

Views on multilingualism in primary schools, a descriptive enquiry

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ABSTRACT

Multilingualism is increasingly present in schools due to today's globalisation. In Western countries pupils often have a mother tongue that is different from the language of instruction at school. Schools and teachers have to deal with this changed situation. This requires a new pedagogical approach, but also a clear vision and new school policies. This research investigates the views on multilingualism that are being held by teachers and staff from 69 Flemish primary schools and which connections can be made between these views and the characteristics of the respondents and their schools. We conducted a survey in which we asked the participants about their school's school language policy and their own views on multilingualism at school. The results of our analysis indicate that teachers and staff members in primary schools in Flanders (Belgium) still strongly adhere to monolingual policies, especially in the classroom. However, their overall attitude towards multilingualism is slightly less negative than the views of their colleagues in secondary schools. For policymakers, our research puts a finger on a sore spot. It shows that teachers and school authorities still have a long way to go in developing policies that promote language learning. Researchers can find inspiration in this research for a comparative study.

Keywords: *Descriptive enquiry, Home language, Multilingualism, Primary education, School language, Teacher beliefs.*

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Highlights of this paper

- Most teachers, principals and policy advisors in Flemish primary schools believe that their pupils' mother tongues should be avoided in the classroom.
- Outside of the classroom, members of a primary school team are slightly more permissive towards their pupils' mother tongue.
- These results for primary school team members are still more positive than those of a previous study focusing on secondary school teachers.

1. INTRODUCTION

Children in today's global world live in a multilingual context. In Flanders (the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium), as well as in other countries and regions, this linguistic reality is reflected in their schools. In 2020, 30% of the primary school pupils had a mother tongue that differed from the language of instruction at school. Amongst toddlers this was even more than one in five (Kind & Gezin, 2018). This shows that the number of pupils in Flemish education with a non-native home language continues to grow. This situation presents an interesting challenge for Flemish primary school staff members. How do they deal with this linguistic diversity?

1.1. Monolingual or Multilingual Education Model?

In Flemish primary and secondary schools, only Dutch is allowed as the official language of instruction (except when teaching languages), although nearly 18% of the pupils between the ages of six and twelve use another language at home. They are in other words multilingual, which (Van Den Branden, 2010) defined as being competent in the production and reception of more than one language and using several languages at the same time. This multilingual competence can differ greatly, resulting in a variety of proficiency levels and linguistic competences.

Multilingual children bring different linguistic repertoires to the classroom, which increasingly augment the linguistic diversity in Flemish education. In most cases, the linguistic repertoire of non-Dutch speaking children does not correspond to the school repertoire used in Flemish schools. Children must master this scholastic repertoire if they want to acquire knowledge and develop skills, but they only optimally acquire this school language Dutch in a school context in which they learn to perform all kinds of cognitive actions. Unfortunately, the multilingual repertoires are hardly ever used as support (Sierens & Van Avermaet, 2010).

At the end of primary school, 49% of the non-Dutch-speaking pupils are at least one year behind. This constitutes a sharp contrast with their Dutch-speaking peers, of whom only 12% fall behind (Agirdag, 2014). This is a difference of 37%, which prompts the question: What can schools do to reduce this educational inequality between Dutch-speaking and non-Dutch-speaking pupils?

Two educational models could provide an answer to reducing this inequality: 1) the monolingual education model or language immersion model and the opposite, 2) the multilingual education model.

The model that is used in most Flemish schools is the former, the monolingual or language immersion model in which students are immersed in the dominant language, in our case Dutch. This model owes its popularity to the fact that Dutch is the only official language of instruction in our educational system (Sierens & Van Avermaet, 2010). Typical of this model is that the mother tongue of the non-Dutch speaking pupils is not used in the acquisition of Dutch. Often its use is even frowned upon, actively discouraged and/or punished. Research in secondary education (Pulinx, Van Avermaet, & Agirdag, 2017; Van Avermaet, 2015) shows the rather negative and disapproving views of teachers about the use of the mother tongue. They are convinced that speaking the home language is an obstacle to the acquisition of the Dutch language.

