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# Norwegian L1 teachers' beliefs about a multilingual approach in increasingly diverse classrooms

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## ABSTRACT

The L1 subject is a central meeting place for all students regardless of their linguistic backgrounds. Thus explorations of multilingualism in the L1 subject provide the potential for enhancing all students' multilinguality. In Norway, several policy papers have emphasised the important role of the L1 Norwegian subject in promoting students' multilingualism as a resource, but guidelines are lacking on how this should be facilitated. Consequently, L1 teachers' beliefs about multilingualism are central to understanding how and to what extent they implement a multilingual pedagogy. Whereas previous research in the Norwegian context has mainly explored foreign language teachers' beliefs on multilingualism, this study investigated L1 Norwegian teachers' beliefs on how the subject can be taught in an increasingly diverse language classroom. Ten upper secondary school teachers discussed these topics in focus groups. Most of the teachers had a language-as-problem orientation to their students' multilingualism. In particular, they found it challenging to improve minority students' Norwegian skills. Moreover, they rarely encouraged the use of minority students' multilingualism as a resource in the classroom. They also reported little guidance from textbooks. The findings suggest a strong need for supporting L1 subject teachers in developing a multilingual mindset and for creating suitable teaching materials.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

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## Introduction

All students in Norwegian secondary schools can be viewed as multilingual (Haukås, *in press*; Haukås & Speitz, 2020): they can communicate in Norwegian and English; they learn two written standards of Norwegian, Nynorsk and Bokmål; they use and understand the multitude of Norwegian dialects; and around 75% learn a second foreign language, typically Spanish, German or French (Foreign Language Centre, 2018). Furthermore, most understand the languages of their Scandinavian neighbours, Danish and Swedish (Zeevaert & Ten Thije, 2007), and an increasing number of students know and use additional languages in the home and elsewhere due to greater mobility across borders in recent

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decades. According to Statistics Norway (2021), 18.5% of the population has an immigrant background, defined as either having moved to Norway themselves or being Norwegian born to immigrant parents. In addition, Sámi is spoken and taught as a school subject in several regions. Furthermore, Kven, Romani, Romanes and Norwegian Sign Language have official statuses as national minority languages. The general sociolinguistic ‘climate’ of Norway has been described as a ‘linguistic paradise’ (Lanza, 2020, p. 131; Mæhlum & Røyneland, 2012) in particular due to the high degree of tolerance to the use of different Norwegian dialects (Lanza, 2020) and therefore apparently ‘an enormous tolerance for linguistic diversity’ (Trudgill, 2002, p. 31) in general. However, research on attitudes to growing diversity in society has found that this ideology of acceptance and tolerance primarily seems to apply to variation within the majority language (i.e. a positive attitude regarding the use of Norwegian dialects), but it does not extend to speaking Norwegian with a foreign accent or to immigrant minority languages (Kulbrandstad, 2015, 2018).

The L1 Norwegian subject is a central meeting place for all students. The curriculum includes competence aims related to viewing multilingualism and linguistic diversity as a resource and using language comparisons to enhance students’ multilingual awareness. However, multilingualism and linguistic diversity are not defined in the curriculum, and there are no official guidelines on how to interpret the competence aims. This likely leads to the existence of different conceptualisations of what multilingualism is and which kind of multilingualism is valued by the key implementors of the curriculum, the teachers.

Teachers’ beliefs ‘must be understood in terms of their connections not only to each other but also to other, perhaps more central, beliefs in the system’ (Fives & Buehl, 2012, p. 477). By designing this study, we sought to better understand how L1 Norwegian teachers orient themselves within this discursive landscape, to what extent and how they take responsibility for fostering students’ multilingualism in the L1 Norwegian subject, and which factors hinder them from doing so. Ruiz’s (1984) orientations in language planning – language-as-problem, language-as-right and language-as-resource – served as categories and a heuristic tool in the analysis of teachers’ beliefs.

Before moving on to the theoretical section, several concepts used in this study need to be clarified. The term multilingualism is defined and understood in many ways among scholars and the public (for further discussion, see Cenoz, 2013; Haukås, *in press*). In this study of the Norwegian school context, we define multilingualism as the dynamic and integrated knowledge and/or use of more than one language or variety. Based on this definition, all students in upper secondary school can be referred to as multilinguals (Haukås, *in press*). Furthermore, *L1 Norwegian* refers to the dominant language subject in Norwegian schools. Students with Norwegian as their first language are referred to as *majority students*, whereas students with other home languages or L1s besides Norwegian are referred to as *minority students*. It should be noted that minority students belong to a heterogeneous group. For example, some minority students may have spent their whole lives in Norway and are fully proficient in Norwegian, whereas others have recently arrived and have just begun the process of learning Norwegian. Other language subjects in school are referred to as *foreign languages* (typically English, French, German and Spanish). The transition subject offered to minority students who are not yet perceived to be sufficiently proficient in Norwegian is officially known as *mother tongue teaching for language minorities*.

