# A Classroom-Based Investigation into Pre-Service EFL Teachers' Evolving Understandings of a Plurilingual Pedagogy to Foreign Language Education

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## Abstract

In spite of ample research evidence indicating the need for a paradigm shift in language education, there is still a great discrepancy between the principles of plurilingual and intercultural education promoted by the applied linguistics literature and the reality of everyday language teaching and learning in schools. These research findings point especially towards the need for investigating the knowledge gaps that need to be addressed in pre- and in-service language teacher education. This paper presents findings of a classroom-based investigation into the professional development paths of five pre-service English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers, as they learned how to translate concepts of plurilingualism and plurilingual education studied at University into their situated practice in schools. Five case studies were carried out in four primary schools and one secondary school in Germany. Research data were collected via the following ethnographic research instruments: classroom observations and field notes, video recording of school lessons, in-depth interviews with pre- and in-service teachers, pre-service teachers' reflective journals, anonymous questionnaires, and focus group interviews with learners. The study has produced findings that reveal important aspects of the development of teacher cognition in connection to the integration of plurilingual-inspired pedagogies into the EFL curriculum, the challenges associated with adopting an innovative approach to language education and the new competencies that are needed in this context.

**Key terms**: teacher education; plurilingualism; teacher cognition; EFL; TBLT

## Abstract

Zahlreiche Forschungsergebnisse wiesen bereits auf die Notwendigkeit eines Paradigmenwechsels im Sprachunterricht hin. Dennoch besteht immer noch eine große Diskrepanz zwischen den Prinzipien des mehrsprachigen und interkulturellen Unterrichts, die in der Fachliteratur der Angewandten Linguistik empfohlen werden, und der Realität im alltäglichen Sprachunterricht an Schulen. Die Ergebnisse weisen im Besonderen auf die Notwendigkeit hin, die pädagogischen Lücken zu untersuchen, die bei der Aus- und Weiterbildung von Sprachlehrern/innen adressiert werden müssen. In diesem Artikel werden die Ergebnisse einer empirischen Studie mit fünf Lehramtsstudenten/innen für Englisch als Fremdsprache (EFL) vorgestellt, die im Rahmen des Studiums gelernte Konzepte der Mehrsprachigkeit und des mehrsprachigen Unterrichts in ihre Praxis im Schulunterricht umgesetzt haben. Fünf Fallstudien wurden in vier Grundschulen und einer weiterführenden Schule in Deutschland durchgeführt. Die Forschungsdaten wurden mit Hilfe der folgenden ethnografischen Forschungs-instrumente gesammelt: Beobachtungen und Feldnotizen im Klassenzimmer, Videoaufzeichnung des Schulunterrichts, Interviews mit Lehrern und Lehramtsstudenten/innen, reflektierende Tagebücher von Lehramtsstudenten/innen, anonyme Fragebögen sowie Fokusgruppen mit den Lernenden. Die Studie hat Ergebnisse erzielt, die wichtige Aspekte hinsichtlich (a) der Erkenntnisentwicklung von Lehrern im Zusammenhang der Umsetzung eines mehrsprachigkeitssensiblen Englischunterrichts, (b) der Herausforderungen bei der Einführung eines innovativen Ansatzes im Sprachunterricht, sowie (c) der neu benötigten Kompetenzen in diesem Zusammenhang aufzeigen.

## 1. Introduction

The foreign language teaching literature has increasingly underscored the need to challenge the existing monolingual ideology present in many foreign language classrooms around the world (e.g. Corcoll Lopez, 2019; Buendgens-Kosten & Elsner, 2018; Jessner & Kramsch, 2015; Breidbach et al., 2014). Cummins (2007, 2017), for instance, discusses three inter-related monolingual assumptions regarding best practice in second/foreign language teaching, which, according to him, continue to dominate classroom instruction in present days: "(a) the target language (TL) should be used exclusively for instructional purposes without recourse to students' first language (L1); (b) translation between L1 and TL has no place in the language classroom; (c) within immersion and bilingual programs, the two languages should be kept rigidly separate" (Cummins, 2007, p. 221). From this perspective, teachers' efforts should be directed towards promoting L2 usage that bears no L1 influences (e.g. pronunciation, syntax, and so on). These assumptions are, however, not supported by research evidence (Hufeisen & Jessner, 2019; Corcoll, 2013; Jessner, 2006). As Cummins (2017, p.15) points out, "In contrast to common monolingual assumptions, there is overwhelming research evidence that languages interact in dynamic ways in the learning process and that literacy-related skills transfer across languages as learning progresses".

Based on current research on multilingualism and multilingual development (Hufeisen & Jessner, 2019; Cummins, 2017; Cenoz, 2009; Jessner, 2006), the literature has called for the conceptualization and investigation of language teaching approaches that a) challenge traditional diglossic, compartmentalising views of language in classrooms, b) explore synergies between languages and cultures, c) embrace students' plurilingual repertoires as valuable linguistic and cultural resources for learning, and d) affirm learners' plurilingual identities as legitimate and appropriate in the classroom context (Galante, 2020; Piccardo, 2013; Candelier et al., 2012). Along the same lines, the concept of intercultural education has been developed with consideration of increasing globalization and multiculturalism in society (and language classrooms). While early theories on the integration of culture into foreign language teaching (Byram, 1997) tended to focus on the native speaker context, more recent proposals have replaced the native speaker model with the notion of the intercultural speaker (e.g. Breidbach et. al, 2014; Dooly, 2011). Within this perspective, the role of intercultural education is to equip learners with the means of accessing and analyzing any cultural practices by fostering a culture generic sensitivity. Language learners are thus encouraged to move away from the rigid combination 'national language/culture', and they are prompted to compare and contrast different cultural traditions, including the ones represented in their classrooms.

