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Teachers views on identity development of monolingual and multilingual children in relation to monolingualism or multilingualism at elementary school.

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### Abstract

Language is associated with the identity development of multilingual children. Potentially, classroom practices and teachers do play an important role of influence on this development. The aim of the present study is to explore whether teachers at multilingual schools evaluate the identity development of their students different from teachers at monolingual schools. Also, possible differences in views of teachers between the identity development of monolingual versus multilingual children in one classroom are analyzed. Lastly, we aimed to explore whether views on multilingualism in elementary education is related to teacher characteristics like teaching kindergarten and teaching at a multilingual school. The present study included 30 Dutch participants, 24 teaching at monolingual and 6 teaching at multilingual elementary schools. Participants filled out an online questionnaire on their opinion on multilingualism at school, their view on the differences in identity development between monolingual and multilingual children in their classroom and their view on the general identity development of their students. The results show that teachers at multilingual schools gave a more positive evaluation of the general identity development of their students than teachers at monolingual schools. Furthermore, teachers at monolingual schools evaluated the identity development of their monolingual students more positive than that of multilingual students, but their assessment of the identity development of multilingual students compared to monolingual students did not significantly differ from that of teachers at multilingual schools. Teacher characteristics such as grade of teaching and working at a multilingual schools were not associated with views about multilingualism at school.

*Keywords:* monolingual education; multilingual education; identity development; teachers' view; multilingualism; children

One of the most important areas of development during childhood is the development of identity. Self-identification, social interactions and support play a role in forming someone's identity which impacts their entire life (Bucholz & Hall, 2005). Since children spend a lot of their time in school, the skills they learn there, relationships they build and objectives they work on can influence their identity development (Wentzel, 2015). Teachers play an important role in this. For example, in a longitudinal study a relation was found between a negative relationship with teachers at elementary school and more externalizing and internalizing problem behavior (Murray & Greenberg, 2001). Also, positive relationships with teachers were found to be related to positive social self-concepts, which is a big part of a child's identity (Davis, 2001). To achieve these positive outcomes it is needed that classroom and teachers' practices connect to the students' characteristics, experiences and values formed by their home culture and practices (Van der Wildt, van Avermaet & van Houtte, 2017). Due to the increase in immigration and internationalization of the Netherlands the past decennia, in regular education a lot of children have different home languages and cultures when compared to the monolingual, autochthonous Dutch children (Extra & Yagmur, 2010). This makes it harder for teachers to adjust their practices to all children in the classroom, which can impact the identity development of the children (La Guardia, 2009).

Due to lack of research on identity development at school in relation to mono- or multilingualism, the goal of this study is to explore this based on the views of the teachers. It is them who educate and observe the children in the school setting, and they can have impact on the classroom culture and language (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Because different factors can play a role in developing a monolingual or multilingual identity, differences in teachers' views on monolingual versus multilingual children's identity development are explored (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). This will be done on student level, in comparing evaluations of teachers on monolingual versus multilingual students in one classroom, and on school level, comparing the assessments of teachers from monolingual versus multilingual schools.

### **The role of school and language in identity development**

As said before, since children spend a lot of their time at school, this can impact the development of their identity. The school and classroom setting are places where children can learn about their common culture, traditions and history. Membership of a certain social group makes children feel safe and plays a role in the formation of their identity (Bayley & Schechter, 2003; Anca, 2018). Group members with more experience can teach the less experienced or new members about the cultural norms and language in the social group (Bayley & Schechter, 2003; Duff, 2007). For multilingual children in special, the extent to

which a child identifies him- or herself as a member of a certain social, cultural or lingual group forms and influences the development of a multilingual identity (Duff, 2007). In multilingual schools, teachers and peers can be seen as important models of the cultural 'group' for the new migrant and multilingual children. Positive impacts on the identity development of these children can be partly reached through education in tune with the different cultural and linguistic backgrounds and experiences of the diverse children (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Zirkel, 2008). Keeping the backgrounds of children in mind in classroom practices can improve the self-confidence and –concept of both monolingual and multilingual children (Gay, 2010).

Next to the social and educational classroom practices, language at school plays a role in identity development as well. Suppressing bilingual children's home language from the school setting can have a negative impact on their self-identification and well-being (Kanno, 2003; Van der Wilt et al., 2017). Multilingual education in which attention is given to children's home language and the countries native language, can help not only multilingual, but also monolingual children to identify themselves with more than one culture and language. This identification can improve the self-esteem and thus identity development of all children (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Fielding & Harbon, 2013).

