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Language ideologies and pedagogical tensions: Norwegian teachers' and students' attitudes toward home language use in the EAL classroom

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Introduction: This study explores the attitudes of students and teachers toward home language (HL) integration in English as an Additional Language (EAL) classrooms in Norway. As multilingualism becomes increasingly visible in Norwegian schools, the traditional emphasis on monolingual, target-language (TL)-only instruction is being questioned.

Methods: Drawing on data from classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with six EAL teachers and 32 students across three linguistically diverse lower secondary schools, this study examines how HL use is perceived, enacted, and negotiated in practice.

Results: The findings highlight two central themes. First, both students and teachers demonstrated a strong ideological commitment to English as the primary language of instruction. Teachers frequently positioned themselves as gatekeepers of TL exposure, citing institutional expectations and professional norms that prioritize English-only approaches. Similarly, students—especially in the upper grades—viewed TL immersion as essential preparation for exams and future opportunities. However, classroom practices often deviated from these ideological positions. Teachers routinely used HLs, particularly Norwegian, for clarification, translation, and classroom management, especially in mixed-ability settings. Students also identified HL use as helpful for reducing stress, boosting comprehension, and making abstract concepts more accessible. While English remained the main instructional language, HLs were valued as supportive tools rather than threats to learning. The second theme concerns the constraints and uncertainties limiting systematic multilingual implementation. Teachers reported feeling underprepared and unsupported when drawing on students' broader linguistic repertoires. While many recognized the benefits of HL integration, they voiced concerns about time, fairness, and feasibility, particularly when students' HLs differed from their own. Students, too, expressed mixed feelings: while many supported HL use, some worried it might highlight linguistic differences or create divisions.

Discussion: Overall, the study suggests that HL integration is not a binary choice but a dynamic, context-dependent negotiation. The findings underscore the need for clearer policy frameworks, targeted teacher training, and classroom-based examples to support inclusive language teaching. By foregrounding the voices of both teachers and learners, the study contributes to ongoing discussions on how multilingualism can be meaningfully integrated into EAL pedagogy in Norway and similar contexts.

KEYWORDS

multilingualism, home language, teacher education, primary school student, primary school teacher, language ideologies/attitudes, EAL (English as an additional language), multilingual pedagogy

1 Introduction

For years, EAL teacher education has encouraged prospective teachers to create a learning environment that abides by an all-English approach (Hall and Cook, 2012; Shin et al., 2020; Singleton and Aronin, 2018; Wernicke et al., 2021). Creating a space with maximum use of the target language (TL) was perceived as the preferred and ideal method for optimizing student learning. Yet, research has shown that this is a rather utopian approach, which often proves challenging for teachers to implement, as they frequently resort to using the majority language to exemplify or answer queries (Copland and Neokleous, 2011; Krulatz et al., 2022; Neokleous, 2017; Shin et al., 2020). Current pedagogical approaches acknowledge increasingly linguistically diverse classrooms and embrace students' entire linguistic repertoires as valuable tools for enhancing TL knowledge (Aronin, 2022; McKinney et al., 2024; Krulatz et al., 2022; May, 2014).

In line with global developments, the increasingly multicultural and multilingual nature of Norwegian classrooms has transformed the learning environment, with students bringing along their own accents, languages, and cultures, which shape their learning of English (Conteh and Meier, 2014; Krulatz et al., 2022; Lee and Spolsky, 2021; Statistics Norway, 2023). This diversity was acknowledged explicitly for the first time in the latest revision of the national curriculum, as the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020) outlined ways in which multilingualism can contribute to learning and promote relationship-building in the classroom. As stated, students "should be given a basis for seeing their own and the identity of others in a multilingual and multicultural context" (p. 3). More specifically, the curriculum stresses the importance of linguistic diversity, recognizes it as an asset, and encourages learners to compare languages to develop their multilingual awareness. The latter is formulated as a competence aim, with students expected to "discover and play with words and expressions that are common to both English and other languages with which the pupil is familiar" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020, p. 6).

Yet, despite the expectations set by the curriculum, research in Norway has demonstrated a lack of knowledge and preparedness among educators, many of whom have not yet embraced the multilingual turn in education (Krulatz and Dahl, 2016; Neokleous and Ofte, 2020; Neokleous et al., 2022; Šurkalović, 2014). Studies on the topic highlight the need for educators to undergo additional training and familiarize themselves with multilingual pedagogical approaches (Portolés and Martí, 2020; Krulatz et al., 2022). Furthermore, Wernicke et al. (2021) stressed the potential for increased awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity not only at the individual but also at the societal level.

This point is particularly relevant in the Norwegian context, where 20.4% of the population consists of immigrants and Norwegian-born individuals to immigrant parents, with more than 200 languages represented (Statistics Norway, 2024). The national core curriculum also acknowledges that proficiency in languages other than Norwegian

can be an asset in both educational and societal contexts (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020).

The objective of this study is to build on existing research in Norway and contribute toward creating a more accurate portrayal of student and teacher attitudes regarding HL integration in the EAL classroom. In doing so, we aim to offer a better understanding of how multilingual practices are perceived, envisioned, and implemented by both students and teachers, in order to identify areas of improvement for optimizing student learning as well as the teacher training experience. More specifically, the study sought to address the following research questions:

- (a) What are EAL students' and teachers' attitudes toward the use of HL(s) in the Norwegian EAL classroom?
- (b) Do teachers and students think that multilingual approaches to teaching can be implemented in the Norwegian EAL classroom? If so, how?