## Theory

### *Orientations towards multilingualism and multilingual teaching approaches*

Ruiz (1984) sought to examine the values underlying policymaking and in particular to offer ‘an empowering perspective that could draw attention to the positive aspects of individual and societal multilingualism’ (Ruiz, 2010, p. 166). According to his conceptual model, there are three basic orientations to language and linguistic diversity; language may be viewed as a problem, a right or a resource. Ruiz intended these orientations to function as a heuristic tool, and they were meant as a way to analyse and reflect not only on the status quo but also on ‘what was thinkable about language in society’ (Ruiz, 1984, p. 16). According to Ruiz (1984), our different orientations ‘delimit the ways we talk about language and language issues’ (p.16).

Essentially, a *language-as-problem* orientation towards linguistic diversity draws on a model of disadvantage or a deficit perspective on linguistic minorities that emphasises their lack of competence in the dominant majority language instead of focusing on their multilingual repertoires (Ruiz, 1984, p. 19). Educational programmes informed by this orientation ‘seek to remedy this deficit with subtractive language teaching that emphasises transition to the dominant majority language’ and ‘immersion in mainstream classrooms, which in extreme cases can become *submersion* as students are placed in classes with no structured support for language learning’ (Hult & Hornberger, 2016, p. 34). In this view, the values stem from a monolingual ideal and assimilationist mindset (Evans & Hornberger, 2005, p. 94; Hornberger, 1990, p. 24) that views linguistic diversity as a threat to national unity (Harrison, 2007, p. 72; Ruiz, 1984). A *language-as-right* approach to linguistic diversity stems from a human rights framework and focuses primarily on the protection of indigenous languages and ‘the right of individuals to identify with their mother tongue and the right of minority groups to maintain their languages’ (Harrison, 2007, p. 73). The national minority language policy of the Sámi languages in Norway is that of a language-as-right orientation, which ‘seeks to address linguistically-based inequities using compensatory legal mechanisms’ (Hult & Hornberger, 2016, p. 35). A *language-as-resource* perspective highlights the benefits of linguistic diversity as a value both for the individual and for society. Following this orientation in education, the language repertoires of *all* students, majority and minority, are equally embraced and promoted. In the Norwegian context, Ruiz’ framework has been used in several recent publications, e.g. in Alstad and Sopenan’s (2020) study of early education and in Sickinge’s study from secondary education (2016). Both studies find that multilingualism is seen as a resource in policy documents on the one hand. At the same time, ‘multilingualism is considered as challenging in terms of language diversity’, as noted by Alstad and Sopenan (2020, p. 30).

Although not always explicitly linked to Ruiz’s (1984) orientation of linguistic diversity as a resource, an increased interest in and research on multilingualism in education as a resource has resulted in several models or approaches to promoting learners’ multilingualism in the last decades. Some of these approaches have been described as awakening to languages (Candelier et al., 2004), inter-comprehension of related languages (Hufeisen & Marx, 2007), tertiary language didactics (Hufeisen & Neuner, 2004), translanguaging (Duarte et al., 2020; García & Wei, 2014) and approaches that aim at a common language

curriculum for all language subjects (Daryai-Hansen et al., 2015). Even though these approaches are different in several respects, Haukås (2016) suggested that they all have some principles in common. First, all learners' full linguistic repertoires are valued and used as a resource in the language learning process. Second, teachers support learners in enhancing their cross-linguistic awareness by establishing links between the languages they know and are learning. Third, teachers support students in becoming aware of and transferring language learning strategies between languages. Fourth, teachers communicate and collaborate across the curricula. In sum, the multilingual approach in education has moved away from the belief that languages should be kept apart in the learners' brains and in the classrooms for learners to take advantage of their full linguistic repertoires when using and learning languages. Furthermore, scholars point to the fact that learners need to be aware of their own multilingualism to benefit from it (Haukås, 2016; Moore, 2006) and that 'transfer will occur from Lx to Ly or from Ly to Lx if the socio-linguistic and educational context is conducive to, or supports, such transfer' (Cummins, 2017, p. 108).

### ***Orientations to multilingualism in the L1 Norwegian subject and other language subject curricula***

L1 Norwegian is the dominant subject in school as measured by the number of instruction hours. It has also been referred to as the most important subject (Kulbrandstad, 1994) and as 'the mother of all other subjects' (Hansen, 2019, p. 96) given its fundamental role in developing literacy. A resource orientation on multilingualism was clearly expressed in the research report *The Future of the Norwegian L1 Subject* conducted by the Norwegian Directorate of Education (NDE, 2006). Furthermore, a white paper by the Ministry of Education and Research (2016) called for a revision of the curricula with a stronger focus on multilingualism in the L1 subject. Both the previous and present curricula for L1 Norwegian express positive views towards multilingualism both in the statement of purpose of the subject and in the competence aims regarding multilingual content (NDE, 2013, 2019). The two most important competence aims related to multilingualism in the curriculum from 2013 are that students should be able to explain grammatical characteristics of Norwegian in comparison with other languages, thus enhancing their cross-linguistic awareness, and that they should be able to give examples of multilingualism and discuss the advantages and challenges of multilingual communities (NDE, 2013).

In fact, all language subject curricula in Norway (L1 Norwegian, foreign language subjects and mother tongue teaching for language minorities) emphasise that multilingualism is a valuable resource for the individual and society. Nevertheless, the subject of mother tongue teaching for language minorities, which newly arrived students are offered, provides an ambiguous message (NDE, 2017). It declares that knowing one's mother tongue is valuable and that strengthening it is beneficial for enhancing interactions and understanding in work life and a multicultural society. However, the curriculum also explicitly states that the subject is a tool for mastering the Norwegian language. Consequently, the subject is no longer offered if the school considers a student to be sufficiently proficient in Norwegian. Thus, this transition model represents a language-as-problem orientation towards multilingualism (Hauge, 2014; Ruiz, 1984).

