

Shaping evidence-informed multilingual education: An instrumental case study at three Dutch primary schools

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Abstract Multilingual education holds potential for fostering students' cognitive and social-affective development. However, adequately addressing linguistic diversity remains challenging for educators. This study reports on an instrumental case study at three Dutch primary schools that have successfully integrated multilingual education. The aim was to provide insight into how schools shape evidence-informed multilingual education. Semi-structured focus-group interviews with educators ($N=8$) and students ($N=22$) were conducted. The study revealed concrete ways of shaping multilingual pedagogies and shows that creating impactful multilingual education involves more than implementing isolated multilingual pedagogies. Schoolwide policies that bring coherence to multilingual practices and a supportive context are needed.

Keywords multilingual education, inclusion, diversity, primary education, evidence-informed, multilingual pedagogies

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1 Introduction

Multilingual children are persistently exposed to unequal learning opportunities compared to their monolingual peers (Langeloo et al., 2019; Meelissen et al., 2023). Multilingual education, defined as ‘the use of two or more languages in education, provided that schools aim at multilingualism and multiliteracy’ (Cenoz & Gorter, 2015, p. 2), seeks to address this gap. Over the past years, research in this field has led to the development of various pedagogical approaches designed to support multilingual learners, while also recognizing and valuing the linguistic and cultural resources they bring to the classroom (e.g., Cummins, 2018; Lucas & Villegas, 2010; Duarte & Günther-van der Meij, 2018). Empirical studies have shown that when implemented effectively, multilingual pedagogies can lead to positive outcomes – both cognitively (e.g., Bosma et al., 2022; Giouroukakis & Honingsfeld, 2010) and socio-affectively (García et al., 2018; Meléndez-Luces & Couto-Cantero, 2021; Veerman et al., 2025). Research indicates that the languages a person masters can reinforce one another (Van Hell & Dijkstra, 2002). Also, home languages can play an important role in acquiring the language of schooling (e.g., Blom, 2023; Cummins, 2021).

Despite this promising evidence, multilingual pedagogies are still not widely adopted in schools. Many educators continue to perceive linguistic diversity as a “challenge or

deficit” (European Commission, 2017, p. 64; Cummins, 2019). This view is reflected in mainstream Dutch primary schools, where a monolingual language policy and proficiency in Dutch are often emphasized (Nederlof & Smit, 2018). Although there are signs of a shift in discourse and thinking – most recently illustrated by the Dutch Education Council’s recommendation to make greater use of linguistic diversity in mainstream education (Onderwijsraad, 2025) – this emerging perspective has not yet translated into widespread classroom practice. Even when teachers hold positive attitudes toward multilingualism, they often feel ill-equipped to meet the needs of linguistically diverse classrooms (Duarte & Günther-van der Meij, 2021; Robinson-Jones et al., 2022). In The Netherlands, in 2018, more than 85 per cent of the primary school teachers felt that their initial training had not adequately prepared them to teach multicultural or multilingual groups (OESO, 2019).

Bridging the gap between multilingual pedagogical theory and day-to-day teaching practices is therefore essential. Translating research-based insights into actionable strategies can support teachers and school leaders in implementing multilingual education effectively (Lucas & Villegas, 2010; Lorenz et al., 2021; Cummins, 2018; Okal, 2014). This study presents a multiple case study at three Dutch primary schools that have shaped multilingual pedagogies. The aim of the study is to acquire insights into how evidence-informed multilingual pedagogies can be translated into concrete pedagogical practices.

1.1 Multilingual pedagogies: Definition and categorization

In this study, multilingual pedagogies are defined as an umbrella term for approaches to instruction aimed at activating and capitalizing on students’ multilingual competences in educational contexts (Kirsch & Duarte, 2020). Multilingual pedagogies are conscious and intentional actions of educational professionals to encourage the use of students’ full linguistic repertoires (Cenoz, 2012), and that are supportive towards students’ home languages within the school context. A recent review study identified evidence-informed multilingual pedagogies in empirical research and categorized these into four categories, each with its own value: affirming pedagogies, translanguaging-based pedagogies, scaffolding pedagogies and cross-linguistic pedagogies (Veerman et al., 2025). The categories are not mutually exclusive; the boundaries between them are fluid and they can also complement each other. The identified pedagogies provide different perspectives from which multilingual education can be addressed by educational professionals. In the present study, we will use the categorization as an organizing principle, and we look at how these evidence-informed pedagogies are applied in practice in the Dutch context of mainstream primary education.

