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Research priorities in the field of multilingualism and language education: a cross-national examination

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ABSTRACT

Due to globalisation and migration, multilingualism has become both a reality and an aim of education systems across Europe, affecting how language education is shaped. To improve the ways in which schools cater for language education in diverse settings, research is required on the potentials of multilingualism in order to design curricula that foster skills in different languages. This paper aims at identifying and explaining research priorities in the field of multilingualism and language education in a cross-national perspective. It draws on data from a survey with 298 expert participants in five European countries (Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain) who ranked pre-identified research topics in relation to their perceived urgency. Results show that experts identified ‘effectiveness of multilingual support in regular lessons’, ‘features of multilingual didactics’ and ‘effectiveness of literacy support in home languages on the development of academic language skills in the majority language’ as having the highest research priority overall. However, these results vary across national settings investigated. While the German, Dutch and Portuguese respondents attributed urgency to research on academic language skills, other issues were rated higher in the Spanish and Italian research contexts. The advantages and limitations of conducting cross-national research are also addressed.

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Introduction

Societal and individual multilingualism are currently the norm in most regions across the world (Piller 2016). Surges in migration in recent decades, coupled with forms of virtual mobility, render ‘superdiverse’ conditions in most societies (Vertovec 2007). Education systems have amplified their focus on internationalisation as a result of globalising and diversifying trends from the latter part of the twentieth century (Ampuja 2015), despite the prevalence of ‘one nation, one language’ ideologies or the ‘monolingual habitus’ (Gogolin 2002) that they tend to produce. Although diversity has always been a fundamental attribute in Europe, cultural and linguistic homogeneity became the primary objective for most (aspiring) nation-states from the late eighteenth century (Hobsbawm

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1991). While some European countries actively promote different types of multilingual education within public schooling (e.g. Estonia [Mehisto 2015], Luxembourg [Ministère de l'éducation nationale, de l'enfance et de la jeunesse 2007]¹) and others make (usually regional) provisions for autochthonous minority languages, most are characterised by a monolingual self-understanding.

Multilingualism presents both challenges to and opportunities for all education systems, and so it is necessary for the field of language education to reflect on and adjust to this reality. Empirical research must be conducted to allow researchers and practitioners to meet the challenges and draw on the opportunities of linguistically diverse societies. Yet the research field remains somewhat uneven (Gogolin 2014). Whereas much is known on models for efficient language teaching in general (e.g. the benefits of CLIL approaches), the demands on language education in light of increasing diversity are less well explored (Duarte and Gogolin 2013). There is a need to comprehensively address both issues pertaining to diversity in language education and education systems as a whole, by tackling several layers, from the individual to teacher preparation, policies and curricula.

The recent 'multilingual turn in language education' (Conteh and Meier 2014; May 2014) sees a rise in alternative approaches to the still widely held monolingual ideologies in mainstream, second language and bilingual education, consisting of a growing body of theories, pedagogies and practices. For instance, Flores and Baetens Beardsmore (2015) refer to the benefits of heteroglossic approaches in which minority and immigrant languages are incorporated in instruction. Cenoz and Gorter (2011) propose the 'Focus on Multilingualism' approach which connects the natural multilingual practices of pupils to language education. Basic notions deriving from the monolingual bias, such as that of the idealised native speaker, are thus challenged under this new paradigm. Yet, research on the long-term effectiveness of such approaches on educational outcomes, school development and teachers' professional development remain scarce. These are just some of the open questions requiring closer inspection.

In her overview of linguistic development in educational contexts, Gogolin (2014) identifies further questions that emerge for language education in light of the multilingual turn. For example, while the relationship between socio-economic status and pupil achievement is clear, residuals not explained by this are significant and become salient once pupils are identified as multilingual or as having a migrant background. Another gap in the field is the exploitation of research results for educational practice. On the one hand, research on language education is partly informed by demands from educational practice. On the other hand, many studies aim more at clarifying conditions for designing practice, rather than developing and testing concepts for implementation. In addition, few cases have been subject to a review of the quality or effectiveness of measures implemented (Gogolin 2014).

The field of multilingualism and language education is thus currently confronted with several topics pertaining to demographic change, knowledge gaps and a paradigm shift from monoglossic ideologies to plural approaches (Flores and Baetens Beardsmore 2015). This has diverse repercussions including *inter alia* perceptions of individual pupils, teaching methods in language and non-language lessons and curricular guidelines at regional, national and European levels. Coupled with the wide spectrum of topics explored in the literature, it becomes increasingly necessary to identify and refine research priorities.

The present study was therefore developed to identify research priorities in the open and expanding field of language education and multilingualism across Europe. Conducted in the national contexts of Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain, expert participants were asked to rank pre-identified research topics in terms of their perceived urgency. Different contexts portray diverse education systems, multilingual settings, histories of migration, as well as research traditions. This paper presents a cross-national examination that goes beyond national contexts, thereby attempting to outline overarching needs in language education and multilingualism in Europe. While comparison of different national contexts is enriching it also, in turn, serves to clarify one's own national context as well as to delineate overarching commonalities and differences between countries.