The benefits of these so-called "plurilingual-inspired pedagogies" (Piccardo, 2013) have been discussed in the literature from different angles and perspectives. From a psycholinguistic perspective, research has shown that cross-linguistic awareness raising practices can enhance language learning, since they activate and support cognitive and meta-cognitive processes that help learners utilize their pre-existing linguistic resources for additional language learning (Hopp et al., 2020; Corcoll & González-Davies, 2016; Oliveira & Anca, 2009; Jessner, 2006). From a more general asset-oriented perspective, several researchers have discussed the potential of plurilingual-inspired pedagogies for enhancing students' opportunities for meaning-making, since learners' plurilingual resources can be used as mediational tools (Vygotsky, 1978) to access and acquire academic knowledge of both linguistic and

other curricular subjects (Prasad, 2018; Potts, 2017; Faneca et al., 2016). Plurilingual-inspired pedagogies have also been regarded as a human rights-based and democratic response to the challenges of diversity, since they promote a better integration of the wealth of experience of immigrant students into school practices, the development of positive attitudes towards other languages and cultures, and an increase of minority students' self-worth and sense of belonging (Piccardo, 2020; Cutrim Schmid, 2018; Kramsch, 2014; Candelier et al., 2012; Krumm, 2009). Following from the complexity of this concept, the enactment of plurilingual education can vary significantly depending on a number of factors, such as theoretical underpinnings, educational goals and the socio-political context of language teaching practices.

Nevertheless, what is being recommended and promoted in the applied linguistics literature seems to contradict the reality of everyday language teaching and learning in schools. Current school-based qualitative and quantitate research (García & Kleifgen, 2018; Jessner & Mayr-Keiler, 2017; Faneca et al., 2016) indicates that most educational approaches are still pervaded by a monolingual ideology in teaching practices. Regarding foreign language teaching, more specifically, studies have shown that language teaching practices have not kept pace with the theoretical and methodological developments in the field (Dooly & Valejo, 2020; Cutrim Schmid & Schmidt, 2017; Haukås, 2016). Therefore, the existing applied linguistics literature is unanimous in pointing out that language teacher education is essential for this transformation to take place. This is the topic of the next section.

## 2. Plurilingualism and Language Teacher Education

One of the main stumbling blocks for the enactment of plurilingual education in schools is the fact that language teachers are not sufficiently prepared for dealing adequately with the complexity of linguistic diversity in the classroom. Research findings (Jakisch, 2019; Cutrim Schmid & Schmidt, 2017; Haukås, 2016; Stille, 2015; Otwinowska, 2014; Ziegler 2013; De Angelis, 2011) obtained in different parts of the world indicate that language teachers still have limited knowledge and skills on how to implement plurilingual-inspired pedagogies. Most of the studies conducted so far on language teachers' plurilingual and pluricultural awareness have focused on teachers' beliefs (e.g. Gorter & Arocena, 2020; Jakisch 2019; Haukås, 2016; Otwinowska, 2014; De Angelis, 2011), but there is also a growing body of research on the impact of language teacher education initiatives in this area on the (re)construction of teachers' professional identities (e.g. Dooly & Valejo, 2020; Stranger-Johannessen & Norton, 2017; Dahm, 2017; Higgins & Ponte, 2017; Abendroth-Timmer & Hennig, 2014; Horst et al., 2010).

Current research has shown that most teachers are familiar with the cognitive advantages of bi/multilingualism for the individual and for the learning of additional languages (Gorter & Arocena, 2020; Cutrim Schmid & Schmidt, 2017; Haukås, 2016). However, it also indicates that, even when teachers have positive beliefs about plurilingualism and think that plurilingualism should be promoted, they do not make strategic use of their learners' linguistic potential systematically in their practice (Haukås, 2016; Jakisch, 2014; Hu, 2011). In some qualitative studies (e.g. Cutrim Schmid & Schmidt, 2017; Otwinowska, 2014; Jakisch, 2014) teachers have reported on activities or strategies they use to tap into pupils' familiarity with multiple languages to advance further language learning. However, these activities are often not embedded in a broader framework of plurilingual education, and they are not implemented in a systematic and integrated way. Jakisch (2014), for instance, provides an example of a French teacher who makes regular connections (mainly lexical parallels) between English and French in her lessons, but without the aim of reaching the metalevel (e.g. analyzing the value of

cognates, reflecting on word-formation processes) that would help learners to develop metalinguistic awareness, which is one of the objectives of plurilingual education.

The research conducted so far has also shed light on a few (mis)conceptions and associated realities that tend to serve as barriers for the implementation of plurilingual-inspired pedagogies. These barriers or constraints can be grouped into different categories. At the level of teacher identity, research has shown that teachers tend to regard the integration of home languages as a potential threat to their authority, since they may sometimes need to forfeit their position as knowledgeable language experts (Otwinowska, 2014). At the pedagogical level, teachers have pointed to the extra workload involved in acquiring new linguistic competencies, since integrating learners' linguistic and cultural resources may require being familiar with students' home languages (Haukås, 2016; De Angelis, 2011). At the institutional level, the research on teachers' beliefs has also identified situational constraints embedded within teachers' professional worlds that are perceived to hinder the implementation of plurilingual education. For instance, external pressure from parents and school administration has been identified as a barrier, since in many educational contexts there is still a dominant view of school languages (and a few official foreign languages) as the only legitimate languages for communication and learning in school (Dooly & Valejo, 2020; De Angelis, 2011). These pedagogical and institutional challenges are, in turn, related to broader societal factors. With specific educational policies and curricular recommendations in mind, many teachers fear that a focus on plurilingual competences may lead to a neglect of core objectives (e.g. development of communicative competence) of foreign language teaching (Dooly & Valejo, 2020; Haukås, 2016; Jakisch, 2014). They also refer to the dearth of school textbooks incorporating plurilingual concepts and activities as a potential challenge (Haukås, 2016). In addition to all these aspects, teachers have identified the lack of specialized training as one of the main barriers for the integration of plurilingual-inspired pedagogies into their practice (Dooly & Valejo, 2020; Haukås, 2016).

Based on these findings, several researchers (Dooly & Valejo, 2020; Gorter & Arocena, 2020; Piccardo, 2016; Fernández-Amman et al., 2015; Breidbach et al., 2011; De Angelis, 2011) have pointed to the need for introducing modules on plurilingualism and plurilingual education to language teacher training programs, which incorporate a language awareness dimension, situated practice and a reflective focus on teacher beliefs and identities. As pointed out by Ziegler (2013, p. 3), "the professional identities of language teachers generally emerge from training as a language teaching professional, but in one language only." As a result, current approaches to language teacher education tend to support the development of conceptualizations of languages as compartmentalized units. In order to tackle this issue, the current applied linguistics literature (e.g. Valejo & Dooly, 2020; Fernández-Amman et al., 2015) has called for the design and evaluation of new models of language teacher education with the potential to shape teachers' professional identities that extend beyond the stance of being one-language-teachers.

