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University of Teacher Education Thurgau,
Switzerland

*CORRESPONDENCE

Sarah Désirée Lange
✉ sarah.lange@zlb.tu-chemnitz.de
Anna Plohmer
✉ anna.plohmer@zlb.tu-chemnitz.de

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The complexity and contradictory nature of beliefs in dealing with multilingualism—positionings of primary school teachers between support, ambivalence and rejection

Sarah Désirée Lange^{1*}, Sanna Pohlmann-Rother²,
Anna Plohmer^{1*} and Tanja Müller³

¹Chemnitz University of Technology, Chemnitz, Germany, ²Julius-Maximilians-University of Würzburg, Würzburg, Germany, ³Faculty of Linguistics and Literary Studies, Chair of English Language and Literature Didactics, Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, Eichstätt, Germany

The BLUME study founded by the German Research Foundation study (“Primary Teachers’ Beliefs Regarding Multilingualism”) describes the complexity and contradictions of primary school teachers’ beliefs. The aim is to empirically envision the whole range of beliefs held by primary school teachers. As part of the BLUME vignette study, qualitative, vignette-based interviews in the style of brief teaching case studies were conducted with 43 primary school teachers. In order to unveil the teachers’ beliefs, the study identified positioning statements that are precise statements independent of the situation and indicate the teachers’ beliefs. Using a basic coding for the positioning statements, in the first step of the analysis, text passages containing beliefs were identified, and a category system was developed inductively and deductively, presented in this article. The results show a high degree of variation in the beliefs of primary school teachers, ranging from strongly affirmative to strongly resistant beliefs. In addition, the teachers show ambivalence in dealing with multilingualism in class as well as in their reflections on their own positioning. The qualitative-empirical approach presented here makes it possible to visualise the theoretically assumed complexity and hierarchisation within the teachers’ belief systems.

KEYWORDS

multilingualism, beliefs, primary teachers, teacher professionalism, qualitative research

1 Introduction: multilingualism as a topic in primary schools

What do primary school teachers think about the topic of multilingualism in class? The BLUME study¹ addresses this question in various sub-studies. The question of beliefs is particularly important from a competency theory perspective, as they are considered to be highly relevant to teaching behaviour. The great linguistic heterogeneity in primary schools

1 The BLUME study is being conducted at the Chair of Primary School Pedagogy at the Centre for Teacher Training and Educational Research at Chemnitz University of Technology (headed by Prof. Dr habil. Sarah Désirée Lange).

is an issue that primary school teachers encounter daily in their teaching practice. The refugee and migrant movements associated with current war situations are increasing the topicality and importance of multilingualism as a subject of primary school research. The starting point for a theoretical examination of the topic is, on the one hand, the normative demand for a resource-oriented view of multilingualism (Fürstenau, 2017; Gogolin, 2010) and, on the other hand, the disclosure of the often discriminatory treatment of non-German first languages in class (Lange et al., 2024; Steinbach, 2017). The concept of multilingualism varies depending on the specific research context and field (Plohmer et al., 2025). The following key concepts are typically identified in the conceptualisation of multilingualism: the number of languages acquired; proficiency in the respective languages; the contexts of use. Further, multilingualism can be defined as the linguistic structure of individuals, institutions, or societies. The fundamental grasp of language(s) also seems to be pivotal, as does the conceptualisation of standard languages and language systems or linguistic varieties and registers as components of multilingualism. The present article employs a broad understanding of multilingualism, encompassing internal and external dimensions, and considering it independently of linguistic aptitude. The primary focus is on its practical relevance in everyday life. It can thus be stated that all children enter the classroom with different linguistic prerequisites and that all children are multilingual. From a discourse linguistic perspective, it should be noted that language and multilingualism are socially constructed. Languages can function as a medium of social distinction and multilingualism can signify group membership, as observed in German-speaking primary schools (Dirim et al., 2018).

Up to now, studies on beliefs about how to deal with multilingualism have neglected the perspective of *primary school teachers*. In addition, the heterogeneity of multilingualism has not been explicitly considered in its complexity and diversity. The present study addresses these research desiderata. It begins with a theoretical description of the construct of beliefs and of multilingualism in class and places the BLUME study in the context of current research.

2 Primary school teachers' beliefs about how to deal with multilingualism

The following section provides an outline of the BLUME study's understanding of teacher beliefs and is based on German-language and international discourse on teachers' beliefs as a facet of pedagogical professionalism.

2.1 Teachers' beliefs as a "messy concept"

The description by Pajares (1992, p. 307), that beliefs are a "messy concept," has probably been the most quoted term over the last 30 years in connection with teacher beliefs. Although Pajares set out to clarify the diffuse and difficult-to-measure concept of beliefs ("cleaning up the messy concept"), it should be noted that this clarification is still pending. A recent scoping review of the international state of research on teacher beliefs about multilingualism reveals different operationalisations as well as an underlying

terminological ambiguity with regard to beliefs (Lange and Polat 2024). In addition, there are discipline-specific tendencies in the use of different conceptualisations, which are reflected in the range of terms used in different academic discourses. In summary, the term "belief" is often used as a collective term for the world of thoughts of individuals and is equated with other constructs, such as attitudes, subjective theories and values (Hachfeld and Syring, 2020, p. 661). In the international literature, the terms teacher beliefs, teacher views, teacher attitudes, teacher perspectives, teacher opinions, teacher orientations and teacher viewpoints are used (cf. Lange and Polat, 2024). However, from the authors' point of views, the concept of beliefs has become established across disciplines. "The difficulty in studying teachers' beliefs has been caused by definitional problems, poor conceptualizations, and differing understandings of beliefs and belief structures." (Pajares, 1992, p. 307). The overlap or distinction between related constructs such as attitudes, subjective theories, values, emotions, and knowledge makes it difficult to conceptualise beliefs. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to clarify the relationship to related terms and to distinguish beliefs from them (Dohrmann, 2021). In accordance with the distinction between general beliefs that are distant from behaviour and situation-related cognitions that are close to behaviour (Leuchter et al., 2006), it is essential to distinguish a person's value-based and correspondingly deeply rooted beliefs from situation-related perception, analysis, and decision-making abilities. These situation-related abilities have been developed in the competence model ["PID model"—P (perception), I (interpretation), D (decision-making)] by Blömeke et al. (2015, p. 7). Oser and Blömeke (2012) see beliefs as an abstract concept, the exact meaning of which can only be vaguely discerned. This abstract concept is necessary because its components are defined differently depending on the context.