We describe the development of and findings from this cross-national expert survey that is based on a pre-existing German survey of research priorities in the field of language education and

multilingualism (Gogolin, Hansen, and McMonagle 2017) Research teams from Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain adapted the survey from the German setting. By reviewing the findings from all five national settings, this paper aims to answer the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1: What are the most urgent research priorities for multilingualism and language education across countries?

RQ2: What are the main differences and similarities in research priorities across the five contexts?

RQ3: What variables are associated with differences in research priorities?

RQ4: What patterns in terms of research priorities can be found in the data?

Cross-national research on multilingualism and language education

Cross-national, comparative research is an incredibly complex endeavour (Baistow 2000). Nowadays, most research conducted as such does not aim at simply describing different sets of national practices, but rather at identifying commonalities and differences between countries in order to extrapolate from these in relation to an overarching topic. In accordance with Kohn's (1987) classifications of cross-national research, the present article falls into the category of studies that seek to obtain more information on a particular phenomenon by exploring it in two or more countries.

The countries represented in this study all have multilingualism as a reality in their education systems, catering to different extents to both autochthonous minority and migrant pupils. In terms of similarities between the countries, and despite the presence of multilingualism, they all have a monolingual self-understanding, linked with a 'national' language that is usually the language of schooling. In recent years, the various education systems have had to accommodate newly arrived pupils, albeit to differing degrees. Each system displays achievement gaps between immigrant and native pupils, as well as between pupils of the second and first migrant generations (OECD 2015).

Multilingualism and language education in the national settings

Germany is the country with the third largest number of international migrants in the world (after the United States and Saudi Arabia) (United Nations 2017). Germany is therefore home to considerable migration-induced multilingualism, from the in-migration of so-called *guest workers* from the 1950s to refugee arrivals in 2014/15. As each of the 16 federal states is responsible for organising its own education system, language education presents a rather complex and diverse picture, from foreign to heritage-language teaching and support. In the states of Saxony and Brandenburg educational provision is made for the officially recognised autochthonous languages, Upper and Lower Sorbian; this is likewise the case for speakers of Danish in the state of Schleswig Holstein. In Germany, however, there is a much stronger research focus on migrant languages than on those of autochthonous minorities. Much of this research stems from disparities in educational achievement between students with and without a migrant background, for which language has been deemed an influencing factor. In response, research and educational practice have focused on German as the language of schooling for second-language learners (Schneider et al. 2013; Paetsch et al. 2014). While this emphasis neglects the heritage languages of learners, other lines of research call for their inclusion in education (Fürstenau 2016; Gogolin 2017). Such research addresses teachers' beliefs (Hachfeld et al. 2015) and the different skills that students possess in their different languages (Schroeder, Chlosta, and Ostermann 2003). Migrant languages typically investigated in educational domains in Germany are *inter alia* Turkish, Russian, Polish and Portuguese. Research on multilingualism in Germany has intensified in recent years to include topics such as the cognitive benefits of multilingualism, language awareness, and the integration of multilingualism into mainstream education (Gogolin, McMonagle, and Salem 2019). Given the expansion and diversification of the research field, an enquiry was conducted in Germany in 2015/16 to clarify research topics

having highest priority (Gogolin, Hansen, and McMonagle 2017), upon which the present study is based.

In Italy, next to Italian and its dialects, four regional languages are recognised as official languages: German and Ladin in South Tyrol, French in the Aosta Valley and Slovenian in Friuli-Venezia Giulia. Research has mainly focused on how to promote these languages as subjects in public schooling, on the challenges of this multilingual education in relation to sociolinguistic circumstances (Gross 2019; Mastellotto and Zanin 2020), and on student performance (Abel and Vettori 2017). In the larger national context, research has focused on the teaching of Italian to migrant students (Catarci 2014; Minuz and Borri 2016) and on the use and benefits of CLIL (mainly in respect to English; see Franceschini 2013). Recently, multilingualism has gained attention among researchers in the field of education who enquire how linguistic diversity may be supported in schools as an aspect of intercultural education (Fiorucci, Pinto Minerva, and Portera 2017). This focus emerged in recent years, as Italy becomes more linguistically diverse due to in-migration, resulting in the presence of over 5 million resident immigrants, or 8.5% of the population (Varisco 2018). The most widespread migrant heritage languages are Romanian, Arabic and Spanish (ISTAT 2014). Immigrant languages are not officially supported in the Italian education system, and so research on this is still in its early stages.