Pulinx et al. (2017) established a relationship between the monolingual beliefs of teachers and the little trust they have in their multilingual students. The low confidence, in turn, results in low expectations for these students. And the well-known Golem effect indicates that the low expectations have an effect on teacher behavior and student behavior and performance. Behavioral adjustment is a natural response of a student who adjusts to the expectations that someone has of him (Van Avermaet, 2015).

An alternative model for teaching foreign language students is the multilingual education model. This model differs from the monolingual education model in that the use of the mother tongue of non-native speakers is not penalized. This educational model sees the mother tongue of these students as an asset in acquiring the Dutch language which moreover should form part of the curriculum (Sierens & Van Avermaet, 2010).

Agirdag (2014) was able to demonstrate that non-Dutch speaking students who receive lessons in their mother tongue perform better than foreign language students who do not receive these lessons. The positive effects were only visible after four hours of lessons per week. Agirdag was also able to establish from research that the monolingual education model is not bearing fruit and will therefore not reduce the educational inequality between Dutch-speaking and non-Dutch-speaking students. The multilingual education model has the potential to close this gap.

1.2. The Effect on Flemish Schools

Analyses of Flemish international tests such as PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) and TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) repeatedly indicated that the home languages of respondents have a major influence on results in mathematics and sciences (Vandenbroek, Vanlaar, Bellens, Van Damme, & De Fraine, 2016; Verhaegen, 2016). Pupils that only occasionally or never speak Dutch at home, perform significantly less compared with pupils that do speak Dutch (= the instruction language) at home (Dockx, Van Landeghem, Aesaert, Van Damme, & De Fraine, 2018; Tielemans, 2017).

Van Laere, Aesaert, and Van Braak (2014) investigated this relationship between the home language and the literacy in the language of instruction of fourth-grade students in relation to student achievement in science subjects. They concluded that language minority students do indeed experience difficulties with science subjects and furthermore, the higher students' literacy in the language of instruction, the higher their science achievement. García-Vázquez, Vázquez, López, and Ward (1997) likewise proved that there is a correlation between proficiency in the English language and academic performance of students in science and technical education.

Teachers often consider the use of and proficiency in the home languages of pupils with different ethnic backgrounds as a threat to their academic success. This in turn has a negative influence on their teachability expectations and these pupils' perceptions of futility (having no control over academic success) (Sierens & Van Avermaet, 2010).

However, a monolingual pedagogical approach is not the solution. Sierens, Slembrouck, Van Gorp, Agirdag, and Van Avermaet (2019) investigated the effect of the home language on the vocabulary of emergent bilingual children and argued for a bilingual upbringing. Cummins (2019) examined all arguments supportive of sustaining multilingualism, which led him to question the validity of arguments used in favour of prohibiting or ignoring the home languages of students. He emphasized the positive academic outcomes of multilingual pedagogical approaches and expressed the hope that "the linguistic resources that immigrant-background students bring to school will be recognized and affirmed" (Cummins, 2019).

The attitudes and beliefs of teachers are an important factor in this issue. In 2017, Pulinx et al. (2017) published the results of their investigation concerning the monolingual beliefs of 775 teachers in 48 secondary schools. The vast majority, 78,2% of the Flemish teachers stated that linguistic deficiency is the most important cause of poor

educational performance of non-native speakers and 77,3% of the teachers agreed that these students should not be allowed to speak their home language at school. Only a small minority of the teachers agreed that non-native speakers should be offered the opportunity to learn their home language at school. Pulinx et al. (2017) concluded that teachers in Flemish secondary schools strongly support monolingual policies in education and “that their trust in students decreases as the share of ethnic minority students in a school increases”.

1.3. Our Research

Our current study connects to this previous study in secondary schools and wants to find out which views are shared among teachers and other members of the primary school team. We want to know if and why monolingual education still seems to be the preferred model and why teachers refrain from using the languages of non-native speakers in the classroom. This will help us to find out which obstacles should be removed in order to engage teachers in multilingual education.