1.1.1 Affirming pedagogies

Affirming pedagogies consist of actively demonstrating that students’ linguistic and cultural identities matter and are valued within the school context (Veerman et al., 2025).

They can be implemented through school-wide policies, classroom activities and materials, and teachers' interactions with students. One way to enact affirming pedagogy is by *welcoming the use of home languages* in the school environment (e.g. Fielding, 2016; Karlsson, 2020). Welcoming the use of home languages can become visible in the linguistic landscape of the school, for example, through symbols of the countries or regions of students' home languages or through the visible presence of multilingual welcome signs or books (Gorter, 2013).

A school's approach can go beyond simply allowing the use of home languages and involve the active *acknowledging and celebration of students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds* (e.g. Busse et al., 2020; Demie & Lewis, 2018). This may be incorporated in planned lessons or curricular offerings (e.g. Busse et al., 2020), teachers' interactions with students (e.g. Fielding, 2016), or in the general school climate (e.g. Demie & Lewis, 2018; Wedin & Wessman, 2017).

Affirming pedagogies sometimes draw on a *funds of knowledge* perspective, as the linguistic and cultural knowledge students bring with them from home is valued and built on in school (Moll et al., 1992, p. 133). Students' diversity of experiences is perceived as valuable and not as a deficit that students must overcome. Affirming pedagogies that draw on a funds of knowledge approach involve connecting instruction to students' lived experience including their home languages (e.g. Castillo & Wagner, 2019; Zaidi, 2020).

1.1.2 Translanguaging-based pedagogies

Translanguaging-based pedagogies intentionally create space for students to draw on their full linguistic repertoires in classroom learning, encouraging them to use all their languages as resources for meaning-making, participation, and understanding (Veerman et al., 2025). "Pedagogical translanguaging" (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021) goes further than being open to and welcoming different languages (as with affirming); it is about consciously employing different home languages in the classroom to support learning. An example of a translanguaging-based pedagogy is *buddy pairing*: students that have a same home language but different school language abilities are grouped together to facilitate learning support and peer-to-peer interaction (e.g. Morrison et al., 2020).

Pedagogical translanguaging implies that the teacher is aware of the used language for each activity, but it is not necessary that teachers share the same language repertoire as their students. Pedagogical translanguaging can be used in the classroom in individual learning activities, such as during reflection (e.g. Busse et al., 2020), reading activities (e.g. Cenoz et al., 2021), text production (e.g. Lau et al., 2021), but also during paired and small-group discussions (Milligan et al., 2016).

1.1.3 Scaffolding pedagogies

Scaffolding pedagogies aim to support students' learning through the use of tools and strategies that involve a language which students are familiar with, whether these are physical learning materials or support-based approaches to instruction (Veerman et

al., 2025). Whereas in other pedagogies scaffolding may be an implicitly present aspect or element, in this category it is the dominant aspect. These pedagogies can be used in tailored ways to specifically target the linguistic and learning needs of multilingual learners. One type of this pedagogy is *scaffolding by learning materials*. The teacher can, for instance, adjust textbooks with visuals and bilingual glossaries to aid understanding among students (e.g. Milligan, et al., 2016). The glossaries can be prepared with the help of students or parents who are experts in the students' home languages. Scaffolding by learning materials can be used for supporting the simultaneous development of both the language of schooling and students' home languages – usually referred to as holistic biliteracy or paired literacy – by using supports such as bilingual texts or texts available in students' home languages (e.g. Zaidi, 2020), and multimedia or technology-based literacy programs (e.g. Castillo & Wagner, 2019). For a full paired bilingual approach, it is ideal that speakers of both languages are involved in developing the teaching materials.