In the Netherlands, around 25% of the population has a migrant background (CBS 2019). Frisian is an officially recognised minority language and is part of the education system in Friesland. Dialects such as Limburgish and Low-Saxon currently struggle for more inclusion in education. In addition, Papiamentu, Turkish, Arabic and Polish are widely spoken by their respective communities. Language education is still very much focused on the acquisition of English as a foreign language in early education (de Bot 2014) or on Dutch-English bilingual programmes. Recent trends seek to develop teaching approaches in which regional and migrant languages are integrated in mainstream education (Duarte and van der Meij 2018b). Due to a persisting achievement gap (Gubbels et al. 2019), issues around the performance of migrant pupils are currently on the political and research agendas (Duarte and van der Meij 2018a). Research investigations shine a light on structural features that seem to impact the educational achievement of pupils with an immigrant background in crucial ways, such as the relatively late stage at which pupils enter formal education and academic tracking (Andersen and van de Werfhorst 2010; Crul and Schneider 2010; Crul, Schneider, and Lelie 2012; Dronkers, van der Velden, and Dunne 2012; van de Werfhorst 2015). Another line of research examines teacher expectations of ethnic minority pupils (Jungbluth 2003; van den Bergh et al. 2010; Weiner 2016). Recent research has focussed on delineating pedagogical guidelines towards including migrant and minority multilingualism in mainstream education (Duarte and van der Meij 2018a).

The official languages of Portugal are Portuguese and the regional autochthonous language, Mirandese. Migration-induced multilingualism is also present, especially in urban areas. 4.8% of the primary and secondary school population has an immigrant background (mostly from the former Portuguese colonies, but also from eastern Europe, China and France; CNE 2018). Many migrant pupils thus speak Portuguese as L1 and are not automatically categorised as second language learners. Research on multilingualism in education has mainly been carried out in relation to foreign languages (especially intercomprehension and plurilingualism), teacher and learner autonomy, Portuguese as a second language, and technology-based teaching and learning (Vieira, Moreira, and Peralta 2014). Intercultural education, as an overarching educational project, addresses multilingualism indirectly. In formal education, interest is especially paid to strategies, resources and professional development in relation to Portuguese as a second language (Mateus and Solla 2013). Developing the Portuguese-language proficiency among immigrant students to ensure access to the curriculum is today a major priority in education. However, educational research has started paying attention to migrant languages as a new focus area. This interest mostly emerges in the field of pluri-/bilingual education, but is not yet strongly established in educational research in Portugal.

In Spain, language policy and research is primarily focused on the regional languages with official recognition: Basque, Galician and Catalan. Within their Autonomous Communities (ACs), these

languages are co-official with Spanish (Castilian). Aragonese, Asturian and Leonese are recognised, though not official, autochthonous minority languages. The linguistic normalisation laws (1982–1998) stipulate that the ACs are responsible for the promotion of their respective languages, including in education (Herrerías 2010). Basque, Galician and Catalan are both school subjects and the medium of instruction in the respective regions. In the case of the latter, Spanish is taught as a mandatory subject. Speakers of regional languages in Spain are in almost all cases bi- or multilingual, and foreign languages (mainly English, French, Portuguese) are acquired in schools (Cenoz 2012). In some instances, consideration is given to diversity in the population. For example, the 2004 *Plan per a la llengua i la cohesió social* stipulates that Catalan should be the vehicle of social cohesion in Catalonia's multilingual context. However, in Spain, knowledge on migrant achievement in education and the role of other languages for learning is limited. While many migrants speak Spanish as their first language, official figures indicate that 7% of immigrants come from non-Spanish speaking countries (mainly Morocco and Romania) (INE 2019). Most of the recent research on language education is focused on the benefits of CLIL for teaching foreign languages (Navarro-Pablo and García-Jiménez 2018; Pérez Cañado 2018; Martínez Agudo 2019) or the relationships between regional languages, multilingualism and translanguaging (Cenoz and Gorter 2019).

The five national settings included in this study thus represent a wide range of sociolinguistic, educational and research traditions from diverse areas in Europe. As our study does not aim to compile a set of best practices, we made no explicit effort to include countries with exceptional track records in fostering multilingualism in education (e.g. Luxembourg). Rather, our contexts are selected to indicate the layers and complexities of multilingualism in education, to which 'typical' countries of in-migration (Germany and the Netherlands) have developed rather differentiated research and policy responses to the southern European countries in which, until recent decades, emigration was a marked feature (Caruana, Coposescu, and Scaglione 2013). Despite differences, all contexts represented in this study face challenges of inclusion which can be mediated by targeted research. Coupled with paradigm shifts in the relevant literature, it thus becomes gradually necessary to pinpoint urgent needs in the field to be addressed by research. We opted for a cross-national examination in order to maximise knowledge obtained beyond the traditional nation-state. Representing 223 million inhabitants, our country contexts account for 45% of the EU population. Yet we must acknowledge the limitations of reaching a 'European' perspective based on just these five settings. The fact that no Scandinavian, eastern European or English-speaking (e.g. Ireland/UK) contexts are included here is a significant weakness that should be addressed in future studies. The selective nature of our cross-national study is also largely due to the vicissitudes of academia – establishing collaborative research with enough resources at each partners' disposal is an immense task. At the same time, however, the present study does provide enough differentiation to be able to offer significant results that can be linked to other regions in Europe. Furthermore, the survey developed for this study is freely available to be translated and implemented in other national or regional contexts.