A problematic aspect related to the language subject curricula is that key terms like *flerspråklighet* (multilingualism) or *flerspråklig* (multilingual) are not defined, thus leaving them open to various interpretations among teachers, teacher educators and others. A close reading of several language subject curricula by Kjelaas and van Ommeren (2019) revealed that multilingualism refers to different orientations in these documents. Based on their analysis, they suggested that being multilingual with modern foreign languages studied in school (e.g. English and German) is seen as more valuable and prestigious than being multilingual with one or more immigrant languages (e.g. Arabic or Polish) (Kjelaas & van Ommeren, 2019, p. 5).

In the public debate (cf. 'Speak more Norwegian at home' [Lanza, 2020, pp. 132–134]) there seems to be an *iconic* link between peoples' views on multilingualism and linguistic diversity, in which being multilingual and having poor linguistic and academic skills are seen as being intertwined (Irvine & Gal, 2000; Olaussen & Kjelaas, 2020). Such a link erases existing internal differences within the group and reinforces the image of minority students as intellectually weak (Olaussen & Kjelaas, 2020, p. 68). Another challenge of the language-as-problem orientation is what Harrison (2007) identified as a tendency to place the responsibility of the problem on the minority speakers instead of seeing it as 'a two-way thing' (p. 78)

### ***Teachers' beliefs about and approaches to multilingualism***

Teachers' beliefs can be understood as 'a complex, inter-related system of often tacitly held theories, values and assumptions that the teacher deems to be true, and which serve as cognitive filters that interpret new experiences and guide the teacher's thoughts and behaviour' (Mohamed, 2006, p. 21). Research on teachers' beliefs is central to research on multilingualism in education in multiple ways. First, since teachers are the principal actors implementing the curriculum contents, it is vital to understand their conceptualisations of multilingualism and how they approach linguistic diversity in the classroom. Second, insights into teachers' beliefs may provide important information about components that need to be strengthened in teacher education to meet the challenge of creating schools where all students' language resources are embraced and fostered.

Recent research on teachers' beliefs about multilingualism in and outside of Norway (e.g. Bredthauer & Engfer, 2016; Dahl & Krulatz, 2016; De Angelis, 2007; Haukås, 2016; Heyder & Schädlich, 2014) has suggested that teachers express positive attitudes towards multilingualism but that they only to a limited extent engage learners in tasks that encourage them to explore and develop their multilingualism. For example, a survey among teachers of various subjects in Norway concluded that teachers largely neglected their learners' multilingualism; two out of three teachers had never facilitated multiple language use, and most of them had no plans to do so (Pran & Holst, 2015, p. 43). In a recent study of L1 teachers' beliefs about multilingualism in a Norwegian school setting, multilingual students were referred to as problematic minority students 'who have not developed their language' (Olaussen & Kjelaas, 2020, p. 52). The four L1 teachers interviewed in that study did not differentiate between the multilingual students, excluding both well-functioning minority students as well as the linguistic diversity of the majority students in their ideas of who counts as multilingual.

In cases where teachers have drawn on other languages, they typically pointed to similarities and differences between languages that the teachers themselves knew and/or that the majority of the learners in a given classroom knew, thus leaving out the minority students' languages (Haukås, 2016). Teachers' tendency to refer to languages they know themselves suggests a teacher-centred approach to multilingualism wherein teachers are the experts who provide explicit contrastive grammatical explanations instead of giving learners tools to become increasingly independent explorers of languages and their own multilingual identity. An interesting study of language teachers' beliefs about and approaches to multilingualism in Norwegian and Russian schools showed that highly multilingual teachers had a stronger resource orientation towards multilingualism than teachers with fewer languages in their linguistic repertoire (Calafato, 2020). Furthermore, teachers who taught more than one language subject reported using a multilingual pedagogy more often than those teaching only one language subject.

There are several likely reasons for teachers' reluctance to focus on learners' multilingualism. One explanation can be found in teachers' limited knowledge of how a multilingual approach can be implemented. In some studies in Norway, teachers and pre-service teachers reported that they found multilingualism interesting and considered it a potentially important focus in their language subjects (Haukås, 2016, 2019; Hegna & Speitz, 2020). However, they expressed that they needed more knowledge of what a multilingual approach entails and to see good examples of how it could be done. Thus it seems important that teacher education programmes pay more attention to pre- and in-service teachers' needs for multilingual approaches being implemented in schools.

Given the lack of knowledge about a multilingual approach among teachers and the lack of guidance in the language subject curricula and other documents in Norway, it is likely that teachers who focus on enhancing students' multilingualism depend on the contents of the textbooks they have chosen for their subjects. Therefore, the textbooks, often referred to as the hidden curriculum of a particular subject (Guerrettaz & Johnston, 2013; Tomlinson, 2012), need to include texts and tasks that encourage learners to draw on their full linguistic repertoire and language learning knowledge. However, studies have shown that existing textbooks are only adapted for multilingual teaching to a very limited extent.