Despite the lack of a common basis for understanding the concept of beliefs, in the discourse on teacher beliefs the concept of beliefs is tried to be specified by using bundles of characteristics (e.g., Fischer, 2018; Fives and Buehl, 2012; Reusser and Pauli, 2014; Skott, 2015). With regard to the different characteristics according to which the various definitions can be distinguished (Lange and Plohmer, 2025), determine a structuring of beliefs by six characteristic features based on the current discourse: Beliefs are organised into belief systems, they are characterised by stability, changeability and individuality, the interweaving of cognitive and affective components is specific, as is the (limited) accessibility and the need for a reference point.

In summary, beliefs can be described as individual perceptions and meanings that a person ascribes to the world (Hammer et al., 2018) and as a person's self-judgement about the truth or falsity of a premise (Lundberg, 2019). These can include cognitive as well as emotional and implicit content (Pohlmann-Rother et al., 2023). In addition, beliefs are described as implicit assumptions that are considered true, do not change easily and are able to influence behaviour (Arocena Egaña et al., 2015; Norro, 2021).

With respect to teachers, beliefs are understood as their underlying positions on school, teaching, learning and students, which influence pedagogical decisions and are difficult to change (Lundberg, 2019). Teachers' beliefs are the way in which teachers perceive their daily lives and interpret and influence their behaviour in class (Pohlmann-Rother et al., 2023). In addition, beliefs are considered to play a key role in research on teacher training and teacher professionalism (Lundberg and Brandt, 2023).

Lange and Polat (2024) propose the following definition as the synthesis of key characteristics that distinguish teacher beliefs: “Teacher beliefs as self-normative and subjective knowledge, organised in an overarching beliefs system of a person, which holds a set of beliefs facets that may complement, overlap, or conflict with each other. Beliefs facets encompass cognitive and emotional-affective aspects, and their stable character can be formed and developed in teacher training.”

2.2 Characteristics of teachers’ beliefs about multilingualism in class

Professional beliefs are always focussed on a specific professional requirement – for example, dealing with multilingualism – and are described as teachers’ understanding and pedagogical thinking about multilingualism and multilingual learners (Lundberg, 2019). However, dealing with multilingualism – particularly in relation to in-service primary school teachers and their beliefs – is a research desideratum in primary school research. Overall, it should be emphasised that research interest in the multilingualism-related beliefs of primary school teachers has increased internationally over the last 10 years (Lange and Polat, 2024). The increasing amount of qualitative research on this topic – especially in international discourse – suggests that it may be beneficial to use qualitative approaches when researching teachers’ beliefs in order to address the challenge of social desirability (Lange and Polat, 2024). Overall, it is becoming apparent that an appropriate assessment of beliefs requires a multi-perspective approach, and that different approaches can be useful in assessing beliefs in order to make the complexity of the theoretical construct empirically available (Lange and Plohmer, 2025; Skott, 2009). Lundberg and Brandt (2023) therefore argue in favour of a mixed-method approach to collect data on beliefs. Supplementing quantitative data with qualitative interviews in mixed-methods designs, for example, makes it possible to highlight different facets of beliefs, making them more explainable and thus enabling a more differentiated picture of beliefs (Schroedler et al., 2023).

The following section reports on the international state of research on the characteristics of teachers’ beliefs about how to deal with multilingualism. Particular attention is paid to studies that focus on primary school teachers, who are the specific target group of the BLUME study. Subsequently, studies on prospective primary school teachers are also outlined. To date, there have been few studies that specifically focus on primary school teachers using a qualitative approach and specifically addressing multilingualism.

2.2.1 Studies on (prospective) teachers’ beliefs about multilingualism

In a scoping review on the professional beliefs of primary school teachers, the authors summarise that the results can be differentiated into teachers’ resistant, tentative and affirmative beliefs about how to deal with multilingualism (cf. Lange and Polat, 2024). Overall, however, the results of current studies point to primary school teachers’ positive beliefs about multilingualism. A review of recent studies on the beliefs of primary school teachers revealed that these beliefs can be divided into three main areas: beliefs regarding the language spoken at home, the language of instruction, and the benefits of multilingualism for children. Furthermore, an analysis of the

existing research revealed that the most frequently cited strategies in the context of multilingualism were translanguaging, the utilisation of digital tools, and the promotion of family languages within educational settings (Polat and Lange, 2025).

In 2018, Lundberg surveyed a group of 40 primary school teachers using the Q-method to determine their understanding of multilingualism and their pedagogical approach to multilingualism in class, identifying three different groups: (1) Teachers who see multilingualism as an advantage and do not take a deficit-oriented view of multilingual students. (2) Teachers who have a more critical view of multilingualism and base their views on personal or political rather than professional reasons. However, both Group 1 and Group 2 teachers see no need to adapt their own lessons to the needs of multilingual children. (3) Teachers who are generally in favour of a pluralistic approach to teaching. This approach supports the concept of translanguaging, which can promote a better understanding of the lesson content and enable better participation of higher and lower performing students. It also creates a stronger link between parents and the school (Lundberg, 2018).

Lundberg (2019) later expanded on these results ($N = 67$) with a study in Switzerland. He identified six different perspectives (consensual, evolving, traditional, strategic, egocentric, minimalist) along the lines of multilingualism-related beliefs.