The literature has also discussed important knowledge, skills and attitudes that teachers need to develop in order to be able to incorporate plurilingual-inspired pedagogies into their practice. At the level of knowledge, some authors have pointed to key foundational concepts, such as the familiarity with current research on multilingualism and plurilingual competence (Haukås, 2016; De Angelis, 2011) and the knowledge of core linguistic concepts for the analysis and comparison of languages (Breidbach et al., 2011; Jessner, 2006). At the skills level, researchers have discussed the essential role and need for practical training focusing on the development and evaluation of language learning tasks that require the use of multiple languages (Dooly & Valejo, 2020; Piccardo, 2016). At the attitudinal level, the literature has called for increased sensitivity towards linguistic and cultural diversity and an asset-

oriented perspective of multilingual learners and their resources (Faneca et. al., 2016; Candelier et.al, 2012). In order to support the development of such competences, researchers have highlighted the key role played by self-reflective situated practice in allowing trainees to be actively engaged in educational practice, forming communities of practice and having opportunities to reflect and theorize based on their own learning (Vallejo & Dooly 2020; Gilham & Fürstenau, 2020; Stranger-Johannessen & Norton, 2017; Higgins & Ponte, 2017; Horst et al., 2010).

This paper presents findings of a classroom-based study that aimed at contributing to this evolving research field. The research focused on the collaboration between pre- and in-service EFL teachers for the design, implementation and evaluation of plurilingual tasks. The project aimed at examining a) the underlying beliefs towards plurilingualism that shaped teachers' behavior b) teachers' professional development paths and c) competencies and skills that need to be addressed in language teacher education. The following section describes the research design adopted in this study.

## 3. The Research Project

### 3.1 Research Aims and Research Context

The present study used a collaborative action research framework (Burns, 2010) and a case study approach to collect qualitative data on pre-service teachers' cognition development (Borg, 2006). Teacher cognition is understood here as "the complex, practically-oriented, personalized and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts and beliefs that language teachers draw on their work" (Borg, 2006, p. 272). The research investigated the professional development paths of five pre-service English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers, as they learned how to translate concepts of plurilingualism and plurilingual education studied at University into their situated practice in schools. Five case studies were conducted in four primary schools and one secondary school in Germany. The research responds to a call in the area of teacher cognition research to investigate:

> how language teachers come to terms with the radical changes in conceptualizing communicative and intercultural competence in multilingual settings, and with the shifting emphasis from the monolingual native speaker model to learners' multilingual competencies and repertoires as the basis for successful language teaching and learning. (Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015, p.442)

In relation to these overarching aims, the research questions being addressed are:

1. What are the new competencies that EFL teachers need to acquire in order to be able to integrate plurilingual-inspired pedagogies into their practice?
2. What kind of knowledge base do they need to develop?
3. What kind of support is mostly needed by them as they construct this knowledge base?

The project involved pre-service/in-service teacher collaboration for the development and investigation of plurilingual language learning activities in the EFL teaching context. The five participating schools were state schools with diverse socio-economic student populations. Two of them were located in an urban area and three in a more rural context. The overall proportion of children with a migration background in these schools ranged between seventy and ninety percent. The five pre-service teachers (T1, T2, T3, T4 and T5) participating in the project were undergraduate students at a German University specializing in primary and secondary school teacher education. The university program covers all school subjects, including Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). The curriculum is strongly geared towards developing teaching competencies through the intensive

integration of theory and practice. At the time of the project, all student teachers had already concluded their final 15-week practicum semester and were in the final stages of their degrees. The five in-service teachers were qualified primary or secondary school teachers with 5+ years of teaching experience. Both pre-service and in-service teachers were informed of the research objectives and were actively involved in in the research process. Table 1 provides more detailed information about each case study.

| Case Studies | Pre-Service Teacher | In-Service Teacher | Learners (grade, age and years of language learning experience) | Teaching Unit Topic and Number of Lessons | Number of Heritage Languages Represented in Class | Year of Implementation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Case Study 1** | T1 | T6 | 4th Grade: 21 students (9-10-year-olds) – 4 years | Meeting People around the World: Four Lessons | 8 | First Year |
| **Case Study 2** | T2 | T7 | 3rd Grade: 20 students (8-9-year-olds) – 3 years | Breakfasts around the World: Five Lessons | 5 | First Year |
| **Case Study 3** | T3 | T8 | 4th Grade: 28 students (9-10-year-olds) – 4 years | Shopping around the World: Five Lessons | 13 | Second Year |
| **Case Study 4** | T4 | T9 | 4th Grade: 20 students (9-10-year-olds) – 4 years | Wild Animals around the World: Four Lessons | 12 | Second Year |
| **Case Study 5** | T5 | T10 | 9th Grade: 28 students (14-15-year-olds) – 9 years | New Year's Traditions around the World: Four Lessons | 7 | Third Year |

Table 1: Description of Case Studies

Prior to the implementation of the case studies, the student teachers attended a university seminar on plurilingual education in the EFL context. Following the literature recommendations discussed in the previous section, the main objectives of the course were for the attendees to a) develop an understanding of the main psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic, and educational aspects of learning English as a third language, b) familiarize themselves with plurilingual-inspired approaches to EFL education and b) gain hands-on experience of designing and implementing plurilingual activities in a peer teaching context. The course and subsequent situated practice placed a special emphasis on task-

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based language teaching (TBLT) for two main reasons. Firstly, TBLT is currently one of the main language teaching methods used in German schools. Secondly, the recent literature on plurilingual education has identified good task design as a key element for the successful implementation of plurilingual-inspired pedagogies. Several researchers (e.g. Galante, 2020; Piccardo & Galante, 2017) have pointed to the importance of helping teachers to acquire skills for the development of authentic and meaningful plurilinguals tasks. Piccardo (2016), for instance, notes:

> In a plurilingual perspective, the learner engages collaboratively in real-life tasks that require his/her agency in strategically employing all resources available – linguistic and non-linguistic, implying a variety of languages and codes – to solve a problem, to accomplish a mission. The achievement of the goal is the driving force of the action, followed by a reflective, metalinguistic phase. (p.9)