An analysis of textbooks for learning German as a third language in Norwegian schools showed that a multilingual, cross-linguistic approach was rare and sporadic and that the tasks did not allow for activating existing knowledge or for exploring similarities and differences between languages (Haukås, 2017). The few examples of explicit comparisons were found in explanations of grammatical structures, most of them being comparisons between Norwegian and German. There were very few comparisons including L2 English, and the students were never encouraged to draw on other languages they may know. In Germany, Marx (2014, p. 8) reported similar findings when analysing L1 textbooks for German. She described the presence of a multilingual approach more as sporadic *Häppchen* (appetisers) rather than being the main course.

Likewise, Vikøy (2021) investigated to what extent and how two competence aims from the L1 Norwegian subject related to multilingualism and cross-linguistic comparison were reflected in three L1 Norwegian textbooks for upper secondary school. She found that the competence aim of cross-linguistic comparison was dealt with very differently in the textbooks. They differed particularly in which languages they focused on in the

language comparisons. Whereas the L1 textbooks for general studies were more theoretical and mainly drew on the Nordic and European languages, the textbook for vocational studies used a typological perspective in the presentation of languages. This also included languages that are commonly spoken by Norwegians with immigrant backgrounds. In addition, the textbook intended for vocational studies included a longer example in which Urdu was compared with Norwegian, which clearly highlighted minority languages.

In summary, existing national and international research has shown that multilingualism is mainly valued positively in policy papers and language subject curricula as well as by teachers. Nevertheless, teachers rarely draw on students' multilingualism as a resource in the language classroom. This may be explained by a lack of knowledge of the potentials of a multilingual approach and a lack of appropriate teaching materials to support them. Previous research has mainly examined teachers' views on multilingualism in general or in the foreign language subjects. However, to the best of our knowledge, no studies have yet explored teachers' beliefs about multilingualism in the L1 subject, the central meeting place for *all* students. Furthermore, no studies have so far explored to what extent L1 subject teachers believe cross-linguistic comparisons, a main competence aim in the L1 subject curriculum (NDE, 2013, 2019), are useful for enhancing students' multilingual awareness.

For the purpose of this study, we asked the following research questions:

1. What are teachers' beliefs about teaching the L1 Norwegian subject in increasingly diverse classrooms?
2. What are teachers' beliefs about and approaches to using language comparisons to foster students' multilingualism in the L1 Norwegian subject?

## Methodology

Inspired by the research design used by Haukås (2016), the data for the analysis were collected by conducting focus group interviews with L1 Norwegian subject teachers. Focus groups consist of participants with certain characteristics in common who share their views, feelings and experiences about one or more carefully selected topics (Vaughn et al., 1996). During focus group discussions, participants are encouraged to interact with each other, ask questions and exchange experiences. In this way, participants often play a more active role than they would in one-on-one interviews (Litosseliti, 2003).

The research questions, the curriculum contents for L1 Norwegian (NDE, 2013, 2017, 2019) and previous theory and research on multilingualism in education related to teachers' beliefs about multilingualism as a resource (e.g. Ruiz, 1984), teachers' beliefs about multilingualism as a pedagogical approach (e.g. Bredthauer & Engfer, 2016; Dahl & Krulatz, 2016; De Angelis, 2007; Haukås, 2016; Heyder & Schädlich, 2014), and text analyses of multilingual contents in textbooks (e.g. Haukås, 2017; Marx, 2014; Vikøy, 2021) informed the development of the topic guide. In addition to some introductory, 'warming-up' questions, a number of open-ended questions were developed to explore the participating teachers' beliefs regarding the main topics: multilingualism and teaching the subject in increasingly diverse classrooms, the role of grammar and cross-linguistic



awareness raising, the role of the curriculum and teaching materials, and cross-curricular collaboration among language teachers (see Appendix).

During the discussions, the teachers were given prompts related to the topics above; however, there was no set order for the prompts, as the teachers often started talking about relevant topics without having to be asked questions first. Furthermore, all prompts or questions were neutrally addressed to avoid influencing the teachers' perceptions of multilingualism and possible differences between minority and majority students.

## Participants

L1 Norwegian subject teachers at three upper secondary schools (Grades 11–13) were contacted by email and invited to participate in the study. Upper secondary school teachers in Norway typically teach two or more subjects simultaneously. In each subject, the minimum requirement is 60 European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) credits, but most teachers had specialised in one of their subjects with a subject-specific master's thesis.

In addition to the subject studies, the teachers had completed a 1-year teacher education course which included general pedagogy, subject didactics and practice. The participating schools were recruited from different areas in and around one of Norway's biggest cities. One school was located in the heart of the city, one was a suburban school and one was chosen from a rural area. Two of the interviews had three participants, whereas two had only two participants due to a lack of availability among the teachers. As a warmup, each focus group session started with a presentation round, which included questions regarding the teachers' language learning profiles, their teaching experiences and their reasons for becoming L1 Norwegian teachers. Table 1 provides an overview of the 10 participating teachers' profiles in terms of their qualifications in the L1 as measured by ECTS credits, the extent to which they are qualified to teach other language subjects and their years of teaching experience.