### **The role of the teacher in identity development**

Next to the school type and classroom practices, the teachers personal characteristics and practices influence the identity development of children as well. Teachers can play an important role in the learning of and developing towards membership of a certain social or cultural group (Cummins, 2003; Fielding & Harbon, 2013). Especially for bilingual children, who might put themselves in a position between two languages and cultures, which they incorporate in their self-identification, teachers can be helpful (Kanno, 2003). They help those children in identifying themselves with only one or both cultures and languages through practices in tune with the children's needs (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Also, for both multilingual and monolingual children, teachers' support in their psychological needs can have positive impact on their personal well-being (La Guardia, 2009).

The above written teachers' practices that have influence on the identity development of children, multilingual in special, are based on their views towards general identity development of children and towards multilingualism at school (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Ramaut et al., 2013). Cross-sectional research has shown that teachers in the Netherlands find it hard to deal with the language diversity among their students and feel incompetent educating those children, faster leading to a preference of monolingual educational practices

(Johnson, 2012). This preference, however, can be influenced by individual factors. Female teachers, as well as kindergarten teachers, were found to have a stronger tolerance towards multilingualism in schools when compared to male and elementary school teachers (Youngs & Youngs, 2001; Ramaut et al., 2013). Also, teachers may adapt the same view towards multilingualism as their colleagues, whether or not the school has a monolingual policy (Van der Wildt et al., 2017).

Teachers with a more positive view towards identity development of children at school and towards multilingualism at school were found to use more practices in tune with the psychological, educational and cultural needs of the children in their classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Gay, 2010; Johnson, 2012; Orth, Robins & Widaman, 2012). In line with previous discussed research outcomes, this is expected to have a positive impact on the identity development of children (Zirkel, 2008; Gay, 2010).

### **The present study**

Based on previous research, we know that teachers' characteristics and practices can influence the identity development of children. The views of teachers towards the identity development of children is important as well. However, there is a lack of research on this topic, especially when focused on possible differences between teachers at monolingual and multilingual schools and when focused on the identity development of monolingual versus multilingual children. Therefore, in the present study the following questions will be examined.

The first question is whether there is a difference in positivity in the view towards the overall identity development of children for teachers at monolingual versus multilingual schools. Looking at previous research, multilingual education with attention for children's home language and the countries' native language can help both multilingual and monolingual children identifying themselves with more than one culture, which can improve their identity development (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Fielding & Harbon, 2013). Therefore, we firstly expect that teachers at multilingual schools will view a better overall identity development in their students.

Looking at identity development more specifically, the second questions is: "for which group of students – monolingual at monolingual schools, multilingual at monolingual schools, monolingual at multilingual schools or multilingual at multilingual schools – do teachers have the most negative view regarding the identity development?". Previous research has shown that multilingual education might help multilingual and monolingual children in developing their identity because of more practices in tune with their needs (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Gay,

2010; Johnson, 2012; Orth et al., 2012). Neglecting a child's native language and culture at school, like in monolingual schools, might have a negative impact on their identity development (Kanno, 2003; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Van der Wildt et al., 2017). Multilingual children at monolingual schools seem to get the least support from school in developing their multilingual and –cultural identity. Therefore, we expect that teachers at monolingual schools will evaluate the identity development of multilingual children lower than to their monolingual students and lower than the views of teachers at multilingual schools on the identity development of their multilingual students when compared to their monolingual students.

The final question is whether there really is a difference in the positivity of the assessment of multilingual practices in the classroom between groups of teachers. In previous research, female teachers, kindergarten teachers and teachers at multilingual schools were found to be more positive towards the use of multilingualism at school (Byrnes, Kiger & Manning, 1997; Youngs & Youngs, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Based on this, our last hypothesis is that kindergarten teachers and those at multilingual schools will have a more positive view towards multilingualism at school when compared to elementary school teachers and teachers at monolingual schools. Due to a lack of variation in gender in the participants of the present research, the role of gender will not be tested.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

For the present sample, participants were recruited by approaching schools by email or telephone and via social media, e.g. groups on Facebook for teachers. The initial sample consisted of 79 elementary school teachers of which 30 completed the entire questionnaire. Only the answers of those who completed the entire questionnaire were in the analyses. The 30 participants were all females and their age ranged from 23 to 62, with a mean age of 43 (SD = 11.63). 84.4% of the participants was autochthonous Dutch, 9.4% was from Spanish origin and 6.2% had another native origin. The participants taught in kindergarten (6.3%), first (28.1%), second (12.5%), third (15.6%), fourth (21.9%), fifth (34.4%) or sixth (28.1%) grade. However, 33.3% taught multiple grades. Of all the participants, 75% percent worked at a monolingual school and 25% at a multilingual school. Schools were Dutch regular education (26.7%), monolingual or multilingual religion-related schools (50%), multilingual schools (10%) or monolingual or multilingual special education (13.3%).