We want to find an answer to the following research questions:

- Which views on multilingualism are being held by teachers, principals and policy advisors in Flemish primary schools?
- What relationship can be determined between these views and the characteristics of the respondents (gender, experience, job content) and the school characteristics (number of non-native speakers, umbrella organization)?

2. METHODOLOGY

In the following, we describe the research progress step by step: the collection of data, the criteria for including data in the research, the validity and reliability of the method we used to analyse the data obtained and the final analysis.

2.1. Data Collection

In this quantitative empirical study, we describe primary school team members' belief systems on multilingualism and explore possible connections between certain personal data of participants and their views on multilingualism in school on the one hand, and between these views and certain school data perceived by the participants and their peers on the other hand.

To gain insights into the perception of teachers and other school team members in Flemish primary education about multilingualism, we collected data by means of an online survey. We targeted the entire primary school team and divided the participants into three categories, namely school policy (director and policy staff), care team (care coordinators and care teachers) and teachers (classroom teachers and subject-specific teachers) because their relationship with and contact with language minority pupils cannot be compared with each other. We questioned their impressions and views on multilingualism at school and in the classroom, using the questionnaire by Pulinx et al. (2017), which assesses teachers' beliefs about multilingualism in secondary education. The participants scored the eight statements from the previous study on a 4-point Likertscale, indicating they strongly agreed (3), somewhat agreed (2), somewhat disagreed (1) or strongly disagreed (0) with the statements.

We only included fully completed surveys in this study. Some participants completed the survey twice, in that case we only included their most recent submission. Incorrectly completed surveys with ambiguities, were also not further investigated. However, three surveys were included despite the fact that one piece of information, namely the name of the school, was missing. This fact does not directly affect an individual's perception of multilingualism, so these incompletely completed surveys are still a source of information and we included them in our research. However,

the location of their school (indicated by the name) could potentially influence the perception of primary school team members about multilingualism. This is why we did not investigate a plausible link between the location of the school (municipal school, city school...) and the idea of multilingualism because three surveys were incomplete.

2.2. Validity and Reliability

Reliability of the questions from the questionnaire by Pulinx et al. (2017) about teachers' beliefs about multilingualism was controlled by calculating the Cronbach's' alpha and shows that the questionnaire is a reliable instrument ($\alpha=.74$) We use the generally accepted scale that states that a value above .7 may be regarded as an acceptable reliability.

The validity of the instrument has already been examined in previous research in primary and secondary education by Agirdag, Van Avermaet, and Van Houtte (2013) and Pulinx et al. (2017), and we have no reason to believe that primary school teachers eight years later would interpret these questions differently from teachers from the previous studies.

2.3. Population and Sample

Data were collected during the 2020-2021 school year in Flanders. To obtain a representative sample of schools and teachers, 300 primary schools were invited to participate in the research project. Primary schools providing special needs programs were not included in the survey. In total, 150 respondents from 69 different schools responded to our survey by filling out an anonymous online questionnaire. The research group is sufficiently representative of all Flemish primary schools. The schools belong to different educational organizations (public and non-public) and the proportion of non-native speakers at school level is diverse. The individual characteristics of each participant are also different; both men (18%) and women (82%) participated in the survey, which reflects the gender (in)balance of teachers in Flemish primary schools, 19% and 81% respectively (Manders, 2018). The participants represent different years of experience in education (min= 1year; max= 40years).

The cluster 'school policy' includes all principals and school management (n=32), the cluster 'teacher' includes all class teachers (n=96) and the cluster 'pedagogical support' includes all care coordinators, care teachers, remedial educationalists and special teachers for individual education (n=22).

3. RESULTS

3.1. Descriptive Statistics

Gender, experience and job description: a total of 150 respondents completed the survey. 27 of them defined themselves as male, 123 as female. The average number of years of experience in education was 18 years. The total range of experience was 1 to 40 years.

When subdividing the respondents according to their job description, we found that the largest group were teachers (96), followed by school management (32) and pedagogical support (22).