As shown in the table, the teachers differed in several respects. Four teachers were responsible for L1 Norwegian classes in both vocational and general study programmes, whereas the rest only taught in general study programmes. Furthermore, there was considerable variation regarding teaching experience and the qualifications for teaching the subject. In addition, some teachers had studied Norwegian as a second language (Heidi, Elin and Catherine) or additional languages (Anne, Beate, Frank and Ingrid), whereas three

**Table 1.** Teacher profiles.

Name <sup>a</sup>	Programme	Teaching qualification in Norwegian L1	Teaching qualification in other languages	Years teaching
Anne	General studies	90	German	19.0
Beate	General studies	60	English, French, Japanese	11.0
Cathrine	General studies	60	Norwegian as a second language	2.0
Dag	General studies	210	None	15.5
Elin	General studies	60	Norwegian as a second language	20.0
Frank	General studies	210	Latin, Spanish, Portuguese	28.0
Gina	Vocational + general studies	60	None	32.0
Heidi	Vocational + general studies	90	Norwegian as a second language	18.0
Ingrid	Vocational + general studies	210	French	5.0
Jorunn	Vocational + general studies	210	None	12.0

<sup>a</sup>We used monikers to protect the teachers' identities.

teachers had no experience studying languages other than L1 Norwegian (Dag, Gina and Jorunn).

### **Analysis**

Following the ethical guidelines set out by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data, the focus group interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed with the participants' consent. The average duration of the discussions was expected to last approximately 1 h, but two of the discussions lasted almost 1.5 h. The transcribed material included approximately 48,000 words.

The data were analysed using qualitative content analysis, which refers to the 'subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns' (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). In the first phase (preparation), the transcripts were read several times individually to become well-acquainted with the data. In this way, we obtained an initial impression of the main themes. We then met to discuss the data in detail to agree on the main units of analysis, to share preliminary categories and to identify prototypical text passages. In a second phase, a primarily deductive approach to content analysis based on theory on multilingualism in education as presented earlier was adopted, with each researcher analysing approximately half of the dataset. Thereafter, we shared our respective coding lists and discussed them in depth to reach a mutual understanding of the main categories and emerging themes. In the third phase, one of the researchers analysed the full dataset using the agreed-upon coding procedures and categories. Finally, all coding themes were discussed and agreed upon by both researchers. The following was the final list of themes related to this study's research questions:

- Diversity as a challenge
- Struggling minority students
- Neglect of language comparisons
- Importance of textbook
- Teacher differences.

The first two themes can be linked to the first research question, the third and fourth to the second research question and the final theme to both. In the following, we present the findings for each research question, giving prominence to the main themes related to each research question.

### **Findings**

#### ***Teaching the L1 Norwegian subject in increasingly diverse classrooms***

All of the teachers in this study reported experience with teaching the L1 Norwegian subject in classrooms with an increasing number of minority students to a varying extent. Teachers teaching the subject in vocational studies programmes (Gina, Heidi, Ingrid and Jorunn) reported having more minority students in their groups than teachers

responsible for teaching general studies programmes. Furthermore, there seemed to be more diversity in city schools than in rural schools.

Overall, the teachers seemed to have a language-as-problem orientation rather than a language-as-resource orientation regarding being a teacher in an increasingly diverse classroom. Increased diversity was mainly discussed in relation to minority students. First and foremost, the teachers expressed that they found it challenging to teach L1 Norwegian to the minority students together with the majority students. Most importantly, they reported that the minority students tended to 'disappear' among the majority students.

Both Anne and Catherine described the minority students as becoming passive and quiet when together with the majority students. According to them, this made it difficult to discover that many of the minority students struggled with the academic language of schooling. Anne, for example, described how she coincidentally noticed this when she finally had time to focus on the minority students alone while the rest of the class was on a school trip:

Yes, they normally become passive and tend to drown in the big group. ... When the rest of the class was away, I noticed a big change, because now they could not hide anymore. Suddenly, they were the ones who were expected to provide the answers; they were the active ones. And then they could also say what they didn't understand, and they learned so much more. By having this close dialogue with them, you are able to reveal what they know and what they do not know, which is very important.

According to several teachers, the biggest obstacle for the minority students was the lack of conceptual understanding. Catherine gave an example of a boy who had come to Norway 2 years prior and was struggling because 'he does not understand the meaning of many words'. She further reflected that there was a large gap between their proficiency in Norwegian being evaluated as 'sufficient' and the academic language repertoire they needed to survive in upper secondary school: 'When they do not understand a term, they often do not dare to ask, or they do not even know that they should ask. ... When there are too many words you do not understand, you fall through'. Beate gave another example of a girl who struggled and did not understand that her seemingly fluent oral Norwegian was not at the expected level when it came to writing.

Other minority students tried to hide their lack of competence. Ingrid mentioned that plagiarism was a problem among the minority students at her school. She declared that her main aim was to help her students become proficient language users, but this became difficult when they tried to hide their incompetence from her. Jorunn had similar experiences. She described how irrational and counterproductive it was for students to plagiarise others to avoid being detected as not good enough: 'How can I know that they need help when they hide it?' At the same time, she understood their strategies, as she felt that teenagers are vulnerable: they want to integrate and be like everybody else rather than a 'special case' in need of extra support. Anne found it an almost impossible task to support minority students properly, mostly because it was too big of a challenge for the students to reach a sufficient level, and she did not have the time to focus on them individually. Ingrid described how it often takes her almost a full school year to discover their knowledge gaps, and 'then it is almost too late to change things'.