In TBLT, a task is "an activity in which a person engages in order to attain an objective, and which necessitates the use of language" (Van den Branden, 2006, p. 4). Based on this definition, a plurilingual task is understood here as a language learning activity that a) requires (or allows) the use of multiple languages and diverse cultural knowledge and b) creates opportunities for learners to engage in meaningful communication, using their whole plurilingual repertoire. In accordance with the principle of situated collaborative learning, the five pre-service teachers were paired with in-service teachers to design, implement and evaluate at least four 45-minute plurilingual-inspired EFL lessons organized around a teaching unit. In order to ensure the effective integration of plurilingual tasks into regular classroom practice, the student teachers were instructed to develop teaching units that followed the curricular framework of the teaching environments in which they conducted their case studies. Figures 1 and 2 show two sample plurilingual activities developed by the student teachers (in collaboration with the in-service teachers).
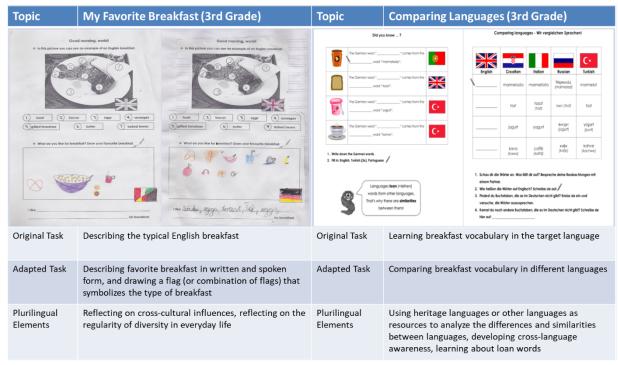


| Topic | My Favorite Breakfast (3rd Grade) | Topic | Comparing Languages (3rd Grade) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Original Task | Describing the typical English breakfast | Original Task | Learning breakfast vocabulary in the target language |
| Adapted Task | Describing favorite breakfast in written and spoken form, and drawing a flag (or combination of flags) that symbolizes the type of breakfast | Adapted Task | Comparing breakfast vocabulary in different languages |
| Plurilingual Elements | Reflecting on cross-cultural influences, reflecting on the regularity of diversity in everyday life | Plurilingual Elements | Using heritage languages or other languages as resources to analyze the differences and similarities between languages, developing cross-language awareness, learning about loan words |

Figure 1:   Examples of Plurilingual Activities 1

| Topic | Animals around the World (3rd Grade) |
| --- | --- |
| Task Description | Learners received a worksheet with the world map on it and a strip of paper which included the name of an animal in eight languages (English, Turkish, Polish, Latin and Cyrillic Russian, Albanian, Romanian, French, Arabic). |
| Task Development | The students were asked to match the animal names to the according country on their own worksheet and later fill out an overhead projector transparency which showed the same world map. |
| Plurilingual Elements | Reflecting on similarities and differences among languages, language families, relationship between geographic and linguistic distance. |

Figure 2:   Examples of Plurilingual Activities 2

## 3.2 Research Methodology

As pointed out earlier, the study used a teacher cognition research framework to investigate the pre-service teachers' evolving understandings of plurilingual-inspired pedagogies. The research on teacher cognition has explored a variety of themes related to teacher knowledge. This investigation has drawn specifically on the research focusing on the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices (e.g. Phipps & Borg, 2009) and on the changes in teachers' beliefs and practices over time (e.g. Wyatt, 2009). Therefore, two important aims of the research were to investigate a) the extent to which the pre-service teachers' stated beliefs corresponded with what they did in the classroom, and b) the role played by their beliefs in their conceptual and pedagogical competence development. Some studies have shown that mismatches between stated beliefs and practice can be related to contextual factors hindering the language teachers' ability to adopt practices that reflected their beliefs (e.g. Feryok, 2010). Other authors have explained these discrepancies on basis of the interaction between different "levels" of cognition. Phipps & Borg (2009), for instance, differentiate between peripheral and core beliefs. As they point out, an essential feature of core beliefs is that they are experientially ingrained, while peripheral beliefs are the ones that are only "theoretically embraced", and are thus often not reflected in practice. In order to investigate cognition in connection with practice, the research project employed a Vygotskian sociocultural perspective as the conceptual framework to research teachers' cognition development. The project thus used "a theory of cognition that includes mental processes together with teachers' practice, and the contexts within which the interaction between thinking and practice takes place" (Cross, 2010, p. 437). In line with this perspective, the research combined self-report data with observation records of teacher practice.

Research data were collected via a variety of ethnographic research instruments in order to ensure data triangulation. The case studies lasted in average two months and followed the same rationale and protocol for data collection. In the first stage, 30-minute in-depth interviews were conducted with the

pre-service teachers. These interviews focused on their perceptions regarding the knowledge and competencies they had acquired in the undergraduate course (on plurilingual education) and the knowledge gaps they wanted to address in their school projects. In the second stage, the student teachers carried out classroom observations for a period of two weeks to one month in order to investigate the in-service teachers' and the schools' attitudes and approaches to plurilingualism. During this phase, they produced unstructured field notes focusing on various topics, as for instance, potential programs that catered for the needs of plurilingual students (e.g., mother tongue classes, multicultural activities), incorporation of heritage languages in the school environment, and use of plurilingual activities in the EFL classroom. In the third stage, the pre-service teachers first taught two or three regular EFL lessons and then they implemented the plurilingual-inspired teaching units in collaboration with the in-service teachers. Two pre-service teachers (T1 and T2) had already taught EFL in their investigated classes during their 15-week practicum. Throughout their case studies, the pre-service teachers wrote reflective journals (eventually compiled into individual reflective reports) focusing on critical incidents (Farrel, 2008) that they experienced in their fieldwork activities. Their lessons were video-recorded and later described in detail for further analysis. In the fourth stage, in-depth individual interviews with the in-service and pre-service teachers and focus groups interviews and questionnaires with the learners were conducted. All interview data were fully transcribed for analysis. Figure 3 provides an overview of the research procedure.
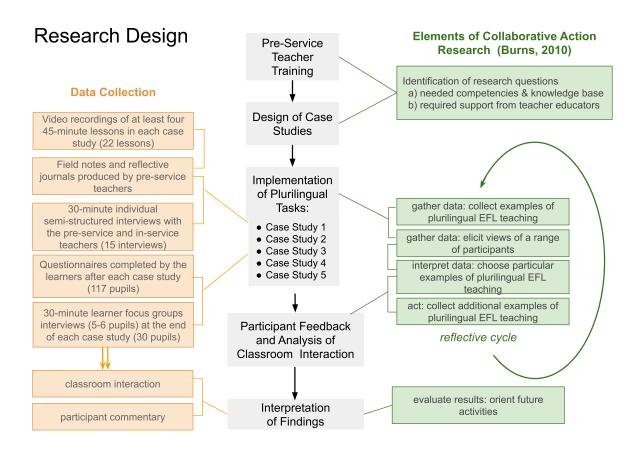


