the students.	63.1 %
4) Non-German speaking pupils should be offered the opportunity to learn their home language at school.	51.4 %
5) By speaking their home language at school, non-German speaking students do not learn German sufficiently.	41.3 %
6) Non-German speaking students should be offered regular subjects in their home language.	14.5 %
7) It is more important that non-German speaking students obtain a high level of proficiency in German than in their home language.	39.5 %
8) It is in the interest of the students that they are punished for speaking their home language at school.	6.5 %

Cronbach's alpha was 0.743; thus, lower than in the original paper (0.816 in Pulinx et al., 2017) but still within the acceptable range. As in Pulinx et al. (2017) the multilingualism index was calculated: here, it was at 2.89 (SD = .72).

The effects of different variables on the multilingualism index are presented in Table 4.

Female teachers differ significantly from male colleagues in their beliefs toward multilingualism. Multilingual teachers differ significantly from monolingual colleagues: every teacher who uses another language at home (whether exclusively or alongside German) had significantly more positive beliefs towards multilingualism than teachers from exclusively German-speaking homes. Also, the amount of multilingual students; i. e.

the experience of teaching multilingual students does have an effect: Those with 0-25 % of multilingual students in the classroom showed (marginally) significantly more negative beliefs compared to those with 25-50 % of multilingual students. (Note that other percentages were not analyzed as the majority of teachers are teaching in classrooms with up to 50 % multilingual students.) A significant effect was found regarding whether teachers are language teachers or whether they are teaching other subjects. If teachers teach only foreign language subjects (e.g. English, French) their beliefs are significantly more multilingually oriented (teachers teaching non-language subjects versus language teachers). There was a significant effect of training in multilingualism during university studies. Note that other percentages were not analyzed here, as the majority of teachers had no or very little training. Neither the size of the city nor years of professional experience significantly influence the results.

Tab. 4: Teachers' Beliefs Toward Multilingualism – Summary of Influencing Factors and significance levels

Factor	Groups Compared	Sample Size (n)	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	t-value	p-value
Gender	Female	190	2.834	0.717	-2.200	<.029
	Male	83	3.0407	0.710		
Language Background	Multilingual	61	2.616	0.740	3.404	<.001
	Monolingual	213	2.968	0.704		
Multilingual Students in Class	0–25 % multilingual students	120	2.943	0.720	1.631	=.051
	25–50 % multilingual students	104	2.791	0.660		
Subject Taught	Non-language subject teachers	73	3.040	0.590	2.743	<.007
	Language teachers (e.g., English, French)	56	2.690	0.800		

University Training	No training on multilingualism	151	3.038	0.699		
	Very little training	79	2.709	0.590	3.573	<.001
Amount of professional experience	High	125	2.938	0.766		
	Low	148	2.843	0.686	-1.081	=.281
City size	City / larger town	168	2.836	0.7325		
	Small town / village	106	2.976	0.7107	-1.560	=.120

5 Discussion

In this study, the knowledge and beliefs towards multilingualism of secondary school teachers in the German federal state of Baden-Württemberg were examined using an online questionnaire. Two sets of items were central to the analysis: a series of questions based on the dimensions proposed by Fischer (2018) and a set of eight validated statements adapted from Pulinx et al. (2017). The following section discusses the findings based on the results from both item sets.

With respect to the epistemological dimension (Fischer 2018), the findings suggest that teachers in this sample generally hold positive beliefs toward multilingualism, though several misconceptions persist (see also Sorace 2007). Overall, the results paint a nuanced picture. Teachers largely reject some of the most common myths: the so-called "double semilingualism hypothesis" (the belief that multilingual children fail to speak any language properly) is endorsed by only a small minority (5 %), and most teachers disagree with the notion that growing up with more than one language harms language development or proficiency. A majority (71.4 %) also rejects the idea that multilingualism leads to cognitive disadvantages or that a certain proficiency threshold must be reached before acquiring additional languages. At the same time, two widespread misconceptions remain prevalent: one third of the teachers agree that parents should speak the language of instruction with their children even without high proficiency, and only about one-third recognize language mixing as an indicator of advanced language competence.

With regard to teaching- and school-related items, teachers appear to be aware of many issues surrounding multilingualism and/or to have practical experience in this area. A large majority (92 %) expressed agreement with the use of translators, likely reflecting previous experiences with communication barriers in parent–teacher interactions. In contrast, the use of multilingual materials or the organization of parent evenings in multiple languages received considerably less support (40.2 % and 52.2 %, respectively), suggesting a realistic assessment of feasibility in everyday school life. Notably, around half of the teachers (51.7

%) stated that school materials should be provided exclusively in German, indicating not only practical constraints but also a more monolingually oriented belief system that extends beyond purely pragmatic considerations.