### **Measuring instruments**

The instrument used in the present research was an online questionnaire with multiple-choice questions. Questions related to the hypotheses were divided into three parts relevant for respectively the third, second and first research questions. In the descriptions down below, the topics of questions are presented in order of the research questions.

**View on the identity development of the children.** The view of teachers on the identity development of all their students in general, regarding the first research question, was measured through four statements like “I worry about the identity development of the students in my classroom compared to their average peers in the Netherlands”. These statements were specifically developed for the purpose of the present study, although based on questions in the TRF (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000). Answers to the statements were transformed into scores ranging from the most negative answer as 1 till the most positive answer as 4. Mean scores were computed for each participant and were called “View on general identity development”.

**Identity development.** With regard to the second research question, teachers' evaluation of children's identity development was investigated through statements in which developmental behaviors like “behave young for their age” and “feel worthless” were described. Most of these behaviors were based on behaviors asked in the Teacher's Report Form (TRF) that related to identity development (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000). COTAN reviewed the concept and criterion validity of the TRF as sufficient and the reliability was reviewed as insufficient mostly because of calculation that were based on Dutch samples (Cotan, 2013).

Teachers were asked to compare the monolingual and multilingual groups of children in their classroom on the described behaviors. When multilingual students showed the behavior more often than their monolingual classmates, teachers marked answer ‘A’. Answer ‘B’ stood for monolingual children showing the behavior more often, and answer ‘C’ meant a comparable frequency between the two student groups in showing this behavior. For each teacher, the frequencies of answers ‘A’, ‘B’ and ‘C’ on all the behavior items were added up into identity development scores called ‘ID\_A’, ‘ID\_B’ and ‘ID\_C’. The higher the score on ‘ID\_A’ or ‘ID\_B’, the lower the teacher evaluated the identity development of respectively monolingual or multilingual children in the classroom compared to their classmates. The higher the score on ‘ID\_C’, the less difference teachers evaluated between the two student groups. Computed ‘ID\_A’ and ‘ID\_B’ scores were used in further analyses.

**Opinion on multilingual practices in elementary education.** The teachers' opinion on multilingual practices in their classroom and school, related to the third research question, was measured through eight statements based on the Oprit 14 project and a questionnaire of the Hogeschool van Amsterdam (Polinsenska & van Beuningen, 2017). The Oprit 14 is a wide

set-up long-term project focused on the role of the ethnic-cultural diversity in everyday education (Clycq, Timmerman, van Avermaet, Wets & Hermans, 2014). For both researches, validity and reliability is unknown.

An example of a statement is “Speaking a different language than Dutch at home is disadvantageous for the academic achievement of children”. Teachers could express their opinion using a 5-point Likert-scale ranging from (1) “I disagree” to (5) “I totally agree”. Scores on three statements were recoded to create mean scores per participant with higher scores indicating a more positive view towards multilingualism and multilingual practices in elementary education.

### **Procedure**

Participating teachers received a link to the digital questionnaire, which they could fill out any time they wanted between December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2017 and February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2018. Filling out the entire questionnaire took around fifteen minutes. Prior to the questionnaire, participants provided some general background information about themselves and the school they worked at (e.g. age, native language, type of school and language of education). Next to this, questions regarding the hypotheses were asked. To ensure the privacy of the teachers, schools and students, the questionnaire was anonymous.

### **Data analysis**

Three questions were analyzed in the present study. In all used analyses, an  $\alpha$  of .05 was used as level of reliability. Results with a  $p$ -value lower than .05 are significant. The first question was whether teachers in multilingual schools will evaluate the identity development of their students, more positive than teachers at monolingual schools. In an independent samples  $t$ -test, the computed ‘view on general identity development’ scores were used as dependent variable to be compared between teachers at monolingual versus multilingual schools. ‘Language at school’ (monolingual or multilingual) was the independent variable.