Figure 3:  Research Design

Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis process was used to interpret the data. Thematic analysis has been defined as "a qualitative analytic method that provides a flexible approach for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). It is

characterized by six stages: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) code generation, (3) theme development, (4) review of themes, (5) defining and naming themes and (6) relating the analysis to the current literature and production of the final report. In stage 2, an open coding approach was applied in order to ensure that codes were developed and modified as the coding process progressed. Once saturation was achieved, the codes were grouped into distinct themes, which were then reviewed for consistency in stage 4 to ensure that there were no overlaps between them, and then each theme was defined in stage 5. In stage 6, the themes were considered in the context of wider theory and literature. The most recurrent and relevant themes were generated using both deductive (theoretical) and inductive coding. Due to the explorative nature of the study, an inductive approach was favored. However, a deductive approach was also considered, as the analysis drew on the teacher cognition framework (e.g. core versus peripheral beliefs). MAXQDA - a software program that aids in the qualitative analysis of data - supported the process of coding and generation of prominent themes. This paper focuses specifically on two overarching themes (and subthemes) that were generated in response to research questions 1 and 2, namely (1) challenges concerning the design of plurilingual tasks and (2) challenges concerning the implementation of metalinguistic reflection. These themes have been chosen because of their prominence in the five case studies and because of their key significance in shedding light on the pre-service teachers' evolving understandings of plurilingual-inspired pedagogies (with a specific focus on task design and task implementation). A thematic table summarizing these themes (and their subthemes) is provided below:

| Themes: Didactic Challenges | Sub-Themes |
|---|---|
| **Designing Plurilingual Tasks** | • Adapting language teaching materials used at university to the school context<br>• Designing authentic and meaningful plurilingual tasks<br>• Promoting the full linguistic repertoires of learners |
| **Supporting Metalinguistic Reflection** | • Unterstanding language awareness as a core competence in language learning<br>• Using code-switching as a strategy to facilitate pupils' metalinguistic reflection<br>• Enhancing learner engagement during metalinguistic reflective work |

Table 2:    Thematic table

In the next section, these themes are explained in detail and evidenced by data excerpts from participants. Although all the other sources of data contributed to the findings, due to space limitations, the data that will be discussed in this article are drawn from the reflective reports and interviews with the pre-service teachers.

# 4. Research Findings

## 4.1 Designing Plurilingual Tasks: From Decontextualized Linguistic Exercises to Meaningful Plurilingual Communication

The following quote illustrates the pre-service teachers' perceptions regarding the impact of their field experiences on their learning about plurilingual education.

> During the course of the semester, a fictional lesson was planned and held in the seminar based on the approaches learned. Yet, the content remained partially theoretical. Only then, when working with a real class and teaching the plurilingual unit, I comprehended the true significance of the approach and the challenges it holds. (**T4 – Reflective Report**)

The data show that the opportunities for situated practice and the analyses of critical incidents helped the pre-service teachers to a) translate theoretical knowledge into procedural knowledge, b) gain a better understanding of the challenges involved in such approaches, and c) develop strategies to overcome these challenges. In the course of their projects, the pre-service teachers faced different challenges depending on their linguistic histories, their beliefs about language teaching and learning, the amount and quality of support they received from their mentors as well as institutional constraints. In this paper, some of these challenges are discussed in order to shed light on the pre-service teachers' learning processes. As already pointed out, they have been selected because they were shared by all five student teachers and they were more frequently identified as critical incidents.

In line with the principles of self-reflective situated practice, the pre-service teachers were provided with innumerable opportunities to exercise agency and autonomy (Stranger-Johannessen & Norton, 2017). Therefore, space was made for independent decision-making and the pre-service teachers were expected to assume complete responsibility for the final versions of their lessons. Due to a dearth of educational resources in this area, most of the teaching materials were produced by the pre-service teachers from scratch and without much access to useful modeling tasks that matched their context. As a result, one of the main challenges the pre-service teachers encountered in their projects concerned the design of effective and meaningful plurilingual tasks. One of the initial strategies for materials design used by them was the adaptation of teaching materials they had already used in the context of their university course. In the following interview extract, T2 reflected on her learning process regarding this issue:

> We looked at some tasks, for example the "I Love You" task, that's why I had this idea of doing more languages. But then I just discovered that for the pupils it is just more difficult, even though the words really look almost exactly the same, it was difficult for them. I don't know why, maybe there were just too many words, or they didn't know the approach [...]. They were like "I don't know what to do, what is this, I don't get it". So, that was my second lesson that was a total mess. I completely changed it then, and did it differently in the third lesson. (**T2 – Interview 2**)

In this sequence, T2 referred to a plurilingual exercise that she designed as part of the 'breakfast around the world' task (see Figure 1). As the teacher pointed out, in line 2, she based her design on a published plurilingual modeling task that was discussed in one of the university seminar sessions. In this task, the learners are exposed to the expression "I love you" in twelve languages and are guided to reflect on the similarities and differences among these languages through questions. Following the same design elements of this model task, T2 created an exercise in which the pupils were provided with word cards of five lexical items (toast, jam, coffee, yogurt and orange juice) in different languages and were supposed to match them to the appropriate language on their worksheet (see Figure 1). As noted by T2, this activity was not well-received by the students, who had difficulties to understand its purpose and its benefit.

In the following extract, T5 also reflected on this issue as she commented on her pupils' general evaluation of the tasks implemented in her case study.