3.2. Home Language and Language Rules

We also inquired about the perceived number of pupils with a different home language in the school. The choice was made to ask for the teachers' perception instead of working with the actual number of pupils. We did not have all the relevant information concerning the schools of the respondents, and so we were not able to use the actual number. On the other hand, teachers' perception also says something about how they feel about this topic. We distinguished

four gradations in teachers' beliefs about the proportion of non-Dutch speaking pupils in their school; less than 25% (n=59), between 25 and 50% (n=26), between 50 and 75% (n=20) and more than 75% (n=45).

These categories are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Perceived proportion of non-Dutch speaking pupils.

Categories on perceived proportion of non-Dutch speaking pupils	Absolute number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Less than 25%	59	39.3%
25 till 50 %	26	17.3%
50 till 75%	20	13.3%
More than 75%	45	30%

We distinguished three possible rules regarding language at school. The first is that pupils are only allowed to speak the language of instruction at school, at all times. A second option indicates that pupils are allowed to speak in their mother tongue outside the classroom. A third possibility is that pupils are allowed to speak in their mother tongue, whenever necessary (inside and outside the classroom). These are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Language rules at school according to the respondents.

Language rules at school	Absolute number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Only language of instruction	88	59%
Mother tongue only outside the classroom	26	17%
Mother tongue in and outside the classroom	36	24%

For the proportion of non-native speakers and the language rules at school level, we did not look at schools as a whole because not all participants from the same school shared the same views. In order to form a more correct picture of the beliefs of each individual, we considered the interpretation of each participant separately.

In total, 59% of the participants indicated that only the language of instruction is allowed to be spoken. We can already see here that in most primary schools a monolingual education model is adhered to and thus a negative attitude towards other languages at school is present. This however is not necessarily in line with teachers' personal beliefs, as they have to follow school regulations.

Four school organizations were represented in our study. Two from the public sector, namely OVSG (Onderwijsvereniging van Steden en Gemeenten) and GO! (GemeenschapsOnderwijs) and two from the private schools KOV (Katholiek Onderwijs Vlaanderen) and VOOP (Vlaams Onderwijs OverlegPlatform). Below we discuss the results in detail for the three largest umbrella organizations (OVSG, GO! and KOV), the number of respondents from VOOP was too little (n=4) to describe them in detail (see also Table 3).

With this distinction, we note that according to our survey, the respondents of the OVSG described themselves as the least confronted with a multilingual reality. More than half of the members of the OVSG schools (n=37) indicated that the proportion of non-native speakers in their school is less than 25%. Of the respondents from the OVSG, 65% only accept Dutch as the contact and learning language within the school. 15% of the respondents would allow a different language outside the classroom, and 20% accept all languages also in the classroom.

Similar results are visible for the respondents of the private schools of KOV, where 63% indicated that they only allow the language of instruction in the school. Here 29% are in favour of the use of different mother tongues in the classroom.

Slightly different results can be seen in the other public-school organization GO! Where it can be concluded that at GO! schools a different language in the classroom is the least accepted (13%) compared with the other school

organizations (OVSG 20% and KOV 29%), on the other hand it is more accepted outside the classroom (39% in contrast to 15 and 8%), and the lowest percentage of respondents support a single language school (48%).

Table 3. Language rules at school in the three main school organisations.

Language rules at school	GO!	OVSG	KOV
Only language of instruction	15 (48%)	42 (65%)	31 (63%)
Mother tongue only outside the classroom	12 (39%)	10 (15%)	4 (8%)
Mother tongue in and outside the classroom	4 (13%)	13 (20%)	14 (29%)

3.3. Monolingual Beliefs

Teachers’ beliefs regarding the use of (home) languages in education (monolingual beliefs) were measured using the same eight items (see Table 4) as in the study of Pulinx et al. (2017) and in the SIPEF (Segregation in Primary Education in Flanders) project (Agirdag et al., 2013). Answer categories and their scores were as follows: (strongly agreed (3), somewhat agreed (2), somewhat disagreed (1) or strongly disagreed (0). Items 1,2,5,7 and 8 were reverse coded. Responses on the eight items were averaged. Mean score (M) was 2.42, with a standard deviation (SD) of 0.51. The scale yielded a satisfactory Cronbach’s alpha of 0.74.