In their study of 21 primary school teachers in Malta, Camenzuli et al. (2022) were able to record positive and critical views. Based on their content analysis, they were able to show that many teachers generally have a positive belief towards multilingualism and are open to taking multilingualism into account in class, although many teachers also expressed scepticism regarding effective implementation in class. While the majority are in favour of multilingualism, a few teachers view multilingualism in class critically and perceive the communication barriers in class as frustrating.

In the study by Björklund (2013), Finnish primary school teachers ($N = 10$) were asked about multilingualism and multiculturalism. Overall, the qualitative content analysis of the focus group interviews made it possible to summarise three perspectives: (1) Multilingualism and the different language skills in class are described as a challenge that is partly accepted by the teachers and is also described as a starting point for further developing their own teaching. (2) Linguistic heterogeneity and multilingualism are described as a natural development within primary schools. (3) Multilingualism in class is seen as an advantage and the different languages should be used to strengthen the students’ language awareness. The multilingualism of the students is also emphasised as a conscious statement in favour of an open society. The challenges faced by teachers were further differentiated. On the one hand, the integration of minority languages was mentioned as a challenge for teachers in schools and in the education sector. On the other hand, it was seen as a challenge to balance the importance of the different languages in class without one language dominating the other. Teachers saw a further challenge in national curricular requirements which, from the teachers’ point of view, are not adapted to the growing multilingualism in class and leave little room for multilingualism or a didactic-methodical implementation of multilingualism in class. The relationship with the parents of multilingual children was also recognised as a challenge due to the language barriers.

In her study, Cunningham (2019) was able to identify beliefs that are on a continuum from positive-affirmative to negative-resistant. She

conducted qualitative interviews with 31 teachers in the north of England to investigate how languages other than English are accepted and used as languages of instruction in primary schools. *Four broad categories* towards language use in class were identified: (1) the use of non-English family languages is viewed very positively and encouraged, (2) all languages are respected and tolerated in class, (3) clear areas of language use are defined for the children (e.g., not in class), (4) family languages are described as inappropriate and prohibited. In addition, contradictions and potentially confusing messages from teachers to children about the value of their languages were identified.

There are studies that compare different groups of teachers: The qualitative study conducted in Spain by [Rodríguez-Izquierdo et al. \(2020\)](#) examined the beliefs of four teachers, two primary school teachers and two secondary school teachers, with different training on linguistic diversity in class when integrating students with a migrant background, who are learning Spanish as a second language. Three in-depth interviews were conducted with each teacher over a period of 6 months. The results of the qualitative analyses show that teachers differ in their views on linguistic diversity and that teachers who do not teach a language tend to hold monolingual views. Overall, however, linguistic diversity was seen as a challenge. At the same time, some languages are seen as more acceptable than others and, in particular, the languages spoken by immigrant students are considered less valuable than the European foreign languages taught in schools. Teachers emphasise the importance of the language of instruction as an important way for children to access lesson content and integrate themselves into the class community.

The importance of the language of instruction was also analysed by [Paulsrud et al. \(2023\)](#) in their study on their beliefs about multilingualism in the Swedish education system using semi-structured interviews with five teacher educators, five in-service teachers and eight pre-service primary teachers. These teachers see the language of instruction as the key to success at school, although multilingual students still need to achieve linguistic competencies in the language of instruction. The results make it clear that both positive and negative beliefs are evident in the statements of the respondents. In-service teachers tend to be more positive about multilingualism than pre-service teachers and university teachers but still point out challenges in class. Overall, it was also possible to identify tensions within the three groups of teachers regarding their beliefs about multilingualism.

In the study by [Kimanen et al. \(2019\)](#), the beliefs of in-service teachers and pre-service teachers on multilingualism were empirically examined. In their quantitative study in Finland, they were able to show that the groups of teachers ($N = 103$) and student teachers ($N = 78$) surveyed had fundamentally positive beliefs about multilingualism in class. They identify three orientations within the beliefs: cultural orientations, related to cultural subject content, language-related orientations concerning the learners' linguistic resources in (language) learning, and identity-related orientations concerning the learners' identity.

2.2.2 Research desiderata and research questions regarding the beliefs of working teachers

Although many studies (e.g., [Paulsrud et al., 2023](#)) emphasise the importance of teachers' beliefs regarding linguistic diversity for the teaching of students with a migrant background, there are only a few studies (e.g., [Lundberg, 2019](#)) that empirically describe the

characteristics of primary school teachers' beliefs in a differentiated way in order to overcome a purely binary description that only differentiates between beliefs in favour of and against multilingualism. Studies often focus on recording beliefs in specific bilingual contexts. Some results show that above all, teachers' experiences and qualifications influence beliefs (e.g., [Camenzuli et al., 2022](#)) and that studies with a specific sample of primary school teachers with different experiences and qualifications are important in this respect.

The BLUME vignette study addresses this research desideratum with the aim of capturing the professional beliefs of primary school teachers in their complexity and contradictions and describing their characteristics. The aim of this qualitative study is to follow this desideratum in order to provide a differentiated, multidimensional view of the beliefs. The question posed in this article addresses this desideratum: *What are the beliefs of in-service primary school teachers with regard to dealing with multilingualism in class?*

3 Methodological approach

The empirical data on which this article is based was collected as part of the BLUME vignette study in Germany.

3.1 Data collection and sample

Sampling plan: the two sampling criteria were current employment as a primary school teacher and experience as a class teacher. In order to achieve a broad sample heterogeneity and therefore the greatest possible variability in the subject area ([Mey and Mruck, 2020](#)), a qualitative sampling plan was defined for the BLUME vignette study ([Kelle and Kluge, 2010](#); [Mey and Mruck, 2020](#)) according to predefined criteria. The significant predictors for favourable beliefs from the BLUME questionnaire (cf. [Lange and Pohlmann-Rother, 2020](#)) were used for this purpose, as well as findings from the pilot phase of the present BLUME vignette study. Although individual factors did not produce any significant results in the BLUME questionnaire study, the pilot interviews did indicate an influencing effect. Based on these predictors and findings, a sampling plan was drawn up, taking into account the following criteria: (1) Importance of formal and informal or non-formal foreign language contacts, (2) Extent of learning opportunities used for German as a second language and/or multilingualism in education and training, (3) Contact experiences with multilingual students (see Technical Report: [Lange and Pohlmann-Rother, 2025](#)), plus the two individual factors of gender and age.