Similar to the previous results, the students mentioned that they had difficulties regarding the plurilingual tasks, as some of the groups did not function well. Either one of the members solved the task on their own or the group did not find a solution at all. (**T5 – Reflective Report**)

In this extract, T5 also reflected on her students' difficulties in engaging with and solving some of the plurilingual exercises she implemented. When prompted to recount what they remembered about the teaching unit, the pupils failed to mention the exercises that focused on language analysis and language awareness. After being asked explicitly about those tasks, the students then discussed the challenges involved in solving them individually and as a group. One of the tasks designed by T5, for instance, was inspired by a similar plurilingual task implemented in her university seminar and focused on 'translation from an unknown language'. In the exercise designed by T5, the learners were supposed to translate three sentences containing New Year resolutions from Portuguese into English and German, and then reflect on their translation process. Apart from being related to the overall theme of the teaching unit (New Year festivities), this activity lacked a meaningful context that would connect it to the objectives of the core task, which was to create a poster about New Year Festivities around the world.

The data show that in all five case studies the pre-service teachers reflected on pupils' negative responses to decontextualized plurilingual exercises focusing on cross-language comparisons. They used their pupils' feedback and responses to reflect critically on the possible impact of such activities on their students' learning. T2, for instance, speculated that these types of exercises can be counterproductive in the sense that they could even help to create negative attitudes towards other languages and cultures. She noted:

The teacher has to be aware that a lack of such a connection to the activity can lead to dissociation of the task. A major danger of dissociation is that, if occurring on a regular basis, the students that do not feel personally involved, or to put it more explicitly, excluded - might develop negative attitudes towards other languages. (**T2 – Reflective Report**)

In this sequence, T2 referred to some primary school pupils who felt demotivated for not understanding the purposes of such cross-language awareness raising activities and/or for not being able to solve them satisfactorily. She also pointed out in other parts of her reflection that some pupils felt excluded for not having the prior knowledge of other languages and, as a result, they felt in disadvantage in comparison to their plurilingual peers.

The pre-service teachers also reflected on their pupils' reactions regarding the closed structure of the cross-linguistic awareness activities they used. Most of them only involved the use of languages predetermined by the teacher. They noticed that such activities could either put undue pressure on pupils seen as representatives of a specific language/culture or fail to create opportunities for the pupils to contribute actively with their expertise in their own languages or other languages they know. Our data also show that, while most learners (especially in the primary school context) wanted to give visibility to their diverse identities, there were also some learners who preferred not to expose different facets of their experiences and identities.

In the following sequences, two pre-service teachers commented on their learners' responses to those activities:

There was one child, she says she knows a little bit Japanese apparently, and she said "Why didn't you include Japanese, then I could participate, I know some words ". So, I noticed that they really want to have

> a link to what they are doing, and if they don't have a link to those languages, they are less interested. (**T2 – Interview 2**)

> In addition, some students were disappointed that their home country or the home country of their (grand) parents was not directly discussed, which I found a disadvantage for their motivation. (**T1 – Reflective Report**)

These results prompted the pre-service teachers to reflect on the importance of designing authentic tasks that create opportunities for the pupils to contribute with different elements of their linguistic repertoires, based on their own choices and interests. They noted that this approach could give learners agency over choice of linguistic resources, thus allowing plurilingual practice to emerge naturally within the group (Anderson, 2018). In the following extract, T5 reflected on how, in hindsight, she should have structured her teaching unit:

> So, if I had to do the teaching unit again, I would probably start out with the poster and have them working on it bit by bit because you could include, for example we did something about saying happy new year in different languages, it is something you could also use for the poster. You could start out with the poster and have them do a task where they work with the different languages. (**T5 – Interview 2**)

In this extract, T5 reflected on how metalinguistic reflective work could have been triggered by pupils' involvement in accomplishing an authentic plurilingual task. In this specific context, the introduction of the core task (design of a plurilingual poster on New Year Festivities around the world) at the very beginning of the teaching unit could have contributed to boost the pupils' interest in conducting research on different languages and cultures, since their engagement in cross-language and cross-cultural comparisons would be embedded in a meaningful context.

The data have shown that the opportunity to experiment with a plurilingual approach led the pre-service teachers to grasp a better understanding of the importance of contextualization and meaningfulness in the design of plurilingual activities. T2, for instance, noticed that, in her teaching, the best opportunities for metalinguistic reflection were created when the pupils were emotionally involved in meaningful plurilingual tasks that triggered their thinking about languages. In the following extract, she reflected on one of these tasks. The activity prompted learners to describe their favorite breakfast in written and spoken form and to draw a flag (or combination of flags) that symbolizes the type of breakfast (see Figure 1).

> By letting students draw their favorite breakfast, they were emotionally involved. Expressing preferences is a typical topic in primary classrooms (favorite animals, favorite hobbies, etc.). However, the task also required students to identify the country or the countries that their favorite breakfast items came from. (**T2 – Reflective Report**)

In other parts of her reflections, T2 noted that learners' emotional involvement with the task translated into stronger engagement, which prompted them to ask genuine questions about language and culture. In the following quote, she highlighted the importance of valuing and capitalizing on pupils' questions and emergent ideas to scaffold their thinking about language.

> During the drawings, some students came up to me and asked me for translations (from German into English), e.g. of "Brezel (or Pretzel) "and "Croissant ". Since a lot of students asked me about the word Brezel, I decided to shortly talk about this with the whole class and create a link to the previous lesson, where we already looked at loanwords. This time, the students immediately realized that there was a similarity to the German word (when I wrote the word (pretzel) on the blackboard for the first student

that asked me, they were like "Wow, this is like in German") and they understood that the English language took the word from the German language. (**T2 – Reflective Report**)

A key element in this excerpt is the sentence "since a lot of students asked me about the word *Brezel*". In contrast to another lesson, in which T2 was unable to motivate her learners to carry out metalinguistic reflection, in this specific episode she used a question initiated by the pupils to involve them actively in a process of cross-linguistic analysis. She prompted the pupils to draw on their knowledge of German (Pretzel) and English (pretzel) to enhance their understanding of the concept of loanwords (discussed in the previous lesson). As T2 pointed out in line 5, this approach was successful and the pupils were able to draw on their prior knowledge to answer their own question.

The data discussed in this section have shown that the situated practice opportunities triggered cognitive conflicts that led the pre-service teachers to rethink their practice and their roles in plurilingual education. They learned, for instance, that when their learners were personally involved in accomplishing meaningful plurilingual tasks, their motivation for cross-linguistic comparison was naturally enhanced. The next section discusses the pre-service teachers' professional developmental paths towards a better understanding of how to support and scaffold metalinguistic reflection in plurilingual education.