Another scaffolding pedagogy is *emotional scaffolding* applied to multilingual education. Emotional scaffolding is a way to 'help students recognize their emotions and utilize them to actively participate in classroom activities and achieve their learning goals' (Back et al., 2020, p. 389). Especially in monolingual learning settings, multilingual students can experience and act upon negative emotions, such as anxiety, which can be masked by a language barrier (Back et al., 2020). Emotional scaffolding approaches aim to provide emotional scaffolds by for instance bilingual classroom assistants or specialists, volunteers from the school's network, or parents (e.g. Back et al., 2020; Karlsson et al., 2020). Multilingual students can discuss academic and emotional issues with this person in their home languages with the aim to feel less isolated and to become more active participants in their classrooms (Back et al., 2020).

1.1.4 Cross-linguistic pedagogies

Cross-linguistic pedagogies focus on developing students' language awareness and language learning strategies by actively fostering transfer between students' multiple languages (Veerman et al., 2025). These pedagogies make students aware of the formal aspects of language. Cross-linguistic pedagogies can focus on language awareness on different levels: vocabulary, morphology, and even sociopolitical context. Teachers can use them with different aims, for example with the aim of increasing the awareness of connections between languages or with the aim of making students aware of their own multilingualism or that of others, as well as of languages and multilingualism in society.

An example of cross-linguistic pedagogies is *translation activities* (e.g. Corcoll, 2013). Another common cross-linguistic pedagogy is *language comparison* (Ticheloven et al., 2020). Language comparisons can be made between languages in terms of vocabulary, cognates and morphology (e.g. Soltero-González et al., 2016; Leonet et al., 2020), syntax and grammar (Hopp & Thoma, 2021), or in general (e.g. Zaidi, 2020).

Finally, a cross-linguistic pedagogy involves *explicit comparisons about multilingualism* in different settings, focusing for example on language rights and social inequalities

(e.g. Carbonara & Scibetta, 2022). Explicit discussions about multilingualism are a way to not only build awareness of the linguistic features and functions of language, but also awareness of the meaning of language within a larger sociopolitical context.

1.3 The present study

The aim of this study is to provide insight into how educational professionals shape evidence-informed multilingual pedagogies (affirming, translanguaging-based, scaffolding and cross-linguistic) in their schools and classrooms. The research question is: How are evidence-informed multilingual pedagogies shaped at multilingual-oriented schools? In order to address this research question, we conducted an instrumental case study in three multilingual-oriented primary schools in the Netherlands.

Multilingualism holds particular significance within the Dutch education system, given the linguistic diversity present among its student population. In addition to the officially recognized regional minority languages – Frisian, Low Saxon, and Limburgish – more than 200 other languages are estimated to be spoken across the Netherlands (Van Hooft et al., 2019). This linguistic landscape is shaped in part by migration, with first- and second-generation immigrants comprising approximately 27% of the Dutch population (CBS, 2024).

No official policies have addressed how multilingualism should be implemented within education (Van Hooft et al., 2019). As a result, Dutch remains the dominant language of instruction, and monolingual education programs continue to prevail (Nederlof & Smit, 2018). Nonetheless, multilingual practices are emerging within educational settings, and an increasing number of schools are actively developing and implementing targeted multilingual policies (Le Pichon & Kambel, 2022; Onderwijsraad, 2025).

2 Method

This study is an instrumental case study (Yin, 2018). The selected cases (the multilingual-oriented schools) were used to explore how theories and evidence-informed insights in multilingual education are enacted in practice. Through detailed case analysis, it sheds light on key features of multilingual education, contributing to the development of theoretical insights (Yin, 2018). Prior to conducting the research, ethical approval was granted by the ethics committee of the University of Amsterdam.

2.1 Participants

To select participating schools purposive sampling was used to include those most likely to have relevant experience with and expertise of the research topic (Denscombe, 2021).

Table 1 Information about the participating schools

Code	Location and environment	Number of students	General information about school population and linguistic diversity at the school	School vision on dealing with multilingualism according to the participating educators
S1	North, suburban	100	Some students speak the regional minority language Frisian at home. Many children are from newcomer families with different home languages, for example Tigrinya and Turkish.	The school team believes it is important that each individual child receives the (tailor-made) support it needs, also when it comes to language support and multilingualism.
S2	Mid, urban	450	The school is characterized by great (socio-economic and cultural) diversity in the student population, due to the influx of children from expats, children from newcomer families with different backgrounds, and children who are native speakers of Dutch. The language repertoires present in the school are very diverse.	School 2's vision is that students and parents both have to be welcomed for who they are, and that language should not be a barrier. At School 2, all languages can be spoken.
S3	Mid, rural	100	Student body primarily consisting of newcomers from many different countries. Some of the students have been in the Netherlands for a relatively short time, but many have lived in the Netherlands for years.	The school team finds it important to give students (and parents) the space to be themselves and to use their languages. Multilingualism is part of the culture of the school.