For items 1, 3, 5 and 7, where the mother tongues of non-native pupils are not directly related to classroom activities, opinions are about equally divided. Roughly half of the members of a primary school team believe that non-Dutch speaking pupils should be allowed to speak a language other than Dutch at school (46.0%), that the school library should contain books in the mother tongue of non-Dutch speaking pupils (59.3%), that non-Dutch speaking pupils still learn enough Dutch if they also speak their own mother tongue at school (50.0%) and that obtaining a high proficiency in Dutch is not more important for non-Dutch speaking pupils than obtaining a high proficiency in their home language (55.3%). The other half of the primary school teams thinks the opposite and has a more negative attitude towards multilingualism at school.

With statements 2, 4 and 6, where the mother tongues of non-Dutch speaking pupils are directly related to classroom activities, the majority of the participants strongly or rather disagrees with positive statements about multilingualism and (rather and) agrees with a negative statement, which demonstrates a more negative multilingual attitude. For example, 76.0% believe that the main reason for the language delay of non-Dutch speaking pupils is their lack of knowledge of Dutch, 90.0% disagrees with the statement that non-Dutch speaking pupils should be given the opportunity to learn their mother tongue at school and 95.3% does not think that language minority pupils should be offered regular subjects in their mother tongue. From these results, and as indicated above, we can deduce that the majority of members in primary education have a rather negative attitude towards multilingualism at school.

3.4. Respondent and School Characteristics

In this part we examine to what extent a connection can be made between certain school variables and the beliefs of members of a primary school team about multilingualism in school. We zoom in on two school variables, namely the educational umbrella to which the school belongs and the proportion of non-native speakers at school level.

In addition to the school variables perceived, we also mapped each participant's personal data such as gender, experience and job content.

Table 4. Convictions of primary school members on eight statements about multilingualism at school.

Description	Strongly & somewhat agree	Somewhat & strongly disagree	Formulation
1. Non-Dutch speaking pupils should not be allowed to speak their home language at school	69 46.0%	81 54.0%	Negative
2. The most important cause of academic failure of non-Dutch speaking pupils is their insufficient proficiency in Dutch	114 76.0%	36 24.0%	Negative
3. The school library (Classroom library, media library) should also include books in the different home languages of the pupils	89 59.3%	61 40.7%	Positive
4. Non-Dutch speaking pupils should be offered the opportunity to learn their home language at school	15 10.0%	135 90.0%	Positive
5. By speaking their home language at school, non-Dutch speaking pupils do not learn Dutch sufficiently	75 50.0%	75 50.0%	Negative
6. Non-Dutch speaking pupils should be offered regular subjects in their home language	7 4.7%	143 95.3%	Positive
7. It is more important that non-Dutch speaking pupils obtain a high level of proficiency in Dutch than in their home language	67 44.7%	83 55.3%	Negative
8. It is in the interest of the pupils when they are punished for speaking their home language at school	9 6.0%	141 94.0%	Negative

In Table 5, we present the results of the regression analysis on school employees' monolingual beliefs. A positive score indicates a more positive attitude to multilingual policies.

At the employees' level, two variables have a significant effect. The more experience employees have the less positive they are about multilingual policies. Each year of experience equals a reduction of 0,017. The function one has in the school also has a significant effect. School policy (principals and their adjuncts) are significantly more positive to multilingual policies.

At the school level we asked participants about the perceived number of pupils with a non-Dutch home language. Here we see that respondents who estimate that the majority of their school population has a different home language are more positive towards multilingualism, with the highest positive rate between 50-75%.

Table 5. Regression analysis on school employees' monolingual beliefs.