## 4.2 Supporting Metalinguistic Reflection: Shifting the Teacher Role from Instructor to Facilitator

Our research findings have shown that the opportunities to evaluate their understandings of a plurilingual-oriented pedagogy also opened up new spaces for critical self-reflection on their roles as EFL teachers. When asked about possible challenges they had faced during their projects, all pre-service teachers responded that they had identified some tensions between the aims of plurilingual pedagogy and some of the core objectives of EFL teaching. In the following extract, for instance, T2 reflected on this challenge:

Yes, the balance. Just to balance it out. I think my second lesson was too much based on creating linguistic and cultural awareness and too little on English language learning. So, I feel like, regarding English language learning, they didn't learn anything really in that lesson. I mean we repeated the vocabulary and they knew it very well, but other than that, they didn't learn anything new regarding the English language, so I think I have to be careful not to put the language learning in the background and just focus too much on those things. (**T2 – Interview 2**)

In this extract, T2 pointed to the importance of "balancing out" the goals of plurilingual education and EFL teaching, as she feared she may have neglected key objectives of the EFL curriculum in one specific lesson. As she stated in line 4, in that lesson her pupils "didn't learn anything new regarding the English language". At that point in her development, T2 did not seem to see cross-linguistic awareness as a core competence in foreign language learning, since cross-linguistic awareness ("those things") and EFL learning were categorized into two separate dimensions. Her concern resonates with research findings in other studies (e.g., Horst et al., 2010) that underscore the need to sensitize teachers to the added value of such cross-linguistic awareness activities for learners' (foreign) language development. On the other hand, T2 made a worthwhile point regarding the need to achieve a harmonious balance between the various objectives of the EFL curriculum. A similar tension was experienced by the participant teachers in Dooly and Valejo's study (2020). The authors concluded: "in a plurilingual

pedagogical approach, languages are not treated as separate resources and yet these teachers have been hired to ensure the learning of one specific language".

Another challenge associated with the implementation of cross-linguistic awareness raising activities was the fact that metalinguistic reflection often required code-switching into the school's language of instruction (in this case German). For the pre-service teachers this meant going against curriculum recommendations of target-language-only EFL instruction, and perhaps also against deeply ingrained beliefs about language learning rooted in school learning experiences (Phipps & Borg, 2009). In the following sequence, two pre-service teachers referred to the difficulties involved in using the target language for metalinguistic reflection:

> It was really difficult to talk in English all the time. Today I had to switch into German because I realized that the pupils did not understand my question. I think that is a disadvantage of this approach as well because talking about language is really difficult even in German and when it is done in English it is even more complicated. And the pupils told me that they did not understand the questions. (**T1 – Interview 2**)

> Reflecting on this part of the lesson, I think the class would have benefitted more from this phase if it had been in German. It is challenging to talk about language in a foreign language, especially with English as the L2 or L3. (**T4 – Reflective Report**)

In the first sequence, T1 expressed her frustration for having to code-switch into the school language (German) during cross-language awareness raising activities due to her primary school learners' limited target language proficiency. In lines 3-5, she noted that this may be a disadvantage of the plurilingual approach, since young learners do not possess enough skills to understand and/or discuss complex linguistic issues in the target language. The German national curriculum recommendations for EFL methodology are based on a monolingual approach that advocates the sole use of the target language by teachers and learners. Therefore, T1 and other participating teachers interpreted the need for code-switching as a drawback of such metalinguistic reflective work. In the second sequence, T4 also reflected on this issue, but she seemed to see code-switching in a more positive and as a strategy to facilitate pupils' learning.

Apart from pupils' limited target language proficiency, another challenge for cross-language awareness raising in those contexts was learners' limited knowledge of metalanguage to analyze linguistic phenomena. This issue was seen as an obstacle not only at the primary level but also in the case study conducted at the secondary school context. As pointed out by T5:

> Usually, I would expect year nine students to work on a metalinguistic level but they can't because they never did it before. So, they don't have explicit grammar teaching. They often don't know terms. So, it is really difficult for them to explain something. For example, when we had something where we compared different languages they could point out differences but couldn't explain. (**T5 – Interview 2**)

In this quote, T5 discussed the challenge involved in encouraging her 9th graders to discuss the use of language at a meta-level. She pointed out that the main reason for their poor performance was the fact that they "had not learned the terms necessary to talk about language". This challenge, which was reported by all participating teachers, can also be related to one of the limitations of the research project itself. Since each school project only covered one teaching unit (four to five lessons), the teachers lacked time to support their learners in the development of such knowledge. In order to be able to guide the students in the construction of their own metalinguistic knowledge, the pre-service teachers would have needed to scaffold learners in building up a metalanguage (in L1 and/or L2) for shared reflection and inquiry.

Therefore, the data have shown that the pre-service teachers experienced tension between deeply ingrained core beliefs about EFL teaching, as for instance the target-language-only approach, and more peripheral beliefs based on their newly acquired knowledge about plurilingual education. The focus on the target language as the only means of communication tended to limit pupils' active involvement during teacher-led whole-class activities focusing on metalinguistic reflection. A recurrent theme in our research data was the pre-service teachers' dissatisfaction with too much teacher talk during cross-language awareness raising activities. This interaction pattern was seen by the pre-service teachers as especially problematic because it went against their theoretical understanding of learner agency and learner autonomy as crucial elements for the development of plurilingual competence.

In spite of these challenges, our data show that the pre-service teachers were actively engaged in developing effective strategies to foster and support reflective work during the implementation of language awareness raising activities. In the following extract, for instance, T2 noted:

> When talking about compounds, I felt like the students were paying attention, but that I could have given them more of an opportunity to participate, e.g. by letting them identify the two words that were in "breakfast" and "orange juice" and by simply letting them come to the blackboard and put up the word cards. (**T2 – Interview 2**)

In this sequence, T2 described a situation in which she believed she underestimated her pupils' capacity to take an active part in the construction of metalinguistic knowledge. In lines 3-4, she reflected on possible strategies she could have used to involve them more fully in the teaching and learning process. In this extract, she made specific reference to the use of a more multi-sensory approach (e.g. through the use of word cards) so that the learners can visualize and actively manipulate elements on the board, thus having to rely less on spoken language for the understanding of linguistic concepts. Other pre-service teachers also made use of multi-sensory strategies and multimodal materials for their learners to carry out linguistic analysis. T3, for instance, created a game in the form of a puzzle, and T4 used maps to help learners understand the concept of language families and the relationship between geographic and linguistic distance (see Figure 2). When reflecting on pupils' reaction to this activity, T4 highlighted the pupils' strong engagement and their attention to details. She stated:

> The children copied the names of the animals correctly off their paper strips, including the diacritic marks of each language (e.g. the breve in Romanian and Turkish (in: girafă /tosbağa); the oblique stroke, and the diacritic dot in Polish (in: małpa/ żółw); and the acute accent in French (in: l'élé-phant). (**T4 – Reflective Report**)

Focus group interview data have also shown that this activity triggered interesting spontaneous conversations and generated questions in the groups about the use of diacritical marks and their value (e.g. why are they necessary, why some languages have them and others don't). This led T4 to conclude that the main goal of cross-language awareness activities is not to teach learners about language, but to stimulate their curiosity towards linguistic diversity. She realized that the learning paths are mostly defined by the pupils themselves, as they follow their own interests and ideas. T4 concluded:

> Apart from that, I realized when working with a wide range of languages that the role of the teacher shifts: from teacher centered to student centered […]. Together new insights about different languages and cultures can be gained as the students engage in conversation to share their knowledge and experience. (**T4 – Reflective Report**)

Therefore, the data have shown that the pre-service teachers struggled at times with finding ways to conciliate their personal enthusiasm for a plurilingual-inspired pedagogy with a number of methodological and institutional constraints. As pointed out earlier, discrepancies between teachers' beliefs and practice can be related to contextual factors hindering the language teachers' ability to adopt practices that are consonant with their cognitions (Feryok, 2010). Nevertheless, all pre-service teachers concluded their projects with a strong conviction on the value of plurilingual practices in language learning and teaching. The situated-practice opportunities seemed to have supported the acquisition of important competences and skills for the enactment of plurilingual education (e.g., design of plurilingual tasks and scaffolding metalinguistic reflection). However, due to the short duration of each case study, the data have shown that the main impact of the program was at the attitudinal level. At the end of the case studies, all participants expressed interest and willingness to continue learning about plurilingual-inspired pedagogies in order to be able to implement them successfully in their future practice. The following quote illustrates their views:

> Yes, I definitely think that I benefitted from it, because as I said, I really want to apply this approach in my future. Referring to the "Bildungsplan" (National Curriculum), it is the duty of the English language teacher to promote the development of positive attitudes towards the learning of languages. This goal cannot be achieved if some languages are ignored or even considered impedimental to learning, while others are promoted. (**T2 – Reflective Report**)

The findings presented herein confirm the value of self-reflective situated practice as a basis for theory learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The data have shown that, by attempting to provide their own solutions to the challenges they faced, the pre-service teachers developed a more nuanced understanding of the nature, benefits and challenges of plurilingual education.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper has presented and discussed research findings of a classroom-based investigation that involved the collaboration between pre- and in-service teachers for the design, implementation and evaluation of plurilingual EFL tasks. The study used a Vygotskian sociocultural perspective as the basis for a conceptual framework to research language teacher cognition (Cross, 2010). Pre-service teachers' cognitions were investigated as they learned how to translate concepts of plurilingualism and plurilingual education studied at University into their situated pedagogical practice. The findings have shown that the opportunities for situated practice and the analyses of critical incidents helped the pre-service teachers to rethink their understandings of plurilingualism, which led to the development of new competencies required for the enactment of plurilingual education. For instance, the pre-service teachers were sensitized to the importance of authenticity and meaningfulness in the design of plurilingual tasks. The data also point to the development of teaching strategies for ensuring learners' active engagement in metalinguistic reflection in spite of their limited target language proficiency and metalanguage resources. As for instance, the employment of multisensory and multimodal resources to scaffold the learners' thinking about language(s).

The findings also shed light on the impact of the teacher education programme on the (re)construction of the pre-service teachers' professional identities. Their involvement in reflective practice triggered cognitive conflicts that led them to question well-established recommendations of the EFL curriculum (e.g. target language only policies) and to develop a more nuanced understanding of their facilitative (as opposed to directive) roles in the process of plurilingual competence

development. The findings revealed tensions between teachers' core (deeply ingrained) and peripheral (less strongly held) beliefs about teaching and learning (Phipps & Borg, 2009). For instance, even though all participant teachers received training on plurilingual education prior to their case studies, their core beliefs, which were mainly shaped by previous language learning experiences and monolingual practices advocated by the national curriculum, had a strong influence on how they experienced and interpreted the need for code-switching in their lessons. Similar to Dooly and Valejo's (2020) findings on in-service teachers' perceptions, the pre-service teachers in our research also recognized tensions between theoretical frameworks and curriculum recommendations that "push for extensive exposure and use of the target language and a new theoretical framework that allows space for a wider range of communicative resources (linguistic and otherwise) as input and tools for language learning" (Dooly & Valejo, 2020, p. 13). The main contribution of our research is to offer insight into the potential of self-reflective situated practice to allow teachers to move beyond these tensions towards thinking about practice-tested solutions. In the process of figuring out how to negotiate these different beliefs, the pre-service teachers started to reframe their professional identities. They concluded their projects with the willingness to continue learning beyond graduation in order to be able to implement plurilingual-inspired pedagogies successfully in their future practice.

The analysis of the research data confirms the value of teacher cognition research in shedding light on language teachers' evolving understandings of innovative concepts and practices. The study has produced findings that reveal important aspects of the development of teachers' cognition in the context of the integration of plurilingual-inspired pedagogies into the EFL curriculum, the challenges associated with adopting an innovative approach to language education, and the new competencies that are needed in this context. Findings such as the ones presented in this paper can have important implications for the design of language teacher education models that account for the needs, priorities and expectations of L2 teachers. It is hoped that these findings can also be used productively in teacher education. The qualitative accounts of the pre-service teachers' classroom practices and their rationales can also constitute material that can be used in teacher education contexts to encourage other teachers to reflect on their own beliefs and practices. Due to the relatively limited number of research participants, the research does not allow us to make conclusive statements about teacher cognition development in this area. Another potential limitation of this study is the relatively short duration of each case study. Therefore, our findings indicate a need for further classroom-based longitudinal research in order to be able to build methodological and theoretical models of plurilingual education that are grounded in classroom-based inquiry, reflection, and experimentation.

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