Schools were selected based on their publicly known work with multilingualism. Only mainstream primary schools with public educational programs were selected. However, although School 3 is classified as a mainstream primary school, it differs from many other schools in that it is located adjacent to an asylum seekers' center and has a student body primarily consisting of newcomers from many different countries. Information about the three selected schools is displayed in Table 1.

From each school, a director, language coordinator, or other teacher responsible for the school's vision on multilingualism was interviewed. To enrich and nuance the analysis of the teachers, also students were interviewed. Teachers at the school were asked to select students from a variety of linguistic backgrounds, who the teacher believed would be open to expressing their thoughts on the school's multilingual approach. The student interviews helped to better understand how multilingual practices were experienced from the students' perspective.

Table 2 Overview of participating educators and basic background information

Code	Age group	Gender	Professional role	Grade level(s) they work with	Birth country	Language(s) used at home
S1E1	50-59	Female	(acting) director, coordinator of appropriate education	n/a	NL	Dutch, Frisian
S1E2	40-49	Female	Teacher	4	NL	Dutch, Frisian
S2E1	30-39	Female	Teacher	1, 2	NL	Dutch
S2E2	20-29	Male	Teacher	7	NL	Dutch
S2E3	60-69	Female	Teacher, language coordinator	1,2	NL	Dutch
S3E1	40-49	Female	Teacher	3, 4, language class with young children	NL	Dutch
S3E2	30-39	Female	Teacher, NT2 coordinator	3	NL	Dutch
S3E3	40-49	Female	Director	5	NL	Dutch

Active informed consent was gathered from all adult participants and the parents/guardians of the participating children. To ensure participant confidentiality, all students and educators were assigned pseudonyms. Each school was coded as S1, S2, etc., educators were labeled using the format S1E1, S1E2, etc., where “S1” indicates the school and “E1” the individual educator. Similarly, students were labeled S1P1, S1P2, etc., where “P” denotes a pupil. Background information of the participating educators ($N = 8$) is displayed in Table 2. Background information of the participating students ($N = 22$) is displayed in Table 3.

2.2 Instruments

Two semi-structured interview guides were developed, one for the educational professionals and one for the students. The questions were aimed at gaining insight into the schools’ multilingual approach, including pedagogical strategies, classroom activities, school-wide policies geared towards multilingualism, and participants’ perceptions of the approach. Examples of interview questions for educators are: ‘Can you tell us about your schools’ approach to multilingualism?’, and ‘What do multilingual approaches look like in your classroom or school environment?’

Questions for students differed based on information from the educators at their school, and focused on specific examples of multilingual pedagogies. Examples of interview questions for students are: ‘You also worked on [specific project/assignment mentioned by the teacher]. Can you tell something about that?’, and ‘Can you tell us about one example of when using multiple languages helped you in school?’ The interviews

Table 3 Overview of participating students and basic background information

Code	Age	Gender	Grade level	Birth country	Language(s) used at home
S1P1	11	Female	7	Netherlands	Dutch, Frisian
S1P2	10	Female	6	Netherlands	Dutch
S1P3	13	Female	8	Outside NL	Tigrinya
S1P4	10	Female	7	Netherlands	Dutch
S1P5	12	Female	8	Outside NL	Tigrinya
S1P6	10	Male	6	Netherlands	Dutch, Chinese
S1P7	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Arabic, Dutch, English
S2P1	11	Female	8	Netherlands	Dutch, Italian
S2P2	11	Female	8	Outside NL	Macedonian, Dutch
S2P3	12	Female	8	Netherlands	Dutch
S2P4	11	Male	8	Netherlands	Dutch, Polish
S2P5	11	Female	8	Netherlands	Dutch, English
S2P6	11	Male	8	Netherlands	Dutch
S2P7	11	Female	8	Netherlands	Dutch, Moroccan, English
S2P8	12	Female	8	Netherlands	Dutch, Surinamese
S2P9	11	Female	8	Netherlands	Dutch
S2P10	Unknown	Unknown	8	Unknown	English
S2P11	Unknown	Unknown	8	Unknown	Turkish
S3P1	11	Female	7	Outside NL	Arabic
S3P2	11	Male	6	Outside NL	Iranian
S3P3	9	Female	4	Outside NL	Arabic
S3P4	11	Male	6	Outside NL	Arabic