In this study, three key terms are used to describe the linguistic landscape of the EAL classroom. *TL* refers to the language being learned—in this case, English—as the main medium of instruction and communication. *Home Language (HL)* denotes the language(s) students speak at home, which may include the majority language (Norwegian), one or more minority languages, or a combination thereof, depending on the student's background. Thus, the HL category encompasses (1) students who speak only Norwegian at home, (2) students who grow up in multilingual households where Norwegian is spoken alongside one or more minority languages, and (3) students whose home language(s) do not include Norwegian. The term *majority language* refers specifically to Norwegian, which functions as the dominant societal and instructional language in the Norwegian school system and is often used as a bridge language in classrooms where English is taught as an additional language. To situate this inquiry within the broader scholarly landscape, the following section reviews relevant literature on multilingualism in education, with particular attention to the role of HL integration in EAL contexts.

2 Literature review

2.1 Monolingual ideologies

Foreign language (FL) learning has traditionally relied on the grammar-translation method, which required students to provide translations to and from the TL and their HL (Hall and Cook, 2012; Shin et al., 2020). While this approach valued vocabulary and grammar rules, it also assumed that students shared the same majority language. The advent of teaching methodologies prioritizing TL communication and interaction shifted the focus toward real-world applications and the need for more comprehensive language education (Howatt and Smith, 2014).

Krashen's Input Hypothesis cemented this prominence but also sparked the first criticisms of HL use in FL classrooms (Hall and Cook, 2012; Shin et al., 2020). The assumption that students should be exposed to as much TL input as possible was interpreted as language immersion and discouraged any reference to languages other than the TL (Hall and Cook, 2012). In the Norwegian classroom context, grammar translation was the dominant teaching method throughout the first half of the twentieth century, with elements of approaches such as the Direct Method gradually introduced (Rindal, 2014; Simensen, 2005). Over time, English language teaching in Norway has come to be based on Hymes' notion of communicative competence, which Rindal (2014) argued had a decisive impact on the development of the previous version of the national curriculum.

2.2 The multilingual turn

While new teaching methodologies prioritized maximal TL exposure, instruction remained rooted in monolingual ideologies. These approaches not only prescribed adherence to an all-TL model, but also assumed that students' HLs had no place in the classroom (Hall and Cook, 2012; Howatt and Smith, 2014; Shin et al., 2020). The emergence of the multilingual turn urged educators to reassess their perceptions of "the concepts of language, the learners and language learning and related terms, as such assumptions determine what language teachers and learners do in the classroom" (Meier, 2017, p. 131). The multilingual turn marked a critical movement in FL education by offering a paradigm shift that promotes "the normalization of processes and practices characteristic of bi-/multilingual speakers" (Prada and Turnbull, 2018, p. 8). This shift reconceptualizes FL classrooms as multilingual by default and invites teachers to view multilingualism as a central instructional strategy (May, 2014). To address the linguistic and cultural diversity of classrooms worldwide, instructors have been encouraged-particularly at the policy level (European Commission, 2018)-to integrate multilingual pedagogies and adopt multilingual initiatives in the classroom (Alisaari et al., 2019; Calafato, 2020). In the Norwegian context, argued that schools, being key social arenas for children, must reflect the diversity that characterizes Norwegian society. In 2023, 2,244 students received mother tongue education, 8,309 received bilingual teaching, and 1,087 received both (Statistics Norway, 2024). Here, *mother tongue education* refers to instruction specifically aimed at developing literacy and academic skills in a student's HL, typically provided as a separate subject. In contrast, *bilingual teaching* involves the use of both the student's HL and Norwegian as mediums of instruction across content subjects to support comprehension and learning.

2.2.1 Reassessing HL use in the classroom

The multilingual turn in education re-evaluated the role of HLs in the classroom, emphasizing their potential to enhance students' TL knowledge (Aronin, 2022; Krulatz et al., 2022). Based on the assumption that all learners are emergent multilinguals, teachers have been encouraged to draw on students' entire linguistic repertoires as valuable resources for addressing the demands of today's classrooms (Shin et al., 2020). This perspective acknowledges that languages cannot be compartmentalized and are part of a person's fluid, dynamic

repertoire. The lack of pedagogical strategies that utilize all of students' languages has been linked to lower levels of academic attainment (Canagarajah, 2007; García and Sylvan, 2011). Moore (2006) stated that TL knowledge is not enhanced "when children are not encouraged in the school situation to rely on their different languages and language knowledge as positive resources" (p. 136).

Shin et al. (2020) listed several benefits of HL use in EAL teaching, including reinforcing TL input through translation, improving speaking and critical thinking skills, and supporting negotiation of meaning. Similarly, Scott and Fuente's (2008) study on HL use in FL classes found that groups allowed to use the HL demonstrated positive practices such as sustained interaction, collaborative dialogue, and use of metalinguistic terminology, compared to groups restricted to TL use. These findings underscore the pedagogical potential of strategic HL use in promoting deeper engagement and language awareness. However, not all studies agree on the unqualified benefits of HL integration. Hlas (2016), for example, warned against assuming HL use is always beneficial. To ensure its effective integration, she advocated for professional development to help teachers identify appropriate usage levels while still maintaining TL exposure as a pedagogical priority. Turnbull and Dailey-O'Cain (2009) have argued that while HL use can bolster comprehension, foster learner confidence, and validate linguistic identities, overreliance on it may inadvertently reduce opportunities for meaningful TL interaction, especially in contexts where students already share a common HL. Taken together, these studies highlight the need for nuanced, context-sensitive approaches to HL use in EAL settings.

To promote visibility of all languages and soften boundaries between them, several multilingual pedagogies have emerged-such as Focus on Multilingualism, Translanguaging, and Culturally Responsive Teaching. Research has confirmed that multilingual pedagogies significantly enhance and sustain students' literacy engagement, pragmatic knowledge, and overall language performance (Brown, 2023; Krulatz et al., 2022). Translanguaging, defined as the fluid movement between languages, has gained pedagogical legitimacy for improving language and content competence in schools (Cenoz and Gorter, 2021; García and Lin, 2016). García et al. (2017) asserted that translanguaging "posits the linguistic behavior of bilinguals as being always heteroglossic, always dynamic responding not to two monolingualisms in one but to one integrated linguistic system" (p. 120). As a pedagogy, translanguaging aims to support students in using their linguistic repertoires to develop proficiency, construct meaning, and engage with new knowledge (Neokleous et al., 2022). Moreover, it fosters the development of language practices suited to increasingly multilingual global communities (García and Sylvan, 2011, p. 388).