Description of the sample: A total of 43 primary school teachers from six different federal states in Germany (Bavaria: 12, Baden-Württemberg: 7, Bremen: 5, Lower Saxony: 4, North Rhine-Westphalia: 10, Thuringia: 5) took part in the qualitative interviews of the BLUME vignette study. 91% of the participants are female, 9% are male. In order to include a range of experiences in training and further education and to keep the scope of experiences with multilingual students heterogeneous, the teachers were recruited from different regions; both large cities and rural areas were considered. At the time of the survey, the teachers were between 22 and 64 years old ($M = 41.5$; $SD = 11.3$). The years of service vary between one and 45 years ($M = 15$; $SD = 11.97$). The number of students in the classes varies from 15 to 28, including an average of 13 multilingual students in a

class ($SD = 7.1$). 15% of teachers state that they teach more than 20 multilingual students in their class, compared to 17% with only up to five multilingual children.

54% of teachers rated their own teaching experience with multilingual students as rather beneficial, 23% as rather stressful. The majority of teachers report a lot or quite a lot of experience with multilingualism (39.5% each). Although the frequency of contact and engagement with multilingualism in the private sphere through language courses, everyday communication and media use is rated as rather high to high by 75% ($MD = 9$; $SD = 2.0$), the majority have only infrequent or low-intensity contact with multilingualism in the family or private sphere.

An index of teachers' expertise, which was formed from items relating to topical² and action-related³ learning opportunities (cf. Ehmke and Lemmrich, 2018) and the amount of time spent on content relating to German as a foreign language as part of initial and further training (cf. Lange and Pohlmann-Rother, 2023), shows that 32.6% of respondents have low expertise in the area of multilingualism, 18.6% have rather low expertise and rather high expertise, and 11.6% have very high expertise ($M = 8.3$; $SD = 3.1$).

3.2 Vignette-based interviews to capture the teachers' beliefs

The interviews were conducted as vignette-based interviews online via Zoom between July 2022 and January 2023. The interview was divided into three consecutive parts. In the first part, the teachers were given an open impulse ("Multilingualism in class – what do you think?"). In the second part, the teachers were presented with vignettes as stimuli on which they were asked to comment (cf. Lange and Plohmer, 2025); in the third part, the teachers were asked to create a concept map and to accompany the process by thinking aloud (Plohmer and Lange, 2025).

The design of this three-stage, multi-method data collection instrument was developed to implement a multi-perspective approach (Skott, 2009). Vignette-based survey methods offer the opportunity to derive beliefs by explaining possible reasons for action in relation to teaching. This also enables reflection, since beliefs are subjective truths that are often only accessible to individuals through reflection. The teaching vignettes enabled a deeper connection to the lesson and enabled further possibilities for narrative passages regarding the range of topics related to multilingualism (Lange and Plohmer, 2025). One challenge was distinguishing between general, deeper beliefs that are less related to behaviour, and behaviour-related, situation-specific PID-skills. The verbalised intentions for action in class presented in the teaching vignettes were analysed to identify the deeper underlying beliefs. Unlike the assessment of situation-related skills (Blömeke et al., 2015), this study aims to obtain detailed explanations of

hypothetical action in specific teaching situations to identify teachers' beliefs on multilingualism.

This analysis focusses on the first part of the interview, which contains extensive discursive passages with many positioning statements. The open-ended question at the beginning allows teachers to position themselves authentically across the entire spectrum of the topic of multilingualism. In this phase of the interview, the interviewer only asked questions that required reference to class. In addition, the teachers were repeatedly asked to formulate their *personal* views on the impulse provided.

3.3 Basic coding based on positioning statements

The interviews were analysed inductively and deductively using qualitative content analysis (Kuckartz and Rädiker, 2022). As a starting point for identifying the teachers' beliefs, a basic coding of the positioning statements was carried out. In the BLUME study, these serve as an indicator of the teachers' beliefs. A statement is categorised as a positioning statement when the teachers' subjective assessment as well as their own clear positioning on how to deal with multilingualism in the lesson are provided along with a first-person reference to content. These positionings are independent of the situation and therefore do not relate to a specific teaching situation. Subjective evaluation and self-reference were chosen as criteria, because beliefs are described as individual mental constructs that are subjectively true for the respective person (cf. Skott, 2015). Clear positioning was chosen as a criterion because beliefs are described as stable and invariant with respect to time and context (Gates, 2006). Situational independence was chosen as a criterion to distinguish beliefs from PID (perception–interpretation–decision-making) skills, which are located closer to action (Blömeke et al., 2015). The basic coding was carried out by the raters working independently of each other.

Based on the coded positioning statements, main categories and subcategories were formed inductively and deductively for further analysis. As part of the inductive data analysis, categories were formed based on the empirical material (Kuckartz and Rädiker, 2022, 71). Each positioning statement was assigned to a category, and double coding was excluded. If two statements of different weightings were made within one positioning, for example if the teacher reinforced their own positioning with another statement, the most expressive statement made by the teacher was coded. Each interview was also coded twice in this coding run (Hopf and Schmidt, 1993; Levasier, 2022). In regular consensus meetings of the research group to interpret and discuss the data, the evaluation results and the category system were revised and the coding was validated intersubjectively in the research group. After this first inductive approach, the categories were specified deductively in order to infer the special features of the material based on general information (Kuckartz and Rädiker, 2022, p. 71).