The second research question was split into two sub questions in order to compare two groups within one class to each other as well as two groups in two different schools. The first question answered was whether teachers at monolingual schools evaluated the identity development of multilingual children lower when compared to the monolingual children in the classroom. This was tested using a paired samples  $t$ -test. The computed identity scores ‘ID\_A’ and ‘ID\_B’ were used as pair of variables to be compared with each other. The second sub question, if there was a difference in view between teachers at monolingual versus multilingual schools on the identity development of multilingual children, was answered using a Mann Whitney  $U$  test. ‘Language at school’ (monolingual or multilingual) was used

as a grouping variable and 'ID\_A' and 'ID\_B' were used as test variables. In both analyses, answers of teachers teaching only one group of either monolingual or multilingual students were not used, since these were not relevant for the purpose of the present research.

The last question examined was whether kindergarten teachers and teachers at multilingual schools had a more positive view towards multilingual practices in their classroom and school when compared to elementary school teachers and those at monolingual schools. The grade of teaching (kindergarten or grade teaching) and 'language at school' (monolingualism or multilingualism) were used as dichotomous independent variables in a two-way ANOVA. The computed "opinion on multilingualism" was used as the dependent variable.

## Results

Descriptive statistics are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

*Means, standard deviations and range for the whole sample*

Variable	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Range</i>
Age	30	43.17	11.63	23 – 62
Experience in years	30	16.23	11.19	1 – 40
View on general identity development	29	2.95	.57	1 – 4
View on identity development				
ID_A*	30	4.80	4.49	0 – 15
ID_B**	30	.97	2.21	0 – 10
ID_C***	30	7.27	7.58	0 – 23
Opinion on multilingualism	30	3.43	.67	1 – 5

*Note.* \*computed scores of the frequency teachers reported multilingual children higher in showing inadequate behaviors regarding identity development compared to monolingual children

\*\* computed scores of the frequency teachers reported monolingual children higher in showing inadequate behaviors regarding identity development compared to multilingual children

\*\*\*computed scores of the frequency teachers reporting monolingual and multilingual children equal in showing inadequate behavior regarding identity development.

### **View on general identity development**

In order to address the first research question, it is relevant to compare teachers in monolingual and multilingual schools. Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations of characteristics of these two subsamples.

Table 2

*Means (and standard deviations) by type of school*

	Monolingual		Multilingual		<i>p</i> -value
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Age	43.13	11.47	43.33	13.41	$t(28) = -.04, .97$
Experience in years	15.29	11.02	20	12.13	$t(28) = -.92, .37$
Teaching kindergarten	.08	.28	.00	.00	$X^2(1) = .54, .46$

A difference in sample size was seen: 24 teachers from monolingual schools participated versus 6 teachers from multilingual schools. Independent samples *t*-tests showed, however, no significance differences between the two subsamples regarding age and experience. Also, a chi-square did not show a significance difference between the subsamples regarding teaching kindergarten.

An independent samples *t*-test was used to compare the view on the general identity development of their students of teachers at monolingual schools ( $n = 23$ ) with the view on the general identity development of their students of teachers at multilingual schools ( $n = 6$ ). Levene's test was non-significant, thus equal variances can be assumed. The *t*-test was statistically significant, with the multilingual school teachers ( $M = 3.42, SD = .30$ ) having an estimated .60 higher score on the view towards the general identity development of their students, 95% CI [-1.09, -.10], than the monolingual school teachers ( $M = 2.82, SD = .57$ ),  $t(27) = -2.46, p = .02$ , two-tailed,  $d = 1.14$ . Teachers at multilingual schools have a more positive view towards the general identity development of their students when compared to teachers at monolingual schools.

### **View on identity development between monolingual and multilingual students**

A paired samples *t*-test was used to compare the views of teachers at monolingual schools on the identity development of their monolingual students ( $M = .75, SD = 1.54$ ) and their multilingual students ( $M = 5.33, SD = 4.63$ ). On average, the teachers at monolingual schools evaluated their multilingual students 4.58, 95% CI [2.55, 6.61] higher in showing negative behavior regarding identity development. This difference was statistically significant,  $t(23) = 4.67, p < .001$ , with a large effect size,  $d = 1.48$ . Teachers at monolingual schools evaluated the identity development of their multilingual students lower when compared to their monolingual students.

For the second comparison, a Mann-Whitney *U* test indicated that the scores of teachers at monolingual schools (Mean Rank = 16.42,  $n = 24$ ) on the view on identity development of multilingual students did not significantly differ from the view of teachers at multilingual schools (Mean Rank = 11.83,  $n = 6$ ),  $U = 50, z = -1.17$  (not corrected for ties),  $p = .24$ , two-tailed.