with both teachers and students of School 2 were conducted via a video conferencing platform, while the other interviews were held in person. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

2.3 Data collection

2.3.1 Focus group interviews

Three semi-structured focus group interviews (one per school) were held with the adult participants, with interviews lasting between 45 and 70 minutes. As participants had different roles in the school, either as a teacher, language coordinator, or director, this enabled them to complement each other in their description of the school’s multilingual approach. The interviews were held in March–April 2022.

Six interviews (two at each school) with the children were held in small groups of three to six students of various linguistic backgrounds. The focus group interviews took approximately 20 minutes for each group.

2.3.2 *Linguistic landscapes*

During visits to each school, photos were taken of examples of multilingualism in the linguistic landscape, to add to visualize parts of the multilingual approach. Active consent was obtained before taking photographs, and any names or images of students were blurred out for privacy. The linguistic landscape data were not analyzed as a separate dataset; however, they contributed to our overall understanding of the school context and informed the interpretation of the findings by providing insight into the visibility and positioning of languages within the school environment.

2.3.3 *Analysis*

The interview transcripts were thematically analyzed in the program ATLAS.ti using both deductive and inductive coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, a close reading per case (within-case analysis) was performed on the data set and pertinent quotes were highlighted. During an iterative reading process, deductive codes were assigned in a theory-driven way (Braun & Clarke, 2006), as categorization of evidence-informed multilingual pedagogies. We used the typology of Veerman (2025) to categorize the different multilingual pedagogies. Fragments about *how* the different pedagogies were shaped were coded inductively.

Besides examples of pedagogies, respondents mentioned conditions or elements that they perceived as valuable for shaping multilingual education. We coded these fragments also inductively. After coding per case, a cross-case analysis was performed to search for overarching patterns, differences and similarities (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

To enhance reliability the coding scheme was discussed with three researchers of the research team until agreement was reached. For reliability of the coding and validity of the interpretations, the results of each step in the analysis were discussed by two researchers.

4 Results

4.1 How are evidence-informed multilingual pedagogies shaped at multilingual-oriented schools?

4.1.1 *Affirming pedagogies*

Respondents at all schools explained that shaping multilingual education started with the implementation of affirming pedagogies. About this category, they were the most vocal, particularly at School 1. Applying affirming pedagogies started with welcoming

Figure 1 Linguistic landscape of School 3: world map

the use of students' home languages, whether in the classroom, in the hallway or on the playground. S1E1¹ described that although it was sometimes a bit difficult to make the change to allowing languages which the teacher does not understand in the classroom, it was ultimately considered important both for students' learning development and their self-expression. The students at School 1 confirm that they are aware of this freedom, and even if they don't always choose to use their home languages at school, they appreciate knowing that all languages are allowed and welcomed.

Schools 1 and 3 also employed visual representations to promote linguistic and cultural diversity in symbolic ways, which is reflected in the linguistic landscapes. At School 3, a world map displayed the different countries where students came from (see Figure 1), and educators at School 2 expressed plans to create something similar in the near future.

School 1 also used decorations such as flags of different countries and phrases in different languages around the school environment as a general celebration of diversity (see Figure 2).

All schools worked on *acknowledging linguistic/cultural diversity*. For example, educators in School 1 described having multilingualism as a school-wide theme each March, which in 2022 involved projects in which students researched a country and language which they were interested in. In some classes, they paid particular attention to the language (see Figure 3), while others focused on culture and language, making posters or "mascots" to represent their chosen country. The artefacts produced during the projects were exposed in the school, contributing to the linguistic landscapes of the school.

Figure