Interestingly, several teachers emphasised that the diversity in the L1 Norwegian classroom is not only related to minority students. There are also considerable individual

differences within and between the different groups of students. Gina talked about noticeable differences within the minority student group. They came from different backgrounds and had various degrees of motivation to learn Norwegian. She also mentioned that many minority students often knew more grammar than the majority students did, thus indicating a resource orientation view on minority students' competences. This was also pointed out by Heidi. Jorunn, on the other hand, claimed that 'instead of it becoming a resource to know many languages', the minority students were generally struggling in all of their language subjects, thus seeing no advantage of being multilingual with a minority background. Frank pointed out that there were also substantial individual differences among the majority students coming from different lower secondary schools: 'Some know a lot, while others do not even know that grammar exists'.

The tendency for there to be a greater number of minority students in vocational classes than in general education classes resulted in different teaching in the vocational classes. Gina, who had extensive experience teaching linguistically and culturally diverse groups, said:

When a class consists of five minority students out of 14, as the one I teach now, it has consequences for what you focus on and how you do it. I emphasise much more reading texts focusing on interculturality and discussing openness and preconceptions to make them understand each other better. ... And when we talk about grammar and writing, I ask them, 'How is it in Arabic?', for instance, since Arabic is the first language of two of the minority students. And since there are also many majority students struggling with basic grammar, you have to start with the basics to help both them and the minority students.

In other words, Gina adapted her teaching to the needs of the group. Irrespective of being labelled majority or minority students, the students shared the need to develop an understanding of others as well as basic grammar knowledge, which Gina helped them to do by reflecting on their first languages.

### ***Beliefs about and approaches to using language comparisons in the L1 Norwegian subject***

None of the participating teachers found the competence aim of comparing Norwegian linguistic structures with structures in other languages to be particularly important, and in general, this was not a topic that they spent much time on. They gave various reasons for this. First, they expressed that the curriculum is overloaded with competence aims from too many different fields. For example, Frank stated that 'there are a thousand things you should do, so in the end you have to choose what to focus on'. Dag confirmed this, saying 'there are simply too many aims, and not enough time to work thoroughly with all of them'. Elin stated, 'actually I think I have skipped it, or at least that will be the first to be left out if I have little time'.

Second, they noted that language comparison was not prioritised in the textbooks that they used. According to the teachers, the textbook authors chose to place topics concerned with multilingualism in the final chapters, and Gina stated that the textbooks treated this aim rather superficially both in length and quality. The low priority of this competence aim in the textbooks was interpreted by the teachers as a signal of less importance since few of them seemed to compensate for the shortcomings of the textbook by developing or adding extra learning materials. The teachers who reported that

they spent some time on this competence aim typically used the languages they knew themselves or those that were known by the most learners in the classroom. Anne, for instance, tried to make the competence aim relevant to her students by challenging them to look for similarities and differences between Norwegian and the languages closest to the students, in other words, 'the foreign languages they learn in school'. In fact, the Norwegian L1 teachers also teaching foreign languages seemed to have a better overview of the linguistic repertoires in their classrooms. They frequently reported using linguistic structures from the languages of the majority of the learners (i.e. English, German, French and Spanish) to compare them with structures in Norwegian. Several teachers argued that the students need grammar to learn foreign languages (Frank) and to become good writers (Dag). In fact, all the teachers agreed that *all* students should know some grammar, but none of the teachers mentioned grammar knowledge as essential for exploring and contrasting the languages represented in their L1 Norwegian subject classrooms.

With the exception of Gina, none of the teachers suggested using students' other mother tongues besides Norwegian as a starting point for cross-linguistic comparisons in class, as they claimed that they did not feel competent discussing languages they had not mastered themselves. However, Gina wished she knew Arabic so that she could explain Norwegian to her Arabic-speaking students using concrete examples from their language: 'Then I could show them the differences'. Gina found no support for such an approach in the textbooks: 'There is almost nothing about minority languages in the textbooks'.

Dag believed that this competence aim could be approached by asking minority students to give presentations about their home languages in class. However, he was doubtful if this would increase students' cross-linguistic awareness in the long term or be regarded as more of a one-time, exotic assignment. Dag described the whole activity of language comparisons, 'where you cross out similarities and differences between languages', as a superficial approach with little value for the students. Furthermore, he claimed that it was not relevant for the exam.

However, several teachers (Anne, Catherine, Gina, Ingrid and Jorunn) said that they drew on the learners' home languages when giving individual feedback on written texts. In these contexts, the teachers sometimes asked how specific Norwegian structures were expressed in students' home languages, and in this way, they tried to support students in establishing links between the languages they knew.

Despite the general low priority of this aim, there were some differences between the teachers. Teachers who had studied more than one language appeared to spend more time on comparing and contrasting languages than teachers who had only studied and taught one language, L1 Norwegian. Frank applauded contrastive thinking and viewed it as an advantage that he had from studying both Norwegian and foreign languages: 'You use contrastive thinking all the time and can invite the students to do the same'.