Method

The quantitative cross-national survey is based on a previous multi-step Delphi study in Germany (Gogolin, Hansen, and McMonagle 2017). The aim of this study was to determine a set of research priorities in the field of multilingualism and language education, as expressed, reflected and rated by a panel of experts throughout the German-speaking area of Europe. To do this, the Delphi method was adopted: an iterative and reflective approach, conducted over survey rounds, employed to reach a group perspective among a structured panel of expert participants (Häder 2002). The German study took place online and in two rounds of enquiry using with the survey software, *Umfrageonline*. In the first round, expert participants named, in a structured and open format, research topics that ought to be urgently researched. The qualitative data elicited in this open round of enquiry was then analysed, summarised and abstracted. The abstracted content was transformed into research 'items'

which were displayed back to study participants to rank in terms of priority on a Likert scale (see Gogolin, Hansen, and McMonagle 2017).

Altogether, 143 research items were abstracted for prioritisation in the German study; these 143 items were then translated into English in order to be adapted for the other national surveys. The research items used in the cross-national survey thus emerged from this German study. Adapting the German-based survey to other contexts necessitated reflection on the most 'correct' target terms in Dutch, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish. Nonetheless, it is almost unavoidable that concepts such as heritage language, bilingual education, academic and foreign language or multilingualism be interpreted in light of the experts' own country background. Given space restrictions, this paper will not present rankings for all 143 items assessed by expert participants across all five national contexts. Rather, we will present the 'top ten' items receiving highest priority cross-nationally.

Sampling and sample description

Our study sample consisted of expert participants from the five European countries outlined above. Because we aimed to uncover a set of *research* priorities, experts were considered those familiar with the current state of *scholarship* on multilingualism and education. A non-probabilistic snowball sampling method (Berg 2006) was initially used, in which experts from different educational and academic areas related to the thematic area, were identified in each setting and invited to participate in the research. In order to obtain a broad and diverse sample of expertise, these experts were selected via relevant academic journals, conference programmes, and the websites of universities and research organisations. These experts were also asked to name others with suitable expertise, who were subsequently contacted by us to take part in the survey.

In total, 298 experts participated in the survey, most of whom were female (67%). Participants fell mainly into two age groups, between 31 and 50 years (46.7%) and older than 50 (47%). About 50% of the participants claimed to have been working on the topics of multilingualism and language education for 15 years or more of their professional lives, which supports the assumption that they are indeed experts in the field. Participants work in academia (75%), educational practice (10.7%) as well as in educational policy/administration (8%) and are specialised in academic disciplines such as linguistics (51.9%), education/pedagogy (17.8%) and in both linguistics and education science (18.3%). For those in education, participants are specialised in didactics (23.7%), multilingualism (21.3%), second language learning (20.7%), educational research (17.7%) and intercultural education (11.7%). The linguistic disciplines of the participants are multilingualism (35.7%), applied linguistics (31.7%), sociolinguistics (19.3%), psycholinguistics (10.3%) and philology (8.3%).

Procedures

Following the translation of the German survey, with some adjustments to reflect terminological traditions in each setting, those identified as experts were emailed a link to the relevant survey with a standard explanatory text in the relevant national language. Data collection took place in Germany in 2016, and in the other four settings between May 2018 and January 2019. Participants were instructed to rate the importance of each item on a 4-point Likert scale, from 4 (very important) to 1 (not important). Additional answer options included: '*Topic is sufficiently researched*' and '*Unable to assess*'. The German study showed that the number of participants decreased over the course of the survey, presumably due to the large number of research items to be evaluated. However, since the mean values act as a precedence measure, and the number of participants did not vary too much among participating countries, a comparison of the mean values was possible. The 10 research topics brought into focus in the current paper received the highest mean scores. They therefore received the highest prioritisation across the sample of expert participants.

Item validation

We analysed the psychometric properties of the ten highest-ranked items in relation to the highest priority across the five national contexts. A Cronbach's Alpha of .78 was obtained and corrected item-total correlations were higher than or about .40. Factor analysis, based on a Principal Component Method of extraction, revealed that the ten items form only one dimension or component, so that all of them have a correlation (factorial weight) of $>.50$ with the component extracted.