	Estimate	St. error	P-value	Signif.
(Intercept)	-0.200	0.306	0.5140	
Female	0.253	0.217	0.2469	
Experience	-0.017	0.008	0.0381	*
Perceived language (25-50%)	-0.326	0.226	0.1510	
Perceived language (50-75%)	0.551	0.249	0.0288	*
Perceived language (>75%)	0.410	0.199	0.0407	*
public sector (OVSG and GO!)	0.029	0.166	0.8592	
School management	0.512	0.221	0.0220	*
Pedagogical support	0.237	0.224	0.2917	

Note: * p<0.05.

4. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

We started out on our investigation to find out whether the views of teachers and staff in Flemish primary schools prefer the monolingual or multilingual educational model. Flemish educational policy, which sanctions the use of Dutch as the only official language in education, suggests the former. An earlier study by Pulinx et al. (2017) concluded that the monolingual beliefs of teachers in secondary education are indeed very strong. But is this also true for primary school teachers and staff?

After conducting and analysing a new survey in which we could collect reactions to the same statements by 150 respondents from 69 different schools, we can draw the following conclusions to answer our two research questions:

- Which views on multilingualism are being held by teachers, principals and policy advisors in Flemish primary schools?
- What relationship can be determined between these views and the characteristics of the respondents (gender, experience, job content) and the school characteristics (number of non-native speakers, umbrella organization)?

Unfortunately, the majority of the Flemish primary school teachers and staff members share the firm monolingual beliefs of their colleagues in secondary schools.

Especially in the statements where the mother tongues of non-Dutch speaking pupils are directly related to classroom events (statements 2, 4 and 6), negative multilingual views prevail. No less than 90% of the members of a primary school team indicate that non-Dutch speaking pupils should not learn their mother tongue at school and 95% of the members of a primary school team believe that non-Dutch speaking pupils should not be offered regular subjects in their mother tongue. For the statements that are not directly related to the teacher's teaching and the pupils' assimilation of learning content in the classroom (statements 1, 3, 5, and 7) we see a more equal distribution of multilingual beliefs. It can be concluded that members of a primary school team adopt a more positive multilingual attitude when the mother tongues of the pupils from language minorities do not relate to teaching itself, but that a more negative attitude can be observed when these do have an influence on the processing of learning contents in the classroom.

The research by [Pulinx et al. \(2017\)](#), which probed the beliefs of secondary school teachers about multilingualism, was an important indicator in selecting variables, investigating possible connections and analyzing the data obtained. We assumed that the results of the research by [Pulinx et al. \(2017\)](#) in secondary education would be in line with the results of our research in primary education. If we compare the beliefs of the teachers in secondary education and the beliefs of the participants in primary education on the basis of the eight statements, we also see in the study by [Pulinx et al. \(2017\)](#) the more negative attitudes prevail when the mother tongues of non-native speakers are associated with classroom practice (statements 2, 4 and 6). Regarding the other statements (statements 1, 3, 5, 7 and 8) we do notice a number of differences between the beliefs of teachers in secondary education and those of teachers in primary education. However, we must take a critical look at this comparison because [Pulinx et al. \(2017\)](#) focused exclusively on secondary school teachers in their research, and we also included other members of a primary school team (such as principals, care coordinators, policy officers...) in our research. Moreover, the analyses show that teachers generally have a more negative attitude towards multilingualism than the members of the school policy and the care team. In order to compare the two studies, we analysed the eight statements a second time that did not include the care team and members of the school policy. We already indicated that a comparison of both studies shows that both secondary and primary teachers have a fairly clear negative attitude towards the statements relating to classroom practice (statements 2, 4 and 6). If we now compare the results of [Van Avermaet \(2015\)](#) with the results of the teachers in our study for the statements where we initially noticed a difference between secondary and primary school teachers (statements 1, 3, 5, 7 and 8), we see that primary school teachers have on average, more positive beliefs about multilingualism than secondary school teachers.

For example, half of the teachers in primary education (49.0%) indicate that language minority pupils are allowed to speak a foreign language among themselves at school, while in secondary education only 22.7% of the teachers agree (statement 1). 57.3% of primary school teachers believe that the school and classroom libraries should also contain books in the mother tongue of non-native pupils and barely 12.8% of secondary school teachers follow this line of thought (statement 3). 92.7% of members in primary education agree or tend to agree that non-native speakers

should not be penalized for speaking their mother tongue at school, while this percentage is much lower in secondary education, namely 70.9% (statement 8). In the last comparison, we must take into account the fact that a different relationship is built up with the students in secondary education, that more is expected of the students in terms of rules of conduct and discipline and that, beyond the multilingual context, there is a different culture of punishment in secondary schools.