Some teachers who only taught L1 Norwegian believed that teachers who knew multiple languages could make more out of this competence aim than they could: 'When you have a solid professional background, it is of course easier to see the opportunities', Dag stated. Elin suggested that it could be useful to increase collaboration with the other language teachers. In general, the teachers reported little collaboration. Frank had experience collaborating on a contrastive grammar course across language subjects at the

beginning of the school year, but he concluded that it was not successful since it 'ran into the sand after a couple of years'.

## Discussion

Drawing on Ruiz's (1984) theory of orientations to language in society and on previous research in the field of teachers' beliefs, the main objectives of this study were to investigate L1 Norwegian teachers' beliefs about teaching the subject in increasingly diverse classrooms and to understand to what extent developing students' cross-linguistic awareness was perceived as a meaningful approach to foster all students' multilingualism. Despite positive formulations regarding individual multilingualism as a resource for all students in the L1 curriculum (NDE, 2013, 2019), the teachers saw it mainly as a challenge to teach minority students together with majority students, thus having a language-as-problem orientation rather than a language-as-resource orientation towards multilingualism (Ruiz, 1984). Most teachers tended to describe the minority students as homogenous and sharing the same type of problem (i.e. struggling to learn both Norwegian and the contents of the L1 subject). By making this iconic link between being multilingual and having poor academic skills, they erased existing internal differences within the group and reinforced the image of all minority students as being underachievers (Irvine & Gal, 2000; Olaussen & Kjelaas, 2020, p. 68). In this way, the linguistic variation and competences represented by the minority students were not valued in the same way as other linguistic variations represented within the group of majority students of the L1 Norwegian subject (Kulbrandstad, 2015, 2018).

In particular, several teachers claimed that the minority students lacked conceptual understanding, and they seemed to be taken by surprise by the observed disparity between the students' oral skills, their academic understanding and written skills. This phenomenon is commonly known as the difference between the students' basic interpersonal communicative skills and their cognitive academic language proficiency (Cummins, 1984). The teachers, with the exception of Gina, seemed to be overwhelmed by this disparity and had little idea of how to support the minority students in their learning. Simultaneously, some teachers reported that the minority students often tried to hide their lack of competence in the L1 subject, making it more difficult to support them. Thus, by immersing the minority students in the mainstream classrooms without structured support for language learning, these students became invisible and immersion became submersion (Hult & Hornberger, 2016, p. 34). Although not a major topic of discussion, several teachers also highlighted some minority students' superior grammar knowledge compared with many majority students, thus appreciating their increased language awareness as a resource.

Regarding the L1 Norwegian subject curriculum, the teachers agreed that it is overloaded, and as a result, the aims of multilingual content were rarely prioritised. Furthermore, since the teachers seemed to follow the chronology of the textbooks, multilingualism was dealt with at the end of the school year if at all due to time constraints. As suggested in previous research (e.g. Guerretaz & Johnston, 2013; Haukås, 2017; Marx, 2014; Tomlinson, 2012), this tendency shows how strongly the textbook contents and structure dominate what is taught in the subject.

The competence aim of encouraging contrasting languages was dealt with to some extent. However, as documented in previous research (Haukås, 2016), the teachers

seemed to compare languages they already knew themselves. In other words, the teachers felt that the aim should be dealt with mainly as a teacher-centred approach wherein they drew similarities and differences between languages explicit to their learners. The less spoken languages in the classrooms, such as the home languages of the minority students, were often consequently excluded, making this an example of what Cummins (2019) called a benign neglect of minority students' languages. Nevertheless, by this teacher-centred approach, all students in the class (both the majority and minority students) missed the opportunity to explore their own multilingualism and to discuss and share their findings with each other in meaningful ways. Furthermore, by expressing that the curriculum is overloaded and that the teachers tend to not give priority to language comparisons, they showed a lack of understanding of this competence aim as a central part of a multilingual approach to language learning.

One teacher (Gina) differed from the others when she talked about how she worked in her vocational Norwegian L1 class. She actively chose to work on texts which could help the minority and majority students to learn something new about each other through discussions. The difference lay in how Gina adapted to the needs of the group. Gina was also the only teacher to report using cross-linguistic comparisons in class by asking her students to reflect on how things are expressed in their first languages, thus using language comparison as a pedagogical meeting point in diverse classrooms and, with this practice, expressing a resource orientation to multilingualism (Ruiz, 1984).

An explanation for the general lack of a multilingual approach in the L1 Norwegian subject and teachers' language-as-problem orientation towards minority students' presence and learning in the L1 subject classroom might be that prototypical models of language education as teachers know them have been dominated by the concern for monolingual speakers (Cummins, 2017; Hélot, 2015; Menken & García, 2010). Accordingly, there seems to be an underlying 'monolingual consciousness' about the purpose of the L1 Norwegian subject, which is to learn to master the Norwegian language. Thus, although formulated otherwise in the curriculum, there is still little room for 'more than one unique, standardised, perfect language' (Young, 2014, p. 164). Only when teachers develop a conscious understanding of this can they 'act as change agents of the various policies they must translate into practice' (Hélot, 2015, p. 226). This is also in line with the works of Randen et al. (2015) and Garcia (2008), who stated that the teacher does not necessarily need knowledge of other languages than the one being taught, but he or she does need an awareness of multilingualism as a dimension on its own. This makes teachers better capable of supporting the exploration and use of other languages in the classroom (García, 2008; Randen et al., 2015). Furthermore, when there is a gap in the understanding of what a multilingual approach is, as the teachers of this study demonstrated, it might be due to a lack of clear definitions at the curriculum level (Kjelaas & van Ommeren, 2019; Sickinghe, 2016) and a lack of guidelines and examples regarding how a multilingual approach in the L1 Norwegian subject classroom can be implemented (Haukås, 2016; Hegna & Speitz, 2020).