Data analysis

Descriptive statistics were calculated to identify topics prioritised for research by our expert participants, first for each country individually and then for the sample as a whole (RQ1). The average deviation index (AD_M) was used as the measure of agreement between participant answers (Burke and Dunlap 2002), so that values lower than $A/6$ denote significant agreement among participants on a particular topic. Values lower than 0.67 ($4/6$) denote satisfactory agreement among participants.

Since each national panel of experts prioritised research items differently, an Analysis of Variance test (ANOVA) was used to identify the main differences between the country settings (RQ2). Background variables (age, occupation, specialisation) were added as possible explanatory factors in research priorities across countries (RQ3). The Tamhane or Scheffé tests calculated post hoc comparisons, according to the results of Levene's homogeneity variance test. Interactions among categorical variables that point to differences in research priorities could be integrated into a statistical function able to classify or group countries. A TwoStep cluster analysis, based on a log-likelihood measure, was used to turn out natural groupings among participants; categorical variables in this analysis were chosen from the results obtained from ANOVA test (RQ4).

Results

What are the most urgent research priorities in the area of multilingualism and education across countries?

In response to RQ1, the descriptive results for the top-ten research priorities across the five country settings are summarised in Table 1; for each research item ranked in terms of priority, the means (M), standard deviations (SD) and average deviation indexes (AD_M) were calculated. Items are ranked by means; the higher the mean value, the more urgent a research item was considered. As detailed below, 'the effectiveness of multilingual support in regular school lessons' and 'the features of multilingual didactics' were deemed the most urgent research topics across all countries, with means close to 3.5 and AD_M lower than .67.

Table 1. Cross-national research priorities in multilingualism and language education.

		N	M	SD	AD_M
1	The effectiveness of multilingual support in regular school lessons	254	3.56	.60	.54
2	The features of multilingual didactics	246	3.48	.69	.60
3	The effectiveness of literacy support in home languages on the development of academic language skills in majority language	257	3.45	.70	.62
4	School-teacher-parent cooperation in language support	258	3.38	.79	.69
5	How schools can value multilingualism without privileging particular languages	260	3.32	.86	.74
6	The effects of coordinated literacy learning on academic language skills	230	3.29	.75	.65
7	Language practices in groups of learners that comprise both monolingual and multilingual learners	253	3.22	.80	.67
8	How multilingual children can most effectively transfer between different educational levels	251	3.21	.81	.68
9	The long-term effects of early foreign language learning on foreign language competences	253	3.11	.84	.68
10	Comparing learning difficulties of learners with country language as a second language and weak learners with country language as first language	254	3.09	.85	.70

‘The effectiveness of literacy support in home languages’ is also prioritised highly for research ($M = 3.45$; $AD_M < .67$), as are ‘the effects of coordinated literacy learning on academic language skills’ ($M = 3.29$; $AD_M < .67$). While there is significant agreement between participants on these topics, others, such as ‘school-teacher-parent cooperation’ ($M = 3.38$; $AD_M = .67$), ‘the effective transfer between different educational levels for multilingual children’ ($M = 3.21$; $AD_M = .68$) and ‘the long-term effects of early foreign language learning in foreign language competences’ ($M = 3.11$; $AD_M = .68$) were also deemed important, but slightly above .67. The topic ranked tenth overall concerns comparisons between weak learners whose first language is the national language and learners having this language as second language ($M = 3.09$; $AD_M = .70$).

We can make some general observations on these findings. Firstly, the top three items prioritise mainstream educational settings for research. The tradition of out-of-school language tuition for multilingual pupils (cf. García and Wei 2014) appears to be of less concern to our experts than regular classes for language-focused research. Secondly, our experts prioritise research to enhance didactical knowledge that corresponds to multilingual pupils’ language use. Yet our methods and findings also suggest that it would be unwise to attempt to draw overall conclusions from the cross-national survey. As our results vary from country to country, we provide a summary in the next section of the main differences and similarities found. Following a presentation of the descriptive statistics, we reflect on our findings (general and differentiated) in the final discussion and implications section.

What are the main differences and similarities in research priorities across European countries?

Eliciting data from five national settings – each with disparate education systems, patterns of linguistic diversity and research traditions – inevitably meant that a number of differences in research priorities were identified. Statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) in answering RQ2 were found between countries in six of the 10 items displayed above, but the highest effect size is .06 and those differences were only found in 11 of 100 pairs of possible comparisons (Table 2). Participants from Spain, the Netherlands and Germany considered less important than Italian respondents ‘the features of multilingual didactics’, ‘the effects of coordinated literacy learning on academic language skills’, ‘practices in groups that comprise both monolingual and multilingual learners’, and ‘long-term effects of early foreign language competences’. German participants considered ‘the effectiveness of multilingual support in regular lessons’ a more urgent research topic than the Spanish respondents, and ‘the effects of coordinated literacy learning on academic skills’ had more priority for them than for the Dutch. Finally, the Portuguese participants prioritised research topics relating to academic language skills much higher than the Spanish and Dutch respondents did. Table 2 displays the statistically significant differences between pairs of countries for given research topics.