Despite research supporting the value of students' linguistic resources, national policies and instructional practices often maintain strict language separation (Cheshire, 2002). Studies have corroborated this, showing that FL teachers frequently undervalue students' HLs (Busse, 2017; Liddicoat and Curnow, 2014).

2.2.2 The functions of HL use in the EAL classroom

Research has shown that HL is mainly used for translation, instruction, vocabulary introduction, and grammar explanation (Izquierdo et al., 2016; Neokleous, 2017; Nukuto, 2017; Shin et al., 2020). On an affective level, HL use can help build stronger

teacher–student relationships (Tsagari and Diakou, 2015), motivate learners, and facilitate casual interaction (Bruen and Kelly, 2014; Taner and Balıkcı, 2022). However, concerns persist regarding HL use in classrooms. For example, Neokleous et al. (2022) found that teachers worried students' frequent HL use might prevent them from demonstrating TL proficiency. Nonetheless, language teachers recognized the potential benefits of HLs in EAL settings (Shin et al., 2020).

In Norway, Vikøy and Haukås (2023) found that teachers rarely encouraged HL use among minority students, often viewing linguistic diversity as a problem. This perspective was echoed in other studies in Norwegian EAL classrooms (Neokleous and Krulatz, 2018; Neokleous and Ofte, 2020; Neokleous et al., 2022). Even when teachers acknowledged HL benefits, they struggled with practical implementation (Krulatz et al., 2022; Myklevold, 2021; Neokleous et al., 2022). Studies further revealed that despite positive attitudes toward multilingualism, teachers often defaulted to English-dominant dynamics (Krulatz et al., 2022; Neokleous et al., 2022; Neokleous and Ofte, 2020), maintaining monolingual practices that exclude other languages (Askland, 2020; Haukås, 2016).

2.3 Effective implementation of multilingual pedagogies

For effective implementation, Haukås (2016) stated that FL teachers must possess specific traits and skills, including high levels of metalinguistic knowledge, positive attitudes toward multilingualism, advanced proficiency in multiple languages, willingness to collaborate with colleagues, and up-to-date knowledge of research in the field. Despite these outlined benefits, studies show that many educators lack the knowledge and preparation necessary to enact the multilingual turn (Conteh and Meier, 2014; Hall and Cook, 2012). While teachers often view multilingualism positively, they report lacking the experience needed to draw on students' full linguistic repertoires (Schedel and Bonvin, 2017). Additionally, in Norway, multilingualism is often viewed as a minority-specific issue linked to insufficient majority language proficiency (Burner and Carlsen, 2022; Haukås et al., 2021).

2.3.1 Implementing multilingual pedagogies in the Norwegian EAL classroom

In its 2020 curriculum for English, the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training acknowledges for the first time that knowledge of languages other than Norwegian can be a valuable resource in both school and society and that multilingualism supports lifelong learning. Calafato (2021) suggested that the absence of such statements in earlier curricula “could have negatively affected the willingness of some English teachers to implement MTPs [multilingual teaching practices] when teaching” (p. 4). Despite this recognition, the curriculum provides no concrete guidelines for incorporating students' linguistic repertoires into instruction. Benediktsson's (2022) analysis of policy documents found that although multilingualism is positively framed, it is not prioritized as a classroom resource.

Despite curriculum emphasis, research shows that multilingual practices have yet to be fully integrated into Norwegian EAL classrooms due to teacher competency gaps (Šurkalović, 2014; Krulatz and Dahl, 2016; Iversen, 2017; Neokleous et al., 2022). According to

Krulatz and Dahl (2016), the main challenge was adapting instruction to diverse student needs. Teachers' reluctance to use HLs may stem from limited language proficiency, insufficient training, or lack of materials (Lorenz et al., 2021; Neokleous et al., 2023; Tavares, 2023; Vikøy and Haukås, 2023). Educators trained in monolingual traditions may resist interventions that contradict their foundational training (Neokleous et al., 2022; Young, 2023). Moreover, teachers who did attempt HL integration reported feelings of insecurity or guilt (Myklevold, 2021; Neokleous and Ofte, 2020; Neokleous et al., 2022).

The first study on teacher preparedness for linguistic diversity in Norwegian EAL classrooms (Krulatz and Dahl, 2016) found that 80% of teachers had no formal training for working with multilingual students. Similarly, student teachers reported minimal training on multilingualism in their programs (Hegna and Speitz, 2020). More recent studies confirm that teachers still feel underprepared (Burner and Carlsen, 2022; Krulatz et al., 2022; Neokleous et al., 2022). As such, educators remain ill-equipped to meet curriculum expectations regarding linguistic diversity—an issue compounded by the lack of specific guidelines.

The urgent need for more practical, hands-on training to prepare teachers for linguistically diverse classrooms has been emphasized in recent studies (Kc and Ohna, 2021; Lorenz et al., 2021; Neokleous et al., 2022, 2023; Tavares, 2023; Vikøy and Haukås, 2023). Tavares (2023) critiqued the overemphasis on theory and the absence of practical guidance for implementation. Kc and Ohna (2021) echoed these concerns, with teachers highlighting a disconnect between teacher training and classroom realities. The lack of training explains why participants in Neokleous et al. (2022) described implementing multilingual pedagogies as confusing and difficult—sentiments echoed by student teachers reflecting on their practicum experiences.

As evidenced in the literature, further research is needed to illuminate teacher strategies that enhance students' multilingual competence and inform curriculum development. This article responds to that need by integrating classroom and interview data to examine the cognitions of both EAL teachers and students in linguistically and culturally diverse Norwegian contexts.

3 Methodology

More specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

- What are students' and teachers' attitudes toward the use of HL(s) in the Norwegian EAL classroom?
- How can multilingual approaches to teaching be implemented in the Norwegian EAL classroom?

As the study explored the attitudes and perspectives of in-service teachers and their students, it employed a qualitative approach.

3.1 Participants

A convenience sampling method was used to recruit participants (Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Silverman, 2021), as they were accessed through the researchers' professional networks. While this approach facilitated access, it may limit the generalizability of the findings due

to the non-random nature of the sample. Three schools across Norway and six classrooms—two from each school—comprised the study's sample. All three schools were located in urban and suburban areas in central Norway and served linguistically diverse populations, with a mix of native Norwegian students and students with migrant backgrounds. Each school had at least one designated EAL teacher and offered support programs for multilingual learners.

More specifically, two seventh-grade classes (37 students), two eighth-grade classes (44 students), and two ninth-grade classes (47 students) participated in the study. To increase variation across school contexts, the two classes at each grade level were drawn from different schools. Of the total student population ($N = 128$), approximately 60% spoke a home language other than Norwegian, including Arabic, Polish, Somali, Pashto, Dari, Tigrinya, and Kurdish. While all students were enrolled in mainstream education, their length of residence in Norway ranged from under 1 year to more than 6 years. Thirty-two out of the 128 students volunteered to be interviewed. Students were approached during regular class sessions and informed about the voluntary nature of the interview. All interviews were conducted with students who had obtained parental consent, and participation was open to anyone in the selected classes. No exclusion criteria were applied aside from age (under 16) and informed consent requirements. The six EAL teachers were also interviewed. All participating teachers taught English to the relevant year groups and had experience working with multilingual learners. Only teachers who were currently responsible for teaching EAL in the observed classrooms were included.

In addition to obtaining consent from the teacher participants, parental consent was also secured, as the student participants were under the age of 16, in order to comply with ethical requirements. All identifiable information related to participants and schools has been anonymized. Teachers are referred to using pseudonyms, with grade level indicated in brackets—Nils (G7), Ingrid (G7), Marius (G8), Eva (G8), Øystein (G9), and Maria (G9). Nils (G7) and Ingrid (G7) had over 20 years of teaching experience, while Marius (G8), Øystein (G9), and Maria (G9) had approximately 10 years of teaching experience. Eva (G8) was a novice teacher with only 2 years of experience. All ethical procedures were carefully followed throughout the study. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were assured of their right to withdraw at any point without consequence.

3.2 Data collection strategies

Data were collected through three classroom observations during one academic semester, individual semi-structured interviews with 32 students and six teachers, and the compilation of field notes in conjunction with observations. Each observation lasted approximately 45 min, corresponding to the length of a full lesson period. The observed activities varied but typically included teacher-led instruction, whole-class discussion, individual seatwork, and group or pair activities. Particular attention was paid to episodes involving language negotiation, instances of HL or TL use, and scaffolding strategies.

An observation protocol was developed to assist with contextual data collection during classroom visits. As the observations were not recorded, the protocol served to structure the notes into distinct focus areas: frequency of HL use, patterns of interaction, and implementation

of multilingual pedagogies. The observational protocol was based on Neokleous' (2017) study on student attitudes towards HL use. During the visits, the protocol was used as a live framework to guide notetaking and focus the observer's attention on relevant classroom events. This ensured systematic coverage of all focus areas across different classes and schools.

All observations were conducted by a single researcher. While this ensured consistency in data collection, it also represents a potential limitation in terms of inter-rater reliability. The observer had prior experience conducting classroom-based research and received internal training on the use of the observation protocol prior to data collection. While observational notes strictly documented the actions and interactions that occurred during classroom sessions, field notes captured the researcher's immediate interpretations, reflections, and contextual impressions. This distinction was important, as field notes complemented the more structured observation notes by offering insights into tone, classroom atmosphere, and participants' affective responses, which would not be evident through behavior description alone (Birks and Mills, 2015). Thus, although both sets of notes emerged from the observation process, field notes constituted a distinct layer of interpretive data rather than duplicative documentation. Additionally, field notes were also used during interviews to capture non-verbal cues and contextual dynamics not recorded by the audio device.

The interviews were conducted in either Norwegian or English, depending on the participants' language preference. These were digitally recorded, and an interview protocol was developed to maintain consistency and focus. The protocol was divided into three sections: the first gathered demographic information; the second contained open-ended questions addressing the main focus of the study and allowed researchers to ask follow-up questions regarding participants' practices and experiences; the third section included questions developed after classroom observations, allowing the researchers to explore specific behaviors and practices witnessed during observations. All interviews were transcribed verbatim. Norwegian-language interviews were translated into English for the purposes of analysis. To minimize bias and preserve nuance, the translation was conducted by a bilingual team member with expertise in both languages. Translations were cross-checked by another bilingual researcher to ensure accuracy.

3.3 Data analysis

The three data sources were analyzed using constant comparison analysis, defined as "an analytical process in which incoming data is compared with existing data in the process of coding and category development" (Birks and Mills, 2015, p. 177). This process allowed the researchers to generate theory grounded in the data. To conduct constant comparison analysis, data were grouped into categories and analyzed for similarities and differences, with categories refined cyclically (Silverman, 2021). This process was conducted through coding (Saldaña, 2016).

To enhance analytical rigor and ensure trustworthiness, the researchers applied investigator triangulation. Both authors independently coded a subset of the interview transcripts during the initial stage of analysis. Coding schemes were then compared and discussed in joint sessions to reach consensus on emerging themes

and ensure consistency in the interpretation of the data. Discrepancies were resolved collaboratively, and the refined codebook was then applied to the full dataset. This iterative process supported the development of thematically coherent categories and reduced the potential for researcher bias.

More specifically, data were coded through two main cycles (Saldaña, 2016). First-cycle methods were applied during the initial coding stage, while second-cycle methods served as “advanced ways of reorganizing and reanalyzing data coded through the first cycle methods” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 234). In the first cycle, interview data from both students and teachers were analyzed using Initial and Structural Coding (Saldaña, 2016). The objective was to identify emerging codes and themes to gain an overview of attitudes toward HL use in Norwegian EAL classrooms—the focus of the first research question. Observation and field notes were analyzed using an exploratory approach. Exploratory methods are “open-ended investigations and preliminary assignments of codes to the data before more refined coding systems are developed and applied” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 294). Pattern and Focused Coding were then used to identify multilingual pedagogical practices, which addressed the second research question.

To ensure credibility, triangulation was employed across three data sources: interview transcripts, observation notes, and field notes (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). This approach allowed for cross-validation of findings and provided a more nuanced understanding of participants’ beliefs and practices. To further enhance the trustworthiness of the study, member checking was conducted with six participants (three students and three teachers), who were invited to review and comment on a summary of the preliminary findings derived from their interviews. Their feedback was used to refine the themes and ensure that the interpretations accurately reflected their perspectives (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). These steps contributed to the trustworthiness and dependability of the analysis. Themes were refined through constant comparison across participant types and data sources, ensuring that the final thematic structure reflected both convergences and divergences in stakeholder perspectives.

4 Findings

The thematic analysis of student and teacher interviews, classroom observations, and field notes yielded two central themes aligned with the research questions: (1) tensions between language ideologies and instructional realities, and (2) constraints and uncertainties in implementing multilingual approaches. Rather than counting frequencies, we report on salient patterns and divergent perspectives to illustrate the range of experiences and beliefs captured in the study.

While the majority of participants acknowledged the cognitive and affective value of incorporating students’ HLs into instruction, both teachers and students typically framed English as the preferred classroom language. Teachers tended to idealize a monolingual English environment as pedagogically desirable, while students expressed appreciation for English input but often called for strategic HL use to scaffold learning. Furthermore, none of the teacher participants had received formal training in multilingual pedagogies, and most were unfamiliar with practical strategies for HL integration.

4.1 RQ1: student and teacher attitudes toward HL integration

The main theme that emerged from the first research question, “tensions between language ideologies and instructional realities,” captures the complexities and contradictions in both teacher and student perspectives.

4.1.1 Ideological commitment to TL-only instruction

Teachers consistently emphasized the importance of maximizing TL (English) exposure in their classrooms. Maria (G9), for example, asserted that lessons should be designed to “make students learn as much English as possible,” while Øystein (G9) framed English proficiency as essential for participation in a “contemporary competitive world.” This English-only stance often reflected a combination of factors, including institutional expectations, national curriculum discourses, and the teachers’ own educational trajectories. The participants viewed themselves as gatekeepers of English input, responsible for maintaining high expectations and ensuring that students are adequately prepared for assessments and future academic demands.

Eva (G8) warned that using HLs might “turn into a habit” and “lower the bar,” while Ingrid (G7) described students as having “an imaginary switch” that could be kept “on English” through teacher consistency and persistence. Similarly, Marius (G8) commented, “If we switch to Norwegian too easily, they [students] will not push themselves. They will take the easy way out.” Øystein (G9) added, “We have to train their endurance in English. It is like building muscle—you cannot grow stronger if you always rely on a crutch.”

The belief that TL immersion is the most effective path to language acquisition was widely held, despite evidence that instructional realities often require flexibility. This ideological commitment often exists in tension with the day-to-day need to support learners through more accessible means of communication.

4.1.2 Instructional practices: the pragmatic use of HLs

Despite this ideological commitment to TL-only instruction, classroom observations and teacher reflections revealed a more pragmatic and flexible reality. All six teachers occasionally used HLs—most often Norwegian—for clarification, translation, and classroom management. HL use was particularly frequent in mixed-ability classrooms, where maintaining English-only instruction proved difficult.

In practice, HLs functioned as strategic pedagogical tools, helping to scaffold understanding, ensure participation, and address students’ varied linguistic repertoires. Ingrid (G7) admitted, “Sometimes I just have to explain something in Norwegian. Otherwise, they lose track completely.” Similarly, Øystein (G9) noted, “If they do not understand a word, I will give them the Norwegian equivalent—then we move on. It saves time and stress.” Eva (G8) observed, “I know it is best to stick to English, but honestly, it does not always work with everyone. You have to meet them where they are.”

The divergence between teachers’ stated ideologies and their actual practices illustrates a persistent tension between aspirational discourses and the pedagogical demands of linguistically diverse classrooms. While HL integration was rarely planned or systematic,

its occurrence across all classrooms suggests an implicit recognition of its utility. Teachers may not fully embrace multilingual pedagogy, but their actions reflect a tacit acknowledgment that exclusive TL use is not always pedagogically effective or inclusive.

4.1.3 Student attitudes: balancing TL exposure and affective safety

Students similarly expressed a strong preference for English as the dominant classroom language, often associating TL immersion with cognitive development and academic success. Older students, in particular, highlighted how consistent TL use helped them “start thinking in English” and prepare for national exams or future international communication. One ninth-grade student noted, “It is easier to switch into English mode when we use it all the time in class.” Another added, “We need English for high school and beyond—it is good to practice now.”

At the same time, HLs were seen as critical resources for emotional and cognitive support. Several students described HL use as a “refuge” or “safe space” when grappling with unfamiliar or complex content. For instance, one learner explained, “Sometimes I panic when I do not understand a word. If I can hear it in my language or Norwegian, it helps me calm down.” Another student stated, “I feel stupid if I do not get it right away in English. A quick explanation in my language helps me feel okay again.”

TL-only environments were sometimes perceived as stressful, especially by students who lacked confidence in their pronunciation, vocabulary, or general language competence. One younger student recalled, “I was afraid to say things in English in case people laughed. When the teacher explains something in Norwegian, it is a relief.” Cross-linguistic comparisons, particularly in grammar instruction, were cited as useful scaffolds that helped link HL knowledge to new TL structures. As one student put it, “When the teacher says, ‘this is like how we say it in Arabic,’ then I understand much faster.” These moments were seen as not only pedagogically effective but also personally affirming.

This affective dimension of HL use—linked to comfort, reassurance, and clarity—emerged as a recurring theme across student interviews. While students upheld the value of English immersion, their comments reveal a more nuanced understanding: HLs can coexist with TL instruction to promote comprehension, reduce anxiety, and support learner identity.

4.1.4 The limits of Norwegian as a scaffold

Students also problematized the assumption that Norwegian could function as a universal lingua franca. While some found Norwegian helpful for understanding classroom content “If I do not get the English, I can ask in Norwegian and it helps” others, particularly those with limited Norwegian skills, felt excluded. One student explained, “When the teacher switches to Norwegian, I sometimes stop following. I just wait for English again.”

Another questioned the linguistic hierarchy: “Why is Norwegian allowed, but not my language?” These perspectives underscore a key tension: Norwegian may support some learners but marginalize others, depending on their linguistic backgrounds. Including additional HLs where possible was viewed by several students as a way to better reflect the classroom’s diversity and promote inclusion.

4.1.5 Navigating between languages

The interplay between language learning goals and affective safety reflects a broader tension in multilingual classrooms. Students and teachers alike expressed support for TL immersion, viewing it as essential for academic progress, language development, and future opportunities. At the same time, they acknowledged the functional, cognitive, and emotional value of HL integration, particularly in supporting comprehension, reducing anxiety, and creating inclusive learning environments.

Rather than framing HL use as a binary choice between “either/or,” both groups described it as a flexible and situational tool, employed strategically depending on learners’ needs, proficiency levels, and the classroom context. This dynamic negotiation of languages suggests that multilingual competence is being constructed moment by moment, not only through curriculum or instruction but also through classroom interactions and relational trust.

Overall, the findings indicate that HL integration in the EAL classroom is shaped by a web of ideological, practical, and emotional considerations. Teachers and students are constantly navigating these complexities—often without explicit institutional guidance, formal training in multilingual pedagogy, or supportive policy frameworks.

4.2 RQ2: implementing multilingual approaches in the classroom

The main theme that emerged from the second research question is “constraints and uncertainties in implementing multilingual approaches,” which captures both the openness and the hesitations teachers expressed when it came to applying multilingual pedagogies in practice. While several educators acknowledged the pedagogical value of HL use—particularly for fostering engagement, identity expression, and deeper comprehension—all six participants reported feeling underprepared or unsupported in integrating such strategies systematically.

4.2.1 Limited training and lingering norms

Teachers frequently traced their hesitance to monolingual assumptions instilled during their teacher education. Several participants recalled being explicitly discouraged from using HLs in their training, with Marius (G8) stating, “We were told to stick to English. Using other languages was seen as a weakness or a shortcut.” This legacy shaped their instructional mindset and contributed to an enduring sense of pedagogical insecurity. Ingrid (G7) noted, “I do not think we ever had a course that even mentioned multilingualism... We were taught to correct, not to embrace [other languages].” Such reflections underscore the disconnect between formal training and the realities of multilingual classrooms in contemporary Norway.

4.2.2 Teacher ambivalence about feasibility and implementation

Even when teachers acknowledged the pedagogical potential of drawing on students’ full linguistic repertoires, many expressed ambivalence about how such approaches could be implemented in practice. This hesitation often stemmed from a combination of practical constraints, limited training, and uncertainty about classroom dynamics.

A recurrent concern was the language gap between teachers and students. Several educators explained that, while they were open to students using their HLs informally, they themselves lacked the linguistic knowledge to engage meaningfully. As Maria (G9) put it, *“It is great in theory, but if I do not understand the language, I feel useless.”* This sense of helplessness led some to question the value of allowing HLs if they could not support or assess what was being said.

Other concerns centered on time and curricular pressures. Eva (G8), for example, worried that attempts to plan for multilingual inclusivity could “derail the lesson plan” or “take up much of the class time.” The unpredictability of classroom interaction—especially in settings with multiple HLs—was seen as a potential threat to cohesion and flow. Teachers feared that without a clear structure, HL use might introduce confusion or uneven participation. This tension between principle and practice left many teachers in a state of hesitation. While some continued to allow HL use as a spontaneous scaffold, they admitted to being “unsure what to do with it” beyond brief clarifications.

4.2.3 Need for practical support and professional development

Across the board, teachers voiced a strong need for targeted training, practical tools, and clearer policy guidance. The absence of structured institutional support left many feeling as though they were navigating the demands of multilingual classrooms in isolation. Several participants indicated they would feel more confident integrating HLs if they had access to classroom-based models, opportunities to observe experienced colleagues, or time for collaborative planning. Nils (G7) suggested that peer workshops or team teaching might provide the scaffolding needed to “get started without feeling lost.” Eva (G8) described professional development as a crucial “safety net,” adding that it could “take the fear out of doing it wrong.” Overall, teachers expressed a desire not only for permission to use HLs but also for the competence and confidence to implement multilingual approaches meaningfully and consistently.

4.2.4 Student perspectives: value, caution, and complexity

Students echoed some of their teachers’ concerns while also expressing a strong interest in greater HL inclusion. Most described their classrooms as effectively multilingual spaces, where English and Norwegian co-existed. However, they noted that other HLs—such as Arabic, Polish, or Somali—were largely absent, even when those languages could have provided necessary support. Several students observed that this lack of inclusion often left peers without sufficient scaffolding, especially those newer to the Norwegian school system.

Reactions to the idea of integrating more HLs ranged from enthusiasm to ambivalence. Some students worried that HL use might “make others feel left out” or “highlight who does not speak Norwegian,” suggesting concerns about social cohesion and visibility. Others, however, were eager to draw on their full linguistic repertoires, explaining that HL use would make lessons “more personal,” help them “connect ideas better,” and allow them to “express ourselves more clearly.” These perspectives reflect a nuanced understanding of both the opportunities and challenges associated with multilingual pedagogy.

4.2.5 A shared need for clarity and support

Ultimately, both teachers and students conveyed a desire for greater clarity, flexibility, and institutional support when it comes to multilingual implementation. Teachers called for concrete models and policy backing to reduce the burden of figuring it out alone. Students,

for their part, emphasized the importance of inclusive practices that respect linguistic diversity and allow for both academic access and identity expression.

Together, these findings point to the need for a more systematic and context-sensitive approach to multilingual pedagogy in Norwegian EAL classrooms—one that equips educators with tools and trust, and empowers students to bring their whole selves into the learning space.

5 Discussion

The objective of this study was to synthesize classroom and interview data to examine teacher and student attitudes toward the use of HLs in the Norwegian EAL classroom. Additionally, the study sought to explore perceptions surrounding the integration of multilingual pedagogies in EAL lessons. As the findings revealed, most teachers and students perceived HL use as a valuable resource. However, there was also a clear preference for instruction to be predominantly conducted in the TL, with the aim of enhancing learners’ proficiency. The six teachers did not implement multilingual pedagogies in their classrooms, primarily due to unfamiliarity with how to do so effectively and a desire for more structured guidance.

While some students were supportive of HL inclusion, others were skeptical, expressing uncertainty about how it would materialize in class and concern that it might make them feel uncomfortable. This discomfort may stem from internalized monolingual norms prevalent in the Norwegian school system and broader society (Calafato, 2021; Xu and Krulatz, 2023). A dominant monolingual habitus—defined by Gogolin (1994) as the deeply rooted preference for one language in institutional settings—may contribute to unease when multiple languages are introduced, even among multilingual learners. Recent scholarship has emphasized that discomfort may also reflect students’ desire to assimilate linguistically or avoid drawing attention to their minority status (Krulatz et al., 2022; Sevinç, 2020). Future research could explore these dimensions further, especially across generations and shifting attitudes toward linguistic diversity. These findings mirror those of earlier studies conducted in Norwegian settings (Krulatz et al., 2022; Neokleous et al., 2023; Šurkalović, 2014; Vikøy and Haukås, 2023).

The findings also revealed the predominance of maximal TL exposure as the perceived optimal teaching approach. Four teacher participants highlighted the benefits they believed stemmed from using the TL as much as possible. However, this idea does not align with current multilingual pedagogical frameworks and instead perpetuates the notion of language separation. Similar beliefs were also expressed by teachers in earlier Norwegian studies (e.g., Neokleous and Ofte, 2020). According to Neokleous et al. (2022), teacher beliefs and classroom practices are influenced by factors such as formal education, past experiences as learners, practicum placements, national language ideologies, and perceived values of learners’ HLs. Since the teacher participants began their careers before the 2020 curriculum reform, it can be inferred that their emphasis on TL use is tied to the objectives of the previous curriculum version (LK06). Rindal (2014) noted that communicative competence played a central role in the former curriculum, which placed a strong emphasis on TL use. The participating teachers were likely exposed to this version either as pre-service or in-service educators. The influence of LK06 was further underscored by Ingrid (G7) and Eva (G8), who

described how their teacher education focused on “methods to get [students] to speak and use English” in order to meet “the curriculum needs.” As Neokleous et al. (2022) argue, teachers may be resistant to new ideas or interventions that contradict their initial training. Additionally, most teachers grew up in monolingual classrooms and lack personal experience with multilingual educational realities (Young, 2014). Research also shows that teachers often caution against HL integration due to concerns over excessive dependence on HLs and reduced TL exposure (Izquierdo et al., 2016; Neokleous et al., 2022; Rolin-Ianziti and Varshney, 2008; Turnbull, 2001).

While students expected the TL to be central in the classroom, many also found HL incorporation highly beneficial for comprehension. Most students valued the ability to use Norwegian, stating that it supported their TL development. However, they also noted that this practice was not inclusive of all students, particularly those not fluent in Norwegian. Thus, they viewed Norwegian use primarily as a functional necessity for comprehension rather than as a meaningful integration of HLs to enhance language teaching. This mirrors findings by Neokleous et al. (2022). Moreover, the teachers’ positive views on HL use appeared somewhat inconsistent with their strong endorsement of maximal TL exposure. This contradiction may reflect an instrumental view of HLs-as temporary tools for achieving TL proficiency-rather than recognizing them as enduring linguistic resources. This challenges the foundational principles of the multilingual turn in education, which advocates for the development of HLs alongside the TL (Haukås and Speitz, 2020; May, 2014). Resistance to multilingual pedagogy in EAL classrooms may, in part, stem from the complex perceptions of multilingualism in Nordic contexts, where it is often linked to individuals perceived as lacking proficiency in the majority language (Calafato, 2021; Xu and Krulatz, 2023). Furthermore, it may signal a lack of teacher confidence due to insufficient competence in students’ HLs (Haukås, 2016; Sevinç et al., 2022). This, in turn, suggests a reductionist understanding of multilingual pedagogy; one that assumes its implementation requires teacher fluency in multiple languages.

The findings also point to an important distinction that deserves further attention: students from majority-language-only households may approach HL use differently than multilingual peers. For monolingual students, HL use may be viewed as a departure from the norm, while multilingual students may see such practices as reflective of their daily experiences. As a result, for students with a monolingual habitus, HL integration may feel disruptive, as they often view TL-exclusive environments as most effective for language acquisition (Gynne and Persson, 2023). In contrast, multilingual students may adapt to the monolingual expectations of school despite valuing their full linguistic repertoires. Exploring these divergent positionalities could help clarify some of the contradictory views voiced by participants and would benefit from further comparative inquiry (Busch, 2021; Krulatz et al., 2022).

The participants did not report systematic use of multilingual pedagogies, echoing findings from recent Norwegian studies (e.g., Lorenz et al., 2021; Vikøy and Haukås, 2023), although some expressed an interest in doing so. This contradicts the conclusion of Sevinç et al. (2022), who argued that EAL teachers largely overlook students’ linguistic and cultural diversity in practice. Research indicates that to address skepticism surrounding HL integration, both teachers and students need a better understanding of its potential benefits, including the development of proficiency in all languages, increased inclusivity, enhanced identity expression, and greater awareness of

linguistic diversity (Aronin, 2022; Krulatz et al., 2022; May, 2014; Neokleous et al., 2022). In the present study, students reported that teachers rarely encouraged HL use, reinforcing Iversen’s (2017) observation that limited encouragement can contribute to negative attitudes toward HLs. The current curriculum emphasizes the advantages of multilingualism for both academic and societal success (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020). However, implementing these goals and fostering globally oriented, multilingual learners remains a challenge for Norwegian EAL teachers (Neokleous et al., 2022; Neokleous and Ofte, 2020; Šurkalović, 2014).

Meeting the growing demands of multilingual classrooms requires systematic revisions to teacher education and stronger institutional support for EAL educators. Schools should be provided with practical resources and updated, systematic training to build the competence needed to support all students. Educators and students alike can thrive in linguistically diverse classrooms only when multilingual practices become the norm, rather than the exception.

6 Conclusion

As Norwegian classrooms become increasingly diverse, this study underscores the persistent gap between monolingual ideologies and the multilingual realities that characterize EAL education. The findings revealed two key tensions: first, a strong preference among both teachers and students for English-dominant instruction, despite recognizing the value of HL support; and second, widespread uncertainty about how to implement multilingual approaches in practice. These tensions point to a need for clearer policy guidance, targeted teacher training, and pedagogical support that reflect contemporary classroom realities.

While both teachers and students recognized the cognitive and affective benefits of HL integration, an ingrained preference for English-only instruction persisted-largely shaped by teachers’ own educational backgrounds and lack of training in multilingual strategies. Teachers frequently cited their limited preparation and exposure to multilingual pedagogies as a barrier, and none of the participants had received formal training in this area. Students, for their part, consistently described HL use as a helpful scaffold for comprehension and participation, especially when the TL or Norwegian alone proved insufficient. Yet HL use remained informal, inconsistently applied, and largely dependent on individual teacher discretion.

To bridge this gap between recognition and implementation, coordinated efforts are needed across multiple levels of the education system. Teacher education programs should integrate multilingual pedagogies as a foundational component, explicitly preparing educators to support students with diverse linguistic repertoires. This includes providing both theoretical understanding and hands-on strategies, particularly since the findings demonstrated that teachers are eager but feel ill-equipped. Furthermore, national curriculum guidelines must move beyond general encouragement of multilingualism to offer concrete, actionable models for practice. Given the persistence of deficit-oriented discourses toward multilingualism (Benediktsson, 2022; Speitz, 2018), policy frameworks should also clarify what multilingualism entails in educational settings and how it can enhance-not hinder-language learning.

Professional development must also be prioritized. The findings showed that teachers perceive multilingual strategies as complex and time-consuming without adequate institutional support. Ongoing

training should be accompanied by mentorship, opportunities to observe multilingual pedagogies in action, and the development of resource banks tailored to diverse classroom contexts (Lorenz et al., 2021; Neokleous et al., 2022). Such infrastructure would help alleviate the uncertainty expressed by participants and build pedagogical confidence.

Due to the small sample size and use of convenience sampling, the generalizability of findings is limited. Future research should include a broader and more demographically diverse population of students and teachers-particularly those with prior experience or training in multilingual approaches. Such studies could also examine regional differences in policy interpretation and implementation, further illuminating systemic gaps. Nonetheless, this study offers important empirical contributions to the field of multilingual education in Norway. It centers student voices-frequently overlooked in educational policy and research-and sheds light on teacher concerns that must be addressed if inclusive practices are to be sustained. The findings demonstrate that while willingness exists, infrastructure and training are lacking.

Ultimately, fostering a more inclusive and equitable EAL classroom requires a paradigmatic shift in how language resources are conceptualized and utilized. By aligning teacher preparation, curricular policy, and classroom practice with contemporary understandings of multilingualism, Norwegian education can move beyond a monolingual paradigm toward a more responsive, empowering, and linguistically inclusive model. Multilingualism, in this vision, is not an accommodation but a norm-one that reflects the lived realities of today's learners and strengthens the foundation of language education.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, upon reasonable request.

Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by Sikt Kunnskapssektorens tjenesteleverandør. The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. Written informed consent for participation in this study was provided by the participants' legal guardians/next of kin. Written informed consent was obtained from the individual(s), and minor(s)' legal

guardian/next of kin, for the publication of any potentially identifiable images or data included in this article.

Author contributions

GN: Data curation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Conceptualization, Writing – review & editing, Validation, Supervision, Formal analysis, Methodology. KN: Formal analysis, Data curation, Methodology, Investigation, Conceptualization, Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft.

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