4 Results on the characteristics of primary school teachers' beliefs about multilingualism in class

The inductively and deductively developed category system for the positioning statements contains nine main categories that comprehensively reflect the teachers' beliefs about multilingualism in class. The subcategories describe the range of the respective

2 Examples of topical learning opportunities: "Linguistic diversity in schools," "Language systems of immigrant languages (e.g., Turkish, Russian)," "Supporting the language learning process through scaffolding" (cf. Lange and Pohlmann-Rother, 2023).

3 Examples of activity-based learning opportunities: "Dealing with the topic of migration and multilingualism in the school context," "Designing language-sensitive lesson(s)" (cf. Lange and Pohlmann-Rother, 2023).

positioning in its individual facets in a more differentiated way and provide reasons for the main categories. The main categories were coded if the teachers' positionings did not contain any substantive reasons. The nine main categories were grouped into four thematic areas: (A) beliefs in favour of multilingualism, (B) hierarchisations between German and family languages, (C) categories rejecting multilingualism, (D) reflection on and weighing up one's own view of multilingualism. Table 1 shows the category system along the four thematic areas, divided into main categories and corresponding subcategories.

4.1 Beliefs in favour of multilingualism

The teachers' support is evident from the material in three different forms (see main categories), which differ in intensity. The three main categories are presented in descending order according to the intensity of support of multilingualism. Among the beliefs in favour of multilingualism there are statements in which teachers describe multilingualism as an enrichment and benefit for class. On the other hand, there are statements in which they are in favour of multilingualism in principle, sometimes subject to condition, as well as statements in which the teachers do not describe any added value of multilingualism, but do ascribe importance and value to it for teaching.

Teachers emphasises the enrichment and added value of multilingualism for class: the teachers' comments describe the children's family languages as a valuable treasure that needs to be taken into account and protected. Multilingualism is seen as beneficial for class and for multilingual children. Teachers see opportunities and great added value in the inclusion of multilingualism in class [*"Multilingualism is totally cool. We can use it. (.) And we can help each other, (.) yes, enrich each other"*; I21, pos. 94–95].

In their explanations, the teachers justify the mutual support of multilingual children through several languages as enriching and argue that children with different family languages and different linguistic competences can benefit from each other. In addition, these teachers believe that it is enriching for the children to familiarise themselves with other ways of life through their interactions, which helps them develop an open mind towards other languages and cultures. Teachers also recognise the linguistic experiences of multilingual children as a *"RESOURCE that OPENS UP a lot"* (I13, pos. 42) and describe the children's multilingualism as their greatest treasure.

Teachers expresses basic support for multilingualism in class: the intensity with which teachers express their support for multilingualism in class varies. This can be fully or partially in favour. Unreservedly favourable statements show that teachers are unconditionally committed to the topic. In addition, there are statements in which teachers link their endorsement to conditions for the inclusion of multilingualism (*"I am very open to things if I receive support"*; I37, pos. 26–27) or to certain times or topics in lessons and framework conditions, e.g., *"if it happens to fit into the curriculum"* (I3, pos. 164).

Teachers expresses the fundamental value of multilingualism in class: in contrast to the clear endorsements, the teachers' statements assigned to C3 contain less strongly affirmative positive evaluations of multilingualism. However, the inclusion of multilingualism in class is attributed importance in that they express appreciation of multilingualism and show appreciation for all languages or for individual

multilingual students, as well as showing an interest in the lives of multilingual children [*"I think it's basically very good that the children (.) also see their own language appreciated."*; I23, pos. 31–33]. Different languages are recognised by the teachers, and linguistic diversity in class is described as positive and important, for example for German language acquisition (*"So I like to use it to delve deeper into the German language and grammar and the possibilities of expression together with the children"*; I23, pos. 41–42) without the teachers explicitly elaborating on the added value of multilingualism. The promotion of the family language(s) of multilingual children is also seen as important. The appreciation is justified by the importance of treating each other with respect and without discrimination [*"And yes. We try to avoid stereotypical behaviour occurring from the outset. (.) I think that's very important."* I7, pos. 487–489], in order to enable all children to participate. This is also evident from the teachers' comments, in which multilingualism is described as a normal, everyday phenomenon that they frequently encounter in class and that is unavoidable (*"It's basically a normal part of everyday life at our school that we all look different, that we speak different languages and that's just everyday life for us."*; I14, pos. 163–165).

4.2 Hierarchisations between German and family languages

Some positioning statements emphasise the hierarchy between German and the family languages and the prioritisation of German as the language of instruction. A distinction can be made between statements with which multilingualism in class is rejected because of the prioritisation of German or with which it is allowed despite the prioritisation of German.

Teachers emphasises the prioritisation of German as the language of instruction: The teachers justify full prioritisation on the one hand by stating that prioritising German in class promotes German language acquisition and enables communication in class [*"The aim is for the child to learn German. (.) as quickly as possible. As well as possible and manages to get by here. And that's why I do not think it's at all helpful if (.) we switch to other languages or if other children translate it into their mother tongue"*; I19, pos. 275–278].

On the other hand, this category contains codings in which a prioritisation of German as the language of instruction is recognisable to a more limited extent. In other words, prioritisation is emphasised, but at the same time non-German languages are (temporarily) taken into account in lessons. German is defined as the language of instruction; other (family) languages are also fundamentally allowed in class [*"German is, so to speak, the language that is considered the general language at school. (.) But all languages have their place"*; I15, pos. 86–88] and are included by the teachers in a targeted and structured way, for example in individual teaching phases or on special topics (*"So there are very clear structures as to when multilingualism is really desired"*; I1, pos. 115–116).

4.3 Beliefs that reject multilingualism

There are gradations in the intensity of rejection in the teachers' resistant positioning statements on how to deal with multilingualism – as with the beliefs in favour of multilingualism –, which are described below. There are statements by teachers for whom the inclusion of

TABLE 1 Inductive-deductive category system on the characteristics of the beliefs of the primary school teachers surveyed.