Similarly, predominantly German-oriented beliefs persist regarding the use of heritage languages in the classroom. Only about one third of the teachers reported allowing students to use their heritage languages during class, mostly for comprehension checks or group/partner work (follow-up item). However, open-text responses also revealed some reservations. Several teachers expressed concerns about students using their heritage language in private conversations – particularly when the teacher could not understand the language – raising suspicions about inappropriate comments or gossip. Deliberate pedagogical uses (e.g., such as cross-linguistic grammar comparisons) were rare; only 11.2 % reported using heritage languages in specifically designed instructional exercises.

Despite limited formal training reported by most participants, nearly half of the teachers expressed the belief that all subject teachers (not just German language specialists) should be responsible for fostering students' German (academic) language skills. This reflects a promising awareness that language-sensitive teaching is relevant across all subject areas. However, it remains unclear whether this belief in supporting German implies a rejection of heritage languages in the classroom, as this was not explicitly assessed.

Results from the multilingualism scale (Pulinx et al. 2017) reveal a general tendency toward rather multilingual-oriented beliefs among German secondary school teachers. Compared to teachers in Flanders (Belgium), who showed pronounced monolingual beliefs, the results from this sample clearly show a trend toward more multilingual beliefs in southern Germany (on the five-point multilingualism scale: 3.74 in Belgium compared to 2.89 in Germany). Results were comparable to those of pre-service teachers in Baden-Württemberg (University A: 2.91; University B: 2.63; Rinker & Ekinci 2025).

More than half of the teachers (51.4 %) advocate L1 learning at school and nearly all oppose sanctioning multilingual students for using their L1. In addition, 63.1 % state that school libraries should include books in different languages. At the same time, doubts about the positive effects of multilingualism persist: more than half of the teachers (52.9 %) agree that multilingual students should not be allowed to speak their heritage language at school, and 41.3 % believe that L1 use negatively affects proficiency in L2 German. Moreover, 35.1 % attribute multilingual students' poor educational performance primarily to language deficits and 39.5 % argue that higher proficiency in the language of instruction should be achieved at the expense of the L1. In the same vein, only a small proportion of teachers (14.5 %) support teaching subjects in heritage languages. Overall, German secondary school teachers show beliefs that lie in the middle between monolingual and multilingual orientations on the multilingualism scale.

Consistent with previous studies (Pulinx et al. 2017; Rinker & Ekinci 2025), a gender effect was found: female teachers expressed significantly more positive beliefs toward multilingualism. Rather than suppressing this diversity, female teachers seem more inclined to acknowledge and support the use of multiple languages within institutional settings.

As in a number of other studies (Schroedler & Fischer 2020; Rinker & Ekinci 2025), teachers' own multilingual background had a significant effect. Unsurprisingly, speaking another language in addition to the societal language not only sensitizes teachers to the problems faced by multilingual students but also to the benefits of multilingualism in general. This experience makes teachers more likely to advocate on behalf of disadvantaged and minority students.

Likewise, being a foreign language teacher, i. e., teaching only language subjects such as English, French or Spanish, was significantly associated with more multilingual oriented beliefs. Since secondary school teachers in Germany typically teach two subjects, those with at least one language subject likely have broader experience with language variation and intercultural contexts, which may enhance their openness toward linguistic diversity.

Contrary to some earlier findings, neither years of teaching experience (Bernstein et al. 2023) nor city size (Bynes et al. 1997) showed significant effects. Yet, experience teaching multilingual students was marginally significant. Dealing with multilingual students over a longer period seems to make teachers perceive those students' potential rather than their deficits, and thus support migration-related multilingualism.

In line with findings by Bosch et al. (2024), professional training also played a role. Even the 79 teachers who reported having received only minimal input on multilingualism during their initial training held significantly more positive beliefs than those without any training. While previous research (e.g., Pohlmann-Rother et al. 2023) emphasized the importance of extensive training, this study suggests that even limited exposure can positively impact beliefs.

Finally, with respect to the international comparison, German secondary school teachers' beliefs align more closely with those reported for the Netherlands and Italy than with Greece (Bosch et al. 2024), positioning them somewhere in the middle of the spectrum of multilingual beliefs found across the countries studied. However, the interpretation should consider differences in school types – given that Bosch et al. examined elementary school teachers who may generally exhibit more positive beliefs – as well as historical and recent migration contexts that likely influence national attitudes toward multilingualism (i. e. “opinions and values” as defined by Paulsrud et al. 2023, 71).