Table 2. Statistically significant differences in country pairs.

How important is it to conduct research on the following topics?	G	N	I	P	S
The effectiveness of multilingual support in regular school lessons	S				
The features of multilingual didactics			S	S	
The effectiveness of literacy support in home languages on the development of academic language skills in majority language				S	
School-teacher-parent cooperation in language support					
How schools can value multilingualism without privileging particular languages					
The effects of coordinated literacy learning on academic language skills	N		N	N	
Language practices in groups of learners that comprise both monolingual and multilingual learners			GN		
How multilingual children can most effectively transfer between different educational levels					
The long-term effects of early foreign language learning on foreign language competences			GN		
Comparing learning difficulties of learners with country language as a second language and weak learners with country language as first language					

Letters in cells refer to countries whose means are lower. The differences between means are statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

The results obtained by the analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicate that there are no statistically significant differences between countries for four items: ‘School-teacher-parent cooperation’ ($F_{4,253} = 1.880$; $p = .114$), ‘how schools can value multilingualism without privileging particular languages’ ($F_{4,255} = 1.977$; $p = .098$), ‘how multilingual children can most effectively transfer between different educational levels’ ($F_{4,246} = 1.996$; $p = .096$), and ‘comparing learning difficulties of learners with country language as a second language and weak learners with country language as first language’ ($F_{4,249} = 1.425$; $p = .226$). There was thus more consensus between experts in the prioritisation of these topics.

Country-based explanation of main differences and similarities in research priorities

The top research priority to emerge in the German study – ‘the characteristics of lessons aimed at successfully supporting language among newly arrived migrant children’ ($M = 1.26$; $AD_M = 0.40$) – does not feature whatsoever in the cross-national top ten. We interpret this prioritisation as a reaction to the immigration of refugees (in particular from Syria) that was occurring as this study was carried out in 2015/16. Chancellor Merkel’s open-door immigration policy presented new challenges to the German education system, such as German-language acquisition for children presenting with various L1s and whose educational biographies had been interrupted. Research in Germany on multilingualism and education is increasingly concerned with support for and the integration of heritage languages in learning. The top research priority into ‘successful’ support for language among newly arrived migrant children may include such goals, although this can only be speculated. We would interpret, however, the second highest priority among the German respondents – ‘the effectiveness of teaching concepts for the promotion of multilingualism in regular lessons’ – in this way. Research on the effectiveness of teaching concepts is generally considered to be very important in the German survey with related topics receiving high mean values (Gogolin, Hansen, and McMonagle 2017). A further significant topic in Germany concerns research into competences for the promotion of multilingualism among pedagogical personnel. Research efforts should focus in particular on raising the qualifications of and awareness among ‘non-language’ subject teachers regarding multilingualism, as well as the inclusion of multilingualism in subject-specific teacher training. Other thematic areas that received high priority include the effects of multilingual education on academic language skills (in German) as well as on subject comprehension.

Participants in Italy rate research into the features of multilingual didactics as most urgent. This reflects an ideological change regarding multilingualism as it increasingly considered in curricula and lessons. In Italy, the CLIL methodology fosters inclusion to an extent and various in-service teacher trainings regarding language are offered (MIUR 2018). However, research on multilingual didactics is scarce and more evidence is requested to justify such actions. ‘School-teacher-parent cooperation’ is also prioritised higher in Italy than in the other countries. This might be explained by recent in-migration, resulting in the diversification of classrooms (Varisco 2018). Parents do not always have sufficient command of an official language, which often means a lack of communication and cooperation between schools, teachers and parents, which is critical to learning and language development. Third, ‘the effectiveness of literacy support in home languages on the development of academic language skills’ are ranked highly by the Italian experts. Those working on multilingualism in Italy recognise the importance of literacy support in home languages, but this support is generally not included in the curriculum. Consequently, little is known about the effectiveness of such support on academic language skills in Italian.

Dutch experts prioritised research on ‘the effectiveness of literacy support in home languages on the development of academic language skills’, highlighting the relevance of raising Dutch-language competences. This research priority ranked lower in the other settings (e.g. fifth in Germany and eighth in Spain). This prioritisation may be related to the centralised exams that are carried out annually in Dutch, from early primary education, and in which a majority of multilingual pupils

lag behind their monolingual Dutch-speaking peers. Experts thus suggest that future research focus on the relationship between literacy support in home languages and overall educational success. Similar to the other settings, this priority was followed by research on ‘the effectiveness of multilingual support in regular school lessons’, stressing the importance of inclusive perspectives in multilingual education, rather than compartmentalised approaches which are very common in the Netherlands (Duarte and van der Meij 2018a).