## Conclusion

In summary, several factors contribute to the limited implementation of a multilingual approach in Norwegian schools as shown in this study and in previous research in the

Norwegian and international contexts. First, teachers need more knowledge of what a multilingual approach may entail and its potential for their learners. However, few language teachers have reported that multilingualism and a multilingual approach are part of a university teaching course or offered as additional courses (Haukås, 2016; Hegna & Speitz, 2020). Consequently, it cannot be expected that teachers will have the knowledge needed to work in accordance with multilingual teaching principles and to be oriented towards linguistic diversity as a resource in the classroom (Ruiz, 1984). Thus, an important implication of this study and also of previous research is that both pre-service and in-service teachers need more knowledge about additive and resource-based approaches to multilingualism. Pre-service teacher education programmes should include such content to a much larger extent, whereas in-service teachers like the ones in focus of this study, should be offered additional courses. They could also be prompted to organise teacher-led study groups using texts about multilingual pedagogies, i.e. García et al. (2017) or collaborate with universities to explore how to plan for and implement lessons that draw upon the linguistic resources of all students (see e.g. Krulatz et al., 2018).

Second, teachers need to have ready access to learning materials with a learner-centred approach to multilingualism that embraces *all* students' languages and varieties. However, a multilingual approach must also be facilitated at the curriculum level. Thus, another important implication of this study is the need for a clear definition of multilingualism in the curriculum and guidelines on how to implement a multilingual approach to avoid that the teachers are left with their own beliefs and convictions about important areas of focus in the L1 Norwegian subject rather than official policy (Paulsrud et al., 2020; Ricento & Hornberger, 1996).

The more linguistically heterogeneous classrooms of the twenty-first century call for a more complex view of the multilingualism of students than the teachers of this study expressed. Still, the models of language education in which they took part have been and still are dominated by the concern for monolingual speakers (Hélot, 2015). The main concern is how to make diversity a resource both at the individual and collective levels. This means experimenting with dynamic, multilingual pedagogies in the classroom, where all types of linguistic diversity, including minority students' languages, are embraced and explored.

The present study focused on a small number of L1 Norwegian subject teachers and thus cannot be generalised. However, the many similarities to previous studies in the L2 and L3 context suggest that the lack of knowledge of how to implement a multilingual approach is shared across language subjects. These insights call for more cross-curricular collaboration among language teachers, as suggested by Haukås (2016). If language teachers across language subjects could work together rather than in separate classrooms, this could have great potential for maximising students' multilingualism. Furthermore, some teachers, like Gina in this study, have already implemented a multilingual approach in their teaching. The experiences of these teachers could be used as models both in the local context as well as in teacher education.

### **Disclosure statement**

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## Appendix

Guide for focus group interviews with L1 Norwegian teachers.

Focus	Questions
Presentation	<p>Could you tell me a little about what subjects you teach?</p> <p>Could you tell me about your educational background? Why did you choose to study the L1 Norwegian subject?</p> <p>Could you tell me about your teaching experience? How long have you worked as a L1 Norwegian teacher? Do you think the subject has changed during your years of teaching the subject?</p>
L1 Norwegian subject	In your opinion, what is the most important focus of the L1 Norwegian subject?
Multilingualism and diversity in the L1 subject	<p><i>The Education Act</i> states that students with other first languages than Norwegian are supported with mother tongue tuition and second language acquisition until they are considered to be sufficiently proficient in Norwegian to follow ordinary classes, i.e. there are many students with Norwegian as a second language within the same classroom as students growing up with Norwegian as their first language.</p> <p>What experiences do you have with this? Does this seem to be a reasonable procedure? Does your school follow <i>The Education Act</i> at this point?</p> <p>It is often stated that 'the more languages you know, the easier it is to learn new ones'. Is this your experience? Why/why not?</p> <p>To what extent do you think grammar knowledge plays a role for the students' ability to utilise their knowledge of several languages in a positive way?</p>
Language awareness/cross-linguistic awareness	<p>What does the word <i>grammar</i> mean to you?</p> <p>To what extent and if relevant, how, should a L1 Norwegian teacher teach grammar?</p> <p>Should all the students know some grammar, or only the students with Norwegian as a second language?</p> <p>To what extent to you think grammar knowledge can make us more language aware? How?</p> <p>How do you interpret the competence aim stating that 'that students should be able to explain grammatical characteristics of Norwegian in comparison with other languages'?</p>

(Continued)

## Continued.

Focus	Questions
	Do you teach writing explicitly? To what extent do you use grammatical terms in written feedback to the students? Does the students' language background have something to say for how you give them feedback?
Curriculum and teaching materials	What role does competence aims play for your teaching? Does the teaching material you use, include activities where the students must find support in former language knowledge, i. e. to look for similarities and differences between languages they know, or to reflect upon which language strategies they can rely on in all the language subjects?
Collaboration	To what extent do the language teachers in your school collaborate across the subjects Norwegian, English and German/French/Spanish?