(A) Beliefs in favour of multilingualism	<i>C1 Teachers emphasize the enrichment and added value of multilingualism for class (66)</i>
	1.1 Enrichment of the children's learning processes through mutual support in different languages
	1.2 Enrichment for children through exposure to other living environments
	1.3 Enrichment for children through the linguistic resources of multilingual children
	<i>C2 Teachers express basic support for multilingualism in class (53)</i>
	2.1 Unreserved support
	2.2 Limited support
	<i>C3 Teachers express the fundamental value of multilingualism in class (58)</i>
	3.1 Value based on interest in the world of multilingual children
	3.2 Value based on potential of linguistic diversity of the class
	3.3 Value based on the children's acquisition of German
	3.4 Value based on the promotion of the family language(s) of multilingual children
	3.5 Value based on the importance of non-discriminatory interaction and participation of multilingual children
	3.7 The value based on teachers' perceptions of the normality of multilingualism in class
	<i>C4 Teachers emphasise the prioritisation of German as the language of instruction (38)</i>
(B) Hierarchisations between German and family languages	4.1 Complete prioritisation of German as the language of instruction
	4.1.1 Prioritisation of German as language of instruction
	4.1.2 Prioritisation of German in class as the language of instruction enables communication in class
	4.2 Limited prioritisation of German as the language of instruction
	4.2.1 Prioritisation of German even if other languages are considered legitimate
	4.2.2 Prioritisation of German and integration of multilingualism
(C) Beliefs rejecting multilingualism	<i>C5 Teachers views multilingualism as a difficulty in class (88)</i>
	5.1 Difficulties related to learning situations of multilingual children
	5.2 Difficulties related to demanding language diversity in class
	5.3 Difficulties related to inadequate school conditions
	5.4 Difficulties related to multilingualism as additional time factor
	5.5 Difficulties related to additional teacher workload
	5.6 Difficulties related to lack of knowledge about multilingualism
	5.6.1 Difficulties related to lack of specialised knowledge in respect of multilingualism
	5.6.2 Difficulties related to the teacher's lack of language skills in the children's family languages
	5.7 Difficulties related to exclusionary group dynamics in the class because of multilingualism
	<i>C6 Teachers express limitations that hinder the inclusion of multilingualism in class (11)</i>
	<i>C7 Teachers express defensive beliefs with respect to the task of including multilingualism in class (9)</i>
(D) Reflecting on and weighing up their own views on multilingualism	<i>C8 Teachers weigh up their own ambivalence regarding the inclusion of multilingualism in class (77)</i>
	8.1 Ambivalent consideration of the fundamental advantages and disadvantages
	8.2 Ambivalent appraisal of multilingualism and difficulties in implementing it in class
	8.3 Ambivalent appraisal of multilingualism and emphasis on the relevance of German language acquisition
	8.4 Emotional content in the ambivalent endorsement of multilingualism and difficulties in class
	<i>C9 Teachers reflect on their professional self in dealing with multilingualism in class (21)</i>

multilingualism in class is associated with difficulties, but these difficulties can basically be solved and overcome. In other statements, however, insurmountable barriers to the inclusion of multilingualism are formulated. Finally, there are statements that reveal defensive belief on the part of teachers towards the inclusion of multilingualism in class.

Teachers views multilingualism as a difficulty in class: this includes statements by teachers in which they describe difficulties related to the

learning situation of individual or several multilingual children, which, in the teachers' view, result from the many different languages in a class (*"especially with regard to multilingualism, um, it is of course also very difficult to meet the children there, because there are just so many different languages in the class"; 17, pos. 48–50*). There are also statements in which teachers describe multilingualism as generating difficulties due to inadequate framework conditions or a lack of time in class. Multilingualism is also perceived as an additional burden (*"In*

everyday teaching, multilingualism naturally also means more effort than conventional lessons, which I would only give in German, for example"; I37, pos. 55–57). A lack of knowledge about multilingualism is described as a further difficulty, in terms of a lack of specialised and didactic knowledge or the children's lack of language skills in their family languages, in order to be able to incorporate multilingualism profitably from the teachers' point of view. The teachers' positioning statements reveal difficulties caused by exclusive group dynamics in form of homogeneous small groups in non-German languages and the resulting exclusion and marginalisation of other (mostly German-speaking) children. ("What's also difficult, of course, is with other children, because then other children, a bit like myself, probably feel a bit rejected, that there's something they do not want to say in our common language, but only want to discuss among themselves in secret. And then you feel a bit rejected and no longer so integrated"; I37, pos. 139–144). This can be exacerbated by different languages spoken in class and different cultural backgrounds of the (multilingual) children.

Teachers expresses limitations that hinder the inclusion of multilingualism in class: In contrast to difficulties, the limitations described by teachers are characterised by the fact that, from the teachers' point of view, these problems cannot easily be solved. The limits of multilingualism that teachers describe in the positioning statements relate to the implementation of their teaching, for example in relation to their work as teachers ("that's simply an obstacle and a barrier to the work that we are actually there for, i.e., to support the children"; I28, pos. 89–91) or to specific teaching situations. Teachers describe the limits of incorporating multilingualism in terms of the challenge to do justice to all students with regard to the variety of language backgrounds in class.

Teachers expresses a defensive belief towards the task of including multilingualism in class: In addition, the teachers' comments show that the inclusion of multilingualism in class is seen as an impossibility ["ACTUALLY, I have to say, it's not okay. (.) So it's not okay for the children, it's not okay for the teachers, and above all it's not okay for the class either."; I2, pos. 58–60]. In these positioning statements, the teachers argue, in contrast to the previously mentioned main categories, that it is fundamentally not possible to take multilingualism into account in class. A distinction can be made between normative statements, in which teachers describe multilingualism in the classroom as unacceptable, and descriptive statements, in which multilingualism in the classroom is deemed infeasible. The statements clearly show that many of these teachers do not perceive dealing with multilingual children as a genuine task of a primary school teacher, so that with regard to this task the entire teacher identity, with the different tasks and values of a teacher, is called into question ["Because that's not my TASK. (.) I have many other approaches in class that are much MORE IMPORTANT to me than multilingualism"; I26, pos. 224–225; "But you simply feel thwarted in what your actual job is. Well, my job is to teach a class and not to teach German to a single child. So that just seems a little contradictory"; I19, 67–75].