Spanish experts prioritised research on ‘the effectiveness of multilingual support in regular school lessons’ and ‘the features of multilingual didactics’. Teaching methods and educational resources are considered most relevant in achieving educational goals. ‘School-teacher-parent collaboration’ is therefore also an important topic to research. The Spanish experts appear to be more concerned with the methods regarding multilingualism in education, rather than ideological perspectives on the role of heritage languages for learning. As such, the relationship between home languages and academic language development or differences between learners in a first or second language, are considered less important to research. Language education policy in Spain generally incorporates several foreign languages as well as official languages (national or regional) (Doppelbauer and Cichon 2008; Comajoan 2010). Migrant heritage languages are not (yet) on the research agenda as most migrants come from Spanish-speaking countries. The Spanish experts are therefore more concerned about enhancing skills in two or more foreign languages. Most primary and secondary schools in Spain implement CLIL for foreign-language teaching and learning. Practitioners and researchers engage in debates on subject-content quality when taught in a foreign language (Goris, Denessen, and Verhoeven 2019). We thus interpret the Spanish priority to research ‘the effects of coordinated literacy learning on academic language skills’ as directly related to that debate.

‘The features of multilingual didactics’ also received top priority in Portugal, closely followed by ‘the effects of coordinated literacy learning on academic language skills’ and ‘the effectiveness of literacy support in home languages on the development of academic language skills’. This perhaps indicates the urgent need for wider discourses on multilingual pedagogies in light of linguistic diversification in Portugal and consequent changes in education, as opposed to the traditionally monolingual view on Portuguese and foreign-language teaching (Andrade and Pinho 2014). However, the second and third priorities strongly emphasise the development of academic language skills in Portuguese. The focus thus remains on learning the language of schooling, but where multilingualism might be seen as a bridge. As in-migration is a relatively recent phenomenon in Portugal, these trends may emerge from legitimate concerns around social integration and inclusion in school. We also interpret these findings in the context of more restrictive policies regarding multilingualism: Portugal has not yet established a shared educational policy in support of migrant languages at school, prioritising instead Portuguese-language acquisition. In sum, the Portuguese experts do acknowledge the importance of multilingualism in developing pedagogies, yet for the ultimate goal of learning Portuguese, which might reflect the relatively early developmental policy stage.

What variables are associated with differences in research priorities across countries?

Several background variables are associated with the differences found in the research priorities. Regarding ‘the effects of coordinated literacy learning on academic language skills’, a slight difference correlates with the area in which participants mainly work. Those working in educational policies considered this topic to be less important than those with other professional foci. Comparisons between participants based on their academic discipline indicate slightly significant differences in items such as ‘the effectiveness of multilingual support in regular school lessons’ (considered more important by psychologists), ‘the effects of coordinated literacy learning on academic language skills’, ‘the effectiveness of literacy support in home languages on the development of academic language skills in the majority language’, and ‘school-teacher-parent cooperation in language support’ (less important to sociologists). No statistically significant differences were found between

responses from different age groups or between the number of years participants have been working in the thematic area.

Patterns in cross-national research priorities

A TwoStep Cluster Analysis was used to identify natural groupings or clusters within participants' ratings. Country, gender and academic discipline were chosen as categorical variables, with the research items from the survey considered continuous variables. Two clusters were identified with a fair level of quality. The first cluster represents 26.3% of participants who considered topics about multilingualism and language education 'not important' or 'less important' to research (means ≤ 3.0). The second cluster (73.7% of participants) denotes those who consider the same topics to be more urgently in need of investigation (means > 3.0).

Table 3 shows that almost all participants from Portugal, Italy and Germany fall into the second cluster. Participants from the Netherlands and Spain are distributed across both clusters, but fall predominantly in the first cluster, suggesting that the 'top ten' research topics may be less relevant for experts in these two settings. As implied in the background section, this might be due to the urgency of other topics, such as early foreign-language learning or regional languages in education.

As a majority of our participants were female, we decided to include gender as a variable. Female participants are mostly associated with the second cluster, indicating that they consider it rather or very important to research the presented items (Table 4). Male participants are distributed across the two clusters but found mostly in the second cluster (59.5%).

All academic disciplines represented in the sample fall mostly in the second cluster, i.e. they consider that the research items are rather or very important to research (Table 5). More than 30% of participants specialised in (educational) linguistics appear in the first cluster. For them, the topics 'how multilingual children can most effectively transfer between different educational levels', 'comparing learning difficulties of learners with [national] language as a second language and weak learners with [national] language as first language' and 'school-teacher-parent cooperation in language support' are not or are less important to research. This suggests that experts from linguistic disciplines consider typically school-related topics, to be less important, perhaps because they are less related to language issues.

Discussion and implications

Using a cross-national approach, the present study has identified research priorities in the field of multilingualism and education, according to a sample of experts drawn from five national contexts. The 298 participants from the five European countries ranked 'the effectiveness of multilingual support in regular school lessons', 'the features of multilingual didactics' and 'the effectiveness of literacy support in home languages on the development of academic language skills in the majority language' as the topics with highest research priority.