Overall, the findings of this study underline the need for coherent policy and institutional measures that move beyond isolated efforts and establish sustained, systemic support for addressing linguistic diversity in German schools. Despite positive tendencies in parts of the sample, many of the beliefs identified still reflect persistent monolingual orientations and uncertainties/unawareness, especially regarding the role of heritage languages in the classroom. The findings suggest that existing measures have not been sufficient to bring about a comprehensive shift in mindset.

A first priority lies in reforming initial teacher education. Although the federal state of Baden-Württemberg has taken important steps by legally anchoring the topic of language-sensitive teaching in teacher preparation, mandatory training currently applies only to future teachers of German, and even then, it is limited to a single course of three credit points. Given that linguistic diversity affects all subjects, including those not traditionally

associated with language (such as mathematics, biology, or chemistry), this is clearly inadequate.

Second, in-service professional development must be significantly expanded, structured, and made more accessible. Although Baden-Württemberg offers a comparatively broad catalogue of training opportunities with respect to linguistic and cultural diversity, the quality and transparency of these offerings remain inconsistent. Courses are often short, insufficiently practice-oriented and hard for teachers to locate or evaluate due to the fragmentation of the training catalogue.

Third, schools themselves must play a more active role in institutionalizing linguistic inclusion. This requires that each school develop a multilingual school development plan tailored to the specific linguistic composition of its student body. Such a plan should outline concrete strategies for communicating with families in multiple languages, for meaningfully integrating students' home languages into classroom routines and subject instruction, and for establishing cooperation with external community resources, such as municipal integration offices, interpreters, and cultural mediators.

Lastly, ministries of education must implement robust mechanisms for monitoring and accountability. These might include systematic school self-evaluations, inspections with a focus on multilingual inclusion or mandatory reporting as part of broader school development documentation.

Even though 276 teachers participated, the sample is not representative (convenience sample), as it includes only secondary teachers from one type of school and from one federal state with its own educational policies and political make-up. Moreover, participation in the survey was voluntary, which may have led to a self-selection bias. It is therefore possible that teachers with a stronger interest in linguistic diversity or with more positive beliefs toward multilingualism were more likely to participate. This potential self-selection should be considered when interpreting the overall trend toward multilingual-oriented beliefs. While this study focused exclusively on secondary school teachers, it remains an open question how elementary teachers might respond to the same items, particularly in light of previous research indicating more favorable beliefs in this group (e.g., Bosch et al. 2024; Pohlmann-Rother et al. 2023). Additionally, the study relies on self-reported data, which may be subject to social desirability bias (Steiner & Benesch 2018).

6 Conclusion

The present study investigated the beliefs of secondary school teachers in southern Germany. Based on two sets of survey items, teachers' beliefs can generally be described as relatively open and multilingual-oriented. However, some doubts and reservations remain, particularly regarding the value and use of students' heritage languages in the classroom. The results underscore the importance of integrating multilingual pedagogies into all school subjects early in teacher education. Many teachers still do not view students' home languages as meaningful resources for learning, highlighting the need for greater awareness and pedagogical training in this area. While a broad range of concepts,

methods, and research on multilingual pedagogies is already available (Lundberg 2019b), these have yet to be systematically transferred into classroom practice.

Encouragingly, the data suggest that even minimal prior training in multilingualism – regardless of how long ago it was completed – has a measurable effect on teachers' beliefs. This finding supports the recent implementation of multilingualism-related content in teacher education and in-service training across various German federal states. Future studies should investigate the long-term impact of these reforms and examine whether the current curricular structures in teacher education actually lead to more inclusive belief systems and corresponding instructional practices.

At the same time, previous research has shown that teachers' beliefs do not necessarily translate into corresponding classroom behavior. Studies have documented inconsistencies between teachers' stated beliefs and their observed actions (Aguirre & Speer 1999; Liu 2011). These findings highlight that fostering more multilingual-oriented beliefs, while important, is only one step; ensuring that such beliefs are enacted in daily teaching requires sustained institutional support and opportunities for reflection and practice transfer.

In sum, improving teachers' beliefs toward multilingualism and supporting them in translating these beliefs into classroom action is not merely a matter of individual disposition. It represents a broader structural and institutional responsibility. Lasting change will only occur if teacher education, professional development, and school-level policy are aligned and reformed to position linguistic diversity as a fundamental dimension of educational quality and equity.

7 References

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