4.4 Reflecting on and weighing up their own views on multilingualism

In some positioning statements, teachers reflect on and weigh up their own position on multilingualism in class. The teachers' statements also contain ambivalent positions on the inclusion of multilingualism in class.

Teachers weighs up their own ambivalence regarding the inclusion of multilingualism: the teachers' statements reveal ambivalent positions, which emerge from their own inner conflict ("You also feel permanently torn" I2, 342) or are reflected in the weighing up of two poles. These are beliefs in favour of and against multilingualism, which are juxtaposed in a line of argument ("of course I see positive aspects of the whole thing, but I also see negative aspects"; I14, items 78–79). The contradictory nature of the beliefs is shown by the fact that in their positioning statements, teachers describe a dichotomy that they experience in respect of multilingualism. This dichotomy becomes visible in the tension between a favourable view of multilingualism on the one hand and the challenge or excessive demands of implementing it in class on the other. Teachers see the challenges of incorporating multilingualism into lessons as a lack of time or an additional burden in terms of a lack of staff and other tasks, so that it seems impossible for them to include multilingualism in lessons ["On the one hand (.) um I do see it, I see it very positively in the sense that multilingualism is there. We have diversity, full stop. And that's nice. When I think about how multilingualism can be implemented in class, it's actually rather um (.) hopeless. So it's more like okay, I'm overwhelmed by it and I think it's a shame that I cannot implement it."; I21, pos. 241–246]. In further statements by the teachers, it becomes clear that they ascribe fundamental importance to multilingualism, which they often see as being in conflict with the importance of German language acquisition in primary school ("Well, I am of the opinion that multilingualism should be promoted and that it should also be seen as an ENRICHMENT, but that German as the language of instruction should take centre stage."; I7, pos. 65–68). In addition, an emotional content becomes recognisable in feelings of ambivalence, in that the teachers show sympathy for the multilingual children or are dissatisfied with their own teaching implementation, in which they hardly take the languages into account, but at the same time consider this to be necessary ("for me, the challenge is really the feasibility of what I would like to see. The feasibility of multilingualism"; I21, pos. 150–152).

Teachers reflects on their beliefs with regard to their professional self in dealing with multilingualism: It is clear from the teachers' statements that they describe fundamental beliefs about multilingualism that are relevant from their perspective ("so this is essential, I think, this acceptance of multilingualism"; I17, pos. 51–52). Teachers also emphasise the relevance of affirmative beliefs with respect to multilingualism; in addition, they reflect on the importance of beliefs for teaching activities ("We have to be critical of or sensitive to discrimination, depending on what you want to call it, in addition to being aware of diversity, that there are many languages and that it is real and NORMAL. It is still important to me that this ATTITUDE is there"; I13, pos. 551–558).

5 Discussion: the complexity and contradictory nature of beliefs

By means of the chosen qualitative approach and by using the teaching vignettes it was possible to record the teachers' underlying beliefs based on their positioning based on a stimulus, and it was possible to minimise the problem of social desirability. The results show the highly differentiated nature of the beliefs of primary school teachers and make intermediate facets visible beyond the poles of strongly affirmative and strongly resistant positions. In addition, the

results show that teachers are ambivalent about dealing with multilingualism in class. At the same time, the results clearly show that the teachers are aware of their individual pedagogical professionalism and able to reflect on their own positioning.

5.1 The differentiated nature of primary school teachers' beliefs about multilingualism in class

The aim of this article is to expand on the previously dominant research findings of the binary nature of pro- and anti-multilingualism beliefs and to provide a more differentiated empirical description of the beliefs of primary school teachers. The multi-layered description of beliefs based on the presented differentiated category system is reflected in the gradations of both the beliefs in favour of multilingualism and those rejecting it. This is reinforced by the detailed subcategories, which allow the respective positionings to be explored in greater depth and described in their complexity. The range of difficulties from the teachers' point of view can be a starting point for interventions and serve as a basis for further training measures. These appear to be urgently needed in order to provide tailored support for the skills required for a positive, appreciative inclusion of multilingualism (e.g., Camenzuli et al., 2022) and to enable an environment for multilingual learners that is conducive to learning.

Allowing multilingualism in the classroom also seems important because multilingualism can bring cognitive benefits for individuals (Sambanis, 2020). Although there are conflicting findings regarding specific cognitive effects, such as on executive functions (Bialystok, 2017; Gunnerud et al., 2020; Ithriyah, 2024) from a psycholinguistic perspective, the inclusion of multilingualism in schools is well justified from a sociolinguistic point of view. By opening up the entire linguistic repertoire for learners, children speaking multiple languages can express their hybrid and polycultural self-images that are meaningful for many children in post-migrant societies (Hinnenkamp, 2020).

Regarding specific subject learning in the classroom, Prediger and Redder (2020) were able to show that multilingual activities can support and improve subject learning when languages were interconnected. In addition, multilinguals have a higher level of metalinguistic awareness and can use and apply their language knowledge across languages, which facilitates the process of learning additional foreign languages (Budde and Martinez, 2023). Translanguaging approaches in particular appear to be promising for subject-specific learning, as exploratory studies and experience reports show (Gantefort, 2020). There are numerous concepts and methodological approaches for implementation in class, yet first of all teachers need to have an open mind-set towards putting them into practice (Lange et al., 2025). In this context, it seems highly problematic that some primary school teachers do not consider multilingualism to be part of their job. One possible reason for this view is the monolingual culture of primary schools, which is still prevalent in schools in Germany (Gogolin, 2010). The rejection of multilingualism in the classroom and the prevailing monolingual habitus in German elementary schools carries with it the risk that teachers reproduce stereotypical notions of Germany as a monolingual and monocultural society. This in turn leads to a distinction between monolingual students as "legitimate" and multilingual students as

"deviant" with lack of social belonging. This is particularly problematic when teachers assume that their multilingual students are from a "different" culture or nation, thereby engaging in practices of differentiation that are widespread also outside school (Mecheril, 2010; Pohlmann-Rother et al., 2023; Lange et al., 2025).