Some overarching observations can be made on these findings. The first relates to settings for future research: All three priorities ranked highest identify mainstream education, or regular classes, as the most relevant setting. 'Superdiverse' conditions render it increasingly difficult to establish traditional bilingual models (such as two-way immersion) for specific groups sharing a common family language or to establish pull-out programmes. This realisation may have led respondents to favour mainstream settings for research, representing a change from what García and Wei (2014) have

Table 3. Frequencies in the TwoStep Cluster Analysis by country.

Clusters	Germany	The Netherlands	Italy	Portugal	Spain
1 ($M \leq 3.0$)	17.9	61.1	4.8	0.0	52.2
2 ($M > 3.0$)	82.1	38.9	95.2	100	47.8

Table 4. Frequencies in the TwoStep Cluster Analysis by gender.

Clusters	Male	Female
1 ($M \leq 3.0$)	40.5	18.4
2 ($M > 3.0$)	59.5	81.6

termed the second language pedagogy towards plurilingual/heteroglossic instruction. Secondly, didactical knowledge is considered crucial to the implementation of multilingual approaches in mainstream settings and may be addressed in research on pedagogical practices. Similar to the propositions of Flores and Baetens Beardsmore (2015) and Cenoz and Gorter (2011), our experts suggest prioritising research in which didactic approaches are closely related to the ways in which languages are used by multilingual pupils. This may point towards the relevance of educational interventions in order to determine the effectiveness of such pedagogical approaches (cf. Gogolin 2014).

However, these results vary according to national setting. While for respondents from Germany, the Netherlands and Portugal, a focus on academic language skills seems to need urgent research, in Spain and Italy other issues are found to be more important. Early foreign-language instruction is considered an urgent research topic in these countries. Yet our findings only tell us *how* respondents ranked research items and not *why* they prioritised certain themes over others, which limits the interpretation of our findings. Thus, while our method shows remarkable strengths and potentials – for example, the possibility to include a considerable number of respondents from different settings and to compare the results between those settings – limitations inevitably emerge. The closed and quantitative nature of the study meant that we could not gain in-depth insights into participants' reasoning in their rankings. We therefore suggest a mixed-methods approach for future such studies in which a further round of enquiry be conducted so that participants qualitatively explain and reflect on resulting rankings. This would (a) allow researchers to better interpret the rankings and (b) test whether expert participants are willing to alter their priorities based on more qualitative engagement. Moreover, further consultation with the same panels of experts in future should indicate whether their research priorities change with time – for instance, it would be interesting to see whether the German experts still prioritise language support for newly arrived migrant children in the ever-developing research agenda. Lastly, the inclusion of more countries and regions would enrich the data and diversify perspectives.

Still, the two large clusters of respondents that we identified saw a large majority (73.7%) agree that the proposed topics on multilingualism and language education should be prioritised for research. While almost all participants from Portugal, Italy and Germany were included in this cluster, participants from the Netherlands and Spain were distributed in both clusters. This might indicate that research topics considered to be important in these settings were not (fully) included in the survey. If this is the case, it points to the limitations of implementing a 'cross-national' survey that was generated in one national context (i.e. Germany). This approach also proved challenging in translation as the survey consisted of language education concepts that could be interpreted differently according to the research traditions in each one country. As a follow-up, the research team thus suggests first eliciting urgent research topics within the different national settings and then creating a European survey.

Nonetheless, participants from all academic disciplines represented in the sample mostly fell into the cluster that finds the proposed research topics to be rather or very important. Overall, this confirms the existence of many open questions, but also that the selected topics represent a solid compilation of urgent topics in the field. Despite the stated limitations, conducting cross-national

Table 5. Frequencies in the TwoStep Cluster Analysis by academic discipline specialisation.

Clusters	Education	Linguistics	Psychology	Sociology	Educ. & Ling.
1 ($M \leq 3.0$)	3.8	30.4	0.0	0.0	33.3
2 ($M > 3.0$)	96.2	69.6	100	100	66.7

research by expert survey is a valid methodological approach for the current study in order to map patterns in European research priorities in the area of multilingualism and education. As societal and individual multilingualism are the norm (Piller 2016) in Europe, it is imperative that research finds the most adequate ways of dealing with such phenomena by empowering teachers to acknowledge multilingualism in (language) education, instead of focusing solely on languages of instruction. Experts in this study clearly prioritise mainstream settings and features of multilingual didactics as future research agendas.

Note

1. The government of Luxembourg announced in 2007 that plurilingualism is the 'real' L1 of its citizens and published an action plan that included changes to language teaching programmes and related research requirements, based on 66 measures (for further examples on bi- and multilingual education systems see Mehisto and Genesee 2015).

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