### **View on multilingualism at school**

A factorial between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to compare the average positivity in opinion on multilingualism, with school type (monolingual or multilingual) and grade of teaching (kindergarten or elementary school teaching) as independent between subject variables. Homogeneity of variance, evaluated by Levene's test, was not violated,  $F(2, 27) = 2.55, p = .10$ . The main effect of grade of teaching (kindergarten or non-kindergarten) was statistically not significant,  $F(1, 27) = .35, p = .56$ . The main effect of school type (monolingual or multilingual) was statistically not significant as well,  $F(1, 27) = 2.66, p = .11$ . No interaction could be analyzed between grade of teaching and school type.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to map views of teachers at monolingual versus multilingual elementary schools on identity development in children related to multilingualism at school. An online questionnaire was used to investigate the teachers' views and opinion towards general identity development of their students, differences in identity development between monolingual and multilingual children and towards multilingualism in elementary education. Three hypotheses were tested using this questionnaire.

Firstly, we expected that teachers at multilingual schools would have a more positive view towards the overall identity development of their students. This hypothesis was supported by the present study. A possible explanation for this is that, in multilingual schools, classroom and school practices are in more tune with children's cognitive, social, cultural and lingual needs which has a positive impact on the development of an ethnic identity, self-concept and self-confidence (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Gay, 2010; Zirkel, 2008).

The second hypothesis was divided into two parts. In the first place, we tested whether teachers at monolingual schools evaluated the identity development of their multilingual students lower when compared to their monolingual students. This hypothesis was supported. In line with previous research, multilingual children are less supported in monolingual schools because of the suppression of their home language and culture (Kanno, 2003; Van der Wildt et al., 2017). Their psychological, social and cultural needs are not sufficiently supported, which can have negative consequences for their identity development, something teachers can observe in the behavior of these children (Bucholz & Hall, 2005; Van der Wildt et al., 2017). In the second part of the hypothesis, evaluations of teachers at monolingual versus multilingual schools on the identity development of multilingual students were compared. No significant differences were found. Teachers at monolingual and multilingual schools did not significantly differ in their evaluation of the identity development of multilingual children as

seen in their behavior. In line with the often used threshold hypothesis, a possible explanation for this can be that multilingual children already have developed their native language well enough to avoid cognitive disadvantages in their school and personal functioning (Cummins, 1979). Also, it can be that those children can still benefit from identification with more than one culture and language, although these are not together in the same school environment (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005).

No results were found to support the hypothesis that kindergarten teachers and teachers at multilingual schools had a more positive view towards multilingualism at elementary schools. However, this hypothesis was based on older literature (Byrnes, Kiger & Manning, 1997; Youngs & Youngs, 2001). Findings from these studies are probably not consistent anymore with the contemporary culture of internationalization and the public opinion that has shifted more towards multilingual education (PO-raad, 2017).

In general, results from this study showed differences in the views and evaluations of teachers at monolingual versus multilingual schools on the identity development of their monolingual versus multilingual students. However, there are several limitations to the present study. Firstly, the sample used in the study is not representative, delimiting the external validity of the research. The sample was too small, there were only six teachers from multilingual school and different school types and grades of teaching were not well distributed. Next to this, the sample was confined to female teachers, hence the effect of gender could not be included in the study. Future research should include a bigger sample with both males and females from different places and types of school, with both monolingual and multilingual school representable included.

Secondly, an open access online questionnaire was used as instrument which made it possible for others than teachers to fill it out. Also, participants could hand in the questionnaire while it was not entirely filled out, which decreased the sample from 79 to 30 participants. Next to this, the questions related to behavior related to identity development were not comprehensible for all participants. Teachers with both monolingual and multilingual students in their classroom were supposed to choose from a certain category of answers. However, some of them reported answers from the other category, which made it hard to analyze these results and draw conclusions. In future research, extra attention should be paid to the reliability and validity of the used instruments. The instructions need to be clear and participants should not be able to choose from answers that do not belong to their category.

All in all, results from the present study suggest that the type of school – either monolingual or multilingual – seems to be coherent with the evaluation and view of teachers towards the identity development of children in general. Also, teachers in multilingual education seem to evaluate the identity development of their students higher than teachers in monolingual education. However, more research with bigger samples and more valid instruments is needed to further substantiate the present conclusions.

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