In the second part of this study, we asked ourselves whether there are possible connections between the participants' person- and school-related data on the one hand, and their beliefs about multilingualism in school on the other hand. We again started from the research by [Pulinx et al. \(2017\)](#) which showed that certain variables, such as the gender of the participant and the proportion of non-native speakers perceived by the participant at school level, have an influence on the multilingual beliefs of teachers in secondary education. We examined these, and a number of other variables, such as the number of years of experience and the participants' function in the school and the educational umbrella to which the school belongs to identify possible connections in multilingual beliefs.

Our research indicates a number of associations between school and person-related data of the participants and their beliefs about multilingualism in school, namely;

- At the teacher level, both male and female participants adopt an equally negative attitude towards multilingualism. It is mainly the male pedagogical support of a school and the male members of the school policy who share more negative beliefs about multilingualism in school compared to their female colleagues.
- The more experience a participant has, the more negative his attitude is towards multilingualism. The highly experienced members have significantly more negative beliefs about multilingualism in school than their novice and less experienced peers.
- Teachers adopt a more negative attitude than the members of the school policy and care team, but this difference in multilingual beliefs between the teachers on the one hand and the school policy and care team on the other only becomes visible when the proportion of non-native speakers at school level is less than 50%.
- When the proportion of non-native speakers at school level is more than 50%, the participants have more positive beliefs about multilingualism at school than when the proportion of non-native speakers at school level is less than 50%. The same tendency can also be observed in the research by [Pulinx et al. \(2017\)](#) who examine the beliefs about multilingualism in secondary education.
- The umbrella organization to which the school belongs, divided into public or private, has no significant effect on attitudes towards multilingualism.

We cannot demonstrate to what extent our findings and these connections are representative of reality. With 150 members of a Flemish primary school team who participated in the survey, and who also completed the survey in full, we cannot guarantee a confidence level of 95%. Nevertheless, our research results can be regarded as acceptable reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of .74 on the eight statements for this dataset. Moreover, our research group is sufficiently representative for all Flemish primary schools. The schools belong to different educational umbrella organizations and the proportion of non-native speakers at school level varies. The individual characteristics of each participant are also sufficiently different; both men (18%) and women (82%) participated in our research, which reflects the exact gender balance of teachers in Flemish primary schools, 19% and 81% respectively ([Manders, 2018](#)). The participants represented all members of a primary school team (directors, teachers, care team) and both novice teachers and teachers with a lot of experience were included in the study.

We would like to conclude this survey with the following striking percentages: 87.5% of teachers in primary education indicate that non-Dutch speaking pupils should not learn their mother tongue at school and no fewer than 94.8% believe that non-Dutch speaking pupils should not be offered regular subjects in their mother tongue. These

fundamental beliefs about multilingualism in primary education are the problem faced by Flemish primary schools. Although the dependency hypothesis of Cummins (Agirdag, 2014) shows that the better a child masters his mother tongue, the better he will acquire the school skills in a second language (in this case Dutch) and although the educational inequality between Dutch-speaking and non-Dutch-speaking pupils persists, while there is a wide range of possibilities to use the different language repertoires in the classroom, Flemish teachers still favour the monolingual education model. What prevents teachers from creating space for the multilingual education model, for the mother tongues of non-native speakers? Are they ignorant, afraid of losing control, or not feeling capable enough to answer this multilingual question?

Our advice for further research is to explore the questions 'Why do primary school teachers have a more negative attitude towards multilingualism in the classroom?' and 'What prevents them from using the mother tongues of non-Dutch speaking students in the classroom?' Finding out why teachers are not open to other mother tongues in the classroom is an important step towards getting them involved in the multilingual story.

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