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TEACHER CANDIDATES' BELIEFS ABOUT CROSSLINGUISTIC PEDAGOGY, CODE-SWITCHING, AND CODE-MIXING: A SNAPSHOT FROM UNIVERSITY OF HAMBURG

Abstract. The last decades have seen the active embracement of classroom multilingualism in educational settings. The relevance of this study is justified by the increasing cultural and linguistic diversity in Western societies, the high demand for teachers who understand the value of multilingualism, have deep knowledge of multilingual language practices, are able and willing to provide an appropriate learning environment for language learners.

The main objective of the study is to investigate the pre-service language teachers' beliefs about crosslinguistic pedagogy, code-switching, and code-mixing as the leading examples of this pedagogy in educational settings. An online questionnaire was shared among teacher candidates (n=20) enrolled in teacher education programs at the University of Hamburg. The respondents were asked to answer the questions concerning their background and to mark on a Likert scale whether they agreed with the statements provided to them or would find the implementation of certain methodology useful.

The findings suggest positive attitudes towards multilingualism and a high level of awareness regarding the importance of previously acquired languages for subsequent language teaching and learning. However, some discrepancies between knowledge, beliefs, and practice are indicated. The results allow us to conclude that target-language-only use in language classes is still a highly desirable goal for pre-service language teachers. Some possible implications for curriculum development arising from the study are discussed.

Keywords: teacher candidates' beliefs, multilingualism, code-switching, code-mixing, teacher training.

Introduction. Due to the ongoing globalization and international migration, the traditional patterns of language use in Western societies have changed considerably over the past decades. Many Western European nation states have an increasing number of immigrants who differ culturally and linguistically. Even though in many countries it is still common to use one language for governance, administration, in courts, and schools, individual and societal multilingualism is on the rise.

During the last decades, Germany has been Europe's most popular destination for international migration [1]. Since the 1990s, the country has become heterogeneous socially, religiously, and linguistically. According to the 2017 *Mikrocensus*, the residents with a migrant background accounted for approximately 19.3 million or 23.6% of the total population of the country three years ago [2].

As a result, in the big international cities like Hamburg, almost half of the school pupils have a migration background. Thus, it is commonplace to see monolinguals, bilinguals, and multilinguals sitting together and learning foreign languages in the classroom. Fortunately, bilingualism and multilingualism are no longer regarded suspiciously among experts who point out more advantages than disadvantages for language learners. Various studies have demonstrated that speakers of two or more languages can experience advantages over monolinguals when learning new languages, as “Explicit comparison of languages, e.g. metaphors, or the relation of sound and script, seem to dock well on cognitive and linguistic dispositions of bi- or multilingual learners” [3]. Furthermore, the study of Hesse and Göbel indicates that the presence of multilinguals in foreign language classrooms can result in a better performance of all learners, not only users of several languages [4].

A growing body of research has illustrated the positive outcomes of crosslinguistic interaction in educational settings [5; 6; 7; 8]. Various studies in

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and Third Language Acquisition (TLA) have demonstrated that building on prior linguistic knowledge increases metalinguistic awareness (MLA) [9; 10; 11; 12]. Moreover, facilitative effects of prior linguistic knowledge have been shown to foster language learning, as perceived similarities can help to infer characteristics of the subsequent languages [13]. This effect manifests itself predominantly between typologically related languages [14; 15].

New demands for language teaching and a growing body of research have resulted in the embracement of classroom multilingualism and a “multilingual turn” in education [16]. It highlights the role of previously acquired languages as a precious tool for teaching and learning. Researchers argue for support of multilingualism and pedagogical translanguaging in educational settings [17; 18]. It should help language learners “to maximize understanding and achievement” [19] and to overcome the monolingual principle that hinders language practitioners from making connections to the already existing knowledge of language learners [20; 21; 22; 23].

Nevertheless, “researchers and practitioners having embraced the new paradigm are still faced with the widespread assumption that language classrooms should be restricted to exclusive target language (TL) use” [24]. Additionally, while language practitioners tend to express positive attitudes towards multilingualism, they have limited knowledge on how to embrace it in the classroom. Thus, one of the main problems of implementing crosslinguistic pedagogy is the absence of specific examples. “It is thus crucial to provide concrete examples of what such approaches could look like and how they contribute to additional language learning” [24]. Code-switching and code-mixing can serve as the primary illustrations of crosslinguistic interaction in the language classroom, as they occur within a multilingual setting where speakers share more than one language. However, there seems to be the need for language teachers “to understand the necessity for learner codeswitching (changing languages during speech) to accommodate cognitive processing of

new concepts for memory reinforcement and comprehension” [25]. It is a beneficial communicative strategy for bi/multilingual students and educators in transferring and clarifying the knowledge. Hobbs [25], summing up the literature on the topic, states that code-switching helps learners to “a) achieve understanding; b) reinforce information; c) facilitate discussion abilities; d) reinforce identities; e) increase motivation”.