The present results clearly show that teachers prioritise German as language of instruction compared to other languages (C.4). While the promotion of language education and German language acquisition is a key function of primary schools (Becker-Mrotzek and Roth, 2017), the current primary school curriculum also incorporates the integration of multilingualism into teaching. If non-German languages are devalued or excluded from teaching, multilingual students may be unable to participate in class in a way that promotes learning, thereby denying them educational opportunities. In interviews, the diversity of tasks performed by primary school teachers is often cited as an argument for not considering multilingualism as a separate task. Teachers need support in dealing with these diverse tasks. Regarding multilingualism, support for teachers using AI-tools has proven to be beneficial (Kuzu et al., 2025). However, it is concerning that teachers legitimise different valuations and devaluations of non-German family languages. Only languages that teachers believe to be useful are given space in the classroom, which usually means European and/or prestige languages with which teachers are familiar as foreign languages. Such patterns of thinking contribute to the creation and reproduction of linguistic hierarchies and their speakers (Lange et al., 2024).

5.2 Contradictions and ambivalence in teachers' beliefs

Another result of the evaluation is the wide range of ambivalent statements made by the teachers. Paulsrud et al. (2023) have been able to show in their evaluation that teacher educators report tensions between the desire to recognise linguistic resources and the realisation that there are challenges in implementing it in the lesson. At the same time, the teacher educators discuss the importance of addressing linguistic needs in class, but that this would require linguistic competence in the language of instruction. This competence is seen as necessary for the educational success of multilingual learners and thus as a necessary competence on the part of teachers (Paulsrud et al., 2023).

In current academic discussions, the ability to reflect on and deal with complexity is often seen as a hallmark of professional behaviour. Statements by teachers in which they reflect on these contradictory demands and expectations can be interpreted as an indication of a deep engagement with the challenges and demands of multilingualism in class. In this sense, ambivalent statements can be interpreted as an expression of an high level of reflection.

In their daily work, teachers often have to balance seemingly contradictory demands and expectations. Helsper (2022) assumes that the fundamental professional demands on teachers are contradictory, and sees how they deal with this as a hallmark of their professionalism. Pedagogical actions are characterised by constitutive, irreconcilable antinomies (cf. Helsper, 2010, p. 15). Teachers who recognise and balance these contradictions without completely favouring one side demonstrate a higher level of

professionalism by recognising the complexity of the topic of multilingualism. On the other hand, ambivalent statements could also be interpreted as uncertainty and hesitation in dealing with multilingualism.

The ambivalence of the teachers shown in the BLUME study also indicating the challenges posed by the theoretical operationalisation of belief systems, which make the multidimensionality of belief facets visible. The reference point of multilingualism can be used as an example of how differentiated beliefs can be analysed. The BLUME study (cf. Lange et al., 2025) provides in-depth analyses of the types of ambivalence among teachers which will be analysed in more detail in the future in the form of individual case studies.

5.3 Meta-reflexivity in research on teacher professionalisation

Professionalism refers to the desired outcome of professionalisation – a state in which teachers demonstrate their professional competence in the face of the complex demands placed on them and in the way they deal with the uncertainty of pedagogical situations. In addition to the prevailing paradigms of professional research, an integrative understanding of professionalism as meta-reflexivity is discussed the last years (Cramer, 2019; Cramer et al., 2019). According to this understanding, the inclusion of different theoretical approaches is necessary to take into account the uncertainty that is constitutive of the pedagogical field of action. Cramer et al. (2019) argue in favour of a multi-perspectivity that does justice to the complexity of pedagogical activities by broadening the view. From a meta-reflective perspective, the possibility of an individual development of professionalism is maintained; professionalisation refers to the individual development process in the formation of pedagogical professionalism, which is envisaged in the context of university teacher training (Horn, 2016). In this respect, the results of the [anonymised] study are relevant as they show that teachers are aware of their own professional behaviour and reflect on their beliefs with regard to a professional approach to multilingualism that is meaningful to them.

5.4 Limitations and outlook

Until now the analysis focused on the first sections of the interviews. In further analyses the teachers' statements about the vignette are to be analysed to examine the teachers' beliefs, especially about specific teaching situations. The beliefs are analysed specifically regarding the didactical functions for incorporating multilingualism into class, which were designed as part of the BLUME study based on primary school pedagogical lines of reasoning for multilingualism in class (cf. Lange and Pohlmann-Rother, 2025).

As an additional analytical approach, teaching videographies will be considered using method triangulation to analyse contradictions or tensions between the teachers' stated beliefs and their teaching practices. A further analytical approach will focus on the emotional involvement of the teachers. This can be seen in the

material, for example, in statements such as *"I'm making the best of it. But I cannot really (.) offer what the children actually need."* (I43, pos. 113–114). These emotionally loaded statements in particular could be examined in more depth, especially with regard to the theoretical operationalisation of beliefs, according to which beliefs comprise both cognitive and emotional-affective components (cf. Skott, 2015).

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by a data protection management system was created for this study together with the University of Würzburg. The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

SL: Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Project administration, Supervision. SP-R: Conceptualization, Writing – review & editing, Formal analysis, Supervision. AP: Data curation, Formal analysis, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. TM: Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing – review & editing.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Generative AI statement

The authors declare that no Gen AI was used in the creation of this manuscript.

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