These possible advantages of code-switching and code-mixing contradict the common assumption that only TL should be used while all the other languages known to language learners should be avoided in the classroom. Predictably, within such a negative attitude towards the use of previously acquired languages, code-switching and code-mixing are seen as a sign of weakness or lack of competency [26; 27]. Overall, the counsel to use TL only is justified by the belief that the use of previously acquired languages in the classroom results in more disadvantages than advantages for language learners.

The answer to the question of whether multilingual pedagogies will be successfully implemented depends not only upon the knowledge of relevant methodology but also on future teachers’ ability to adapt their practices to the societal demands, implement the appropriate strategies in the classroom, and to reflect upon their beliefs and attitudes. Language practitioners choose whether to integrate the knowledge of previously acquired languages into the classroom, ignore it, or even penalize for the use of the non-target languages. After all, language practitioners “play a crucial role in deciding whether multilingualism in the FL classroom will be just another fad or whether it will change FL teaching and learning in a sustainable way” [3].

It is therefore crucial to research pre-service teachers’ beliefs towards multilingualism and implementation of multilingual teaching practices. In this paper, it is investigated how multilingualism and crosslinguistic pedagogy are perceived by pre-service teachers. Furthermore, the article examines the teacher candidates’ views regarding code-switching and code-mixing in educational settings. Finally, the research offers some suggestions for possible innovations

of teacher training programs.

Aim and tasks. The present study aims to investigate the pre-service language teachers' beliefs about crosslinguistic pedagogy, code-switching, and code-mixing as the leading examples of this pedagogy in educational settings. It provides an insight into beliefs about the best practices in the language classroom by revealing pre-service teachers' perceptions of effective teaching. Considering that "beliefs are often deeply-rooted and not easily accessed when directly addressed" [24], the study was designed to unfold the participants' perceptions of the practicality of crosslinguistic pedagogy.

The research questions guiding this study are: 1) What are pre-service teachers' perceptions of multilingualism? 2) What are the students' perceptions regarding monolingual vs. multilingual classroom practices? 3) What are the participants' attitudes towards code-switching and code-mixing in educational settings?

Research methods. 20 female teacher candidates (aged 21 – 35, median 24.5 years old) enrolled in teacher education programs at the University of Hamburg were asked to take part in the study. All participants were taking linguistics/language courses (English, German, French, Spanish) as a part of their major or minor. With a view to answering the research questions, an online questionnaire was shared among the research participants. This questionnaire was used as an effective tool to tap into the pre-service teachers' beliefs.

Firstly, the participants were asked to answer the questions concerning their background, such as age, gender, mother tongue(s), the level of education and semester they were enrolled in during the study, the subjects they would like to teach in the future, language use, etc. Then, the respondents were asked to mark on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree / not useful at all) to 5 (completely agree / very useful) whether they agreed with the statements provided to them or would find the implementation of certain methodology useful. The questions examined pre-service teachers' beliefs about multilingualism, the importance of previously acquired languages for

subsequent language teaching and learning, attitudes towards the use of other languages than TL, code-switching, and code-mixing in the language classroom.

Research results. The results of the study show that the majority of the students who took part in the study (n=12, 60%) speak three or more languages, that is, they are multilingual. Not surprisingly, their attitudes towards multilingualism and subsequent language learning are overwhelmingly positive. They seem to have little to no doubts about the general value of crosslinguistic pedagogy. For example, 80% (n=16) agreed with the statement “The more languages one knows, the easier it is to learn new languages” (see Figure 1) and 95% (n=19) supported the idea of drawing upon pupils’ knowledge of L1/L2 when teaching L2/L3/Ln (see Figure 2).

The more languages one knows, the easier it is to learn new languages.
20 Antworten

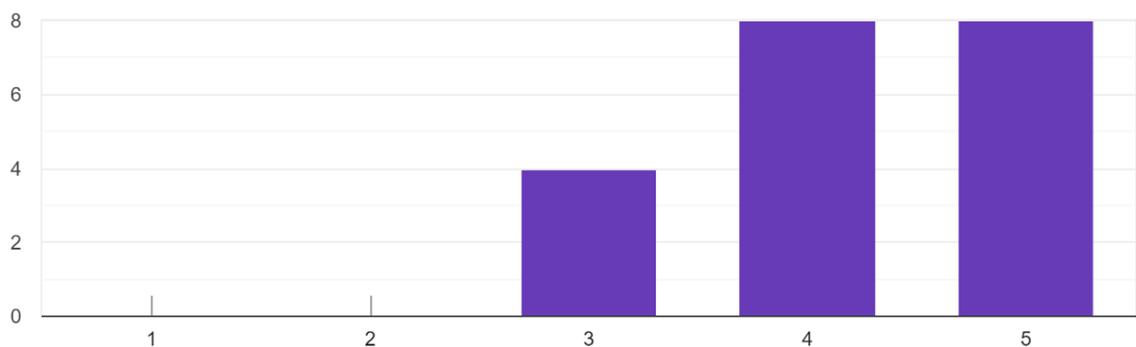


Figure 1. The value previous language knowledge for subsequent language learning

To what extent do you think it is useful to draw on students’ knowledge of L1/L2 when teaching L2/L3/Ln? (Please indicate on a scale from 1 (not useful at all) to 5 (very useful)).
20 Antworten

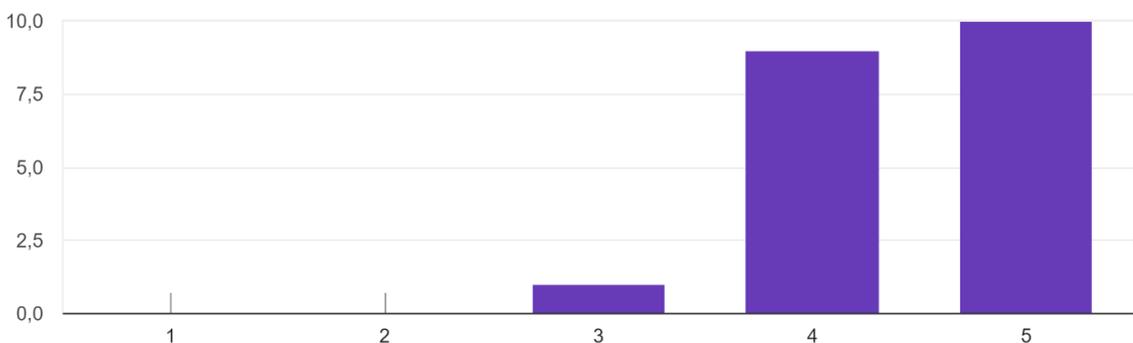


Figure 2. Drawing on students’ knowledge of L1/L2 when teaching L2/L3/Ln

However, only 45% of the participants (n=9) could answer in the affirmative that the textbooks they had used included activities in which students were required to draw on what they had known from before, such as by exploring similarities and differences between languages or reflecting on which learning strategies can be transferred from L1 to L2/L3/L4 or vice versa.

The teacher candidates tend to have positive attitudes towards code-switching and code-mixing. For example, only one participant indicated that the use of code-switching and code-mixing in the classroom is a sign of lack of competency and nobody agreed with the statement that it is a sign of laziness (see Figure 3).

Use of code-switching and code-mixing is a sign of laziness.

20 Antworten

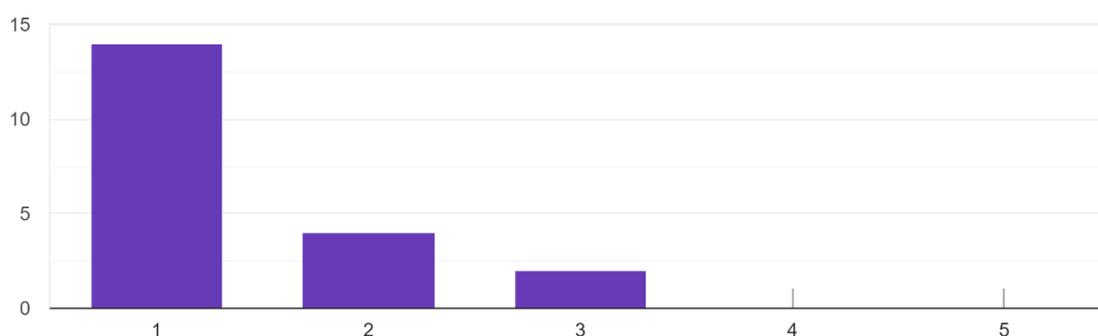


Figure 3. Negative attitudes towards code-switching and code-mixing

The questionnaire revealed that the pre-service teachers are aware of some of the functions of code-switching indicated by Hobbs [25] and mentioned earlier. For example, 70% of the research participants (n=14) agreed with the statement that code-switching and code-mixing make explaining new words easier. 75% (n=15) of the study participants indicated that code-switching and code-mixing make pupils feel comfortable (see Figure 4).

However, the questions that were aimed at revealing the students' perceptions regarding monolingual vs. multilingual classroom practices demonstrated that some participants would allow their pupils to use several languages with some limitations. For example, 60% indicated that they would

permit the use of code-switching and code-mixing in the students' conversation with their peers and 50% admitted that they would permit it in students' conversation with their teacher. While 40% of the pre-service teachers would accept code-switching and code-mixing in oral tasks, only one teacher candidate indicated that she would accept it in written tasks. Interestingly, one research participant who was in her first master's semester and had had two years of teaching experience during the study indicated in her comments that "If it is an English class, I will not allow other languages to be spoken other than English but if it is mathematics, then yes".

Code-switching and code-mixing make pupils feel comfortable.

20 responses

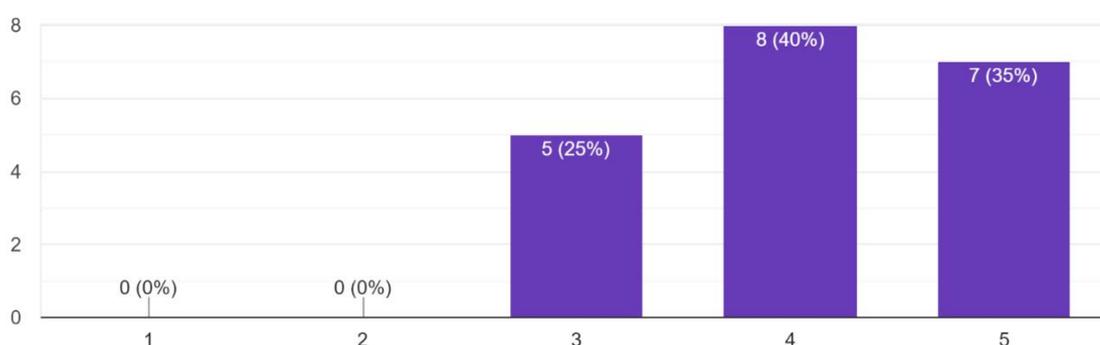


Figure 4. Beliefs about functions of code-switching and code-mixing

Finally, 75% of the study participants indicated that they had read something about multilingual language practices, 60% of them had used multilingual language practices during their classes. 77.8% of those who had used them during their language classes showed interest in getting more information about the topic and having more practice (taking part in a workshop, for example). 85.7% of those who had not used multilingual language practices before indicated that they would like to get more information about the topic and get some practice.

Discussion. These results indicate that teacher candidates who participated in the study are aware of some benefits of bi-/multilingualism and they agree

that previous experience learning a (foreign) language benefits subsequent language learning. At the same time, while the pre-service teachers have mostly positive attitudes towards multilingualism and are aware of some of its benefits, they are skeptical about implementing changes.

This is in line with previous studies on attitudes towards multilingualism and multilingual practices in the language classroom [28; 29; 30]. TL-only policy and penalizing the use of other languages are still seen as a norm. As Haukås [30] indicates, teachers may express positive beliefs about multilingualism in general, but that does not mean that they engage in multilingual practices with their pupils. In this study, a similar situation is observed: teacher candidates have positive attitudes towards bi-/multilingualism, but they are somehow skeptical about the actual use of multilingual teaching practices and embracing multilingualism in the classroom. This can (at least partially) be explained by the teacher candidates' feeling that their textbooks do not provide enough support and/or they need to get more knowledge and see successful examples of the application of the new methodology.

Conclusions. This study suggests that despite the generally positive attitudes towards multilingualism, the multilingual teaching practices are not seen as valuable as TL-only use in the language classroom. It seems that the monolingual approach is still deep-rooted in the pre-service teachers' beliefs on language teaching and learning. These somehow contradicting attitudes may demonstrate that the field of language teaching is still moving from the TL-only principle towards acceptance and use of several languages in the language classroom. This underlines the important role that teacher education has in supporting this shift by providing the teachers with the necessary skills.

Based on these findings, one can derive some implications for how to implement multilingual components into language theory and practice. Firstly, it is necessary for future language practitioners to get sufficient understanding of how languages interact in the multilingual mind. Such information could be

included into courses on language acquisition, teaching theories, applied linguistics, and (language) teacher education. Then, teacher candidates should get detailed knowledge of how to implement multilingual pedagogies in the classroom. Teacher training programs need to support pre-service teachers towards their future professional careers and provide them with learning and teaching materials, workshops, and successful examples of how multilingual teaching practices can be applied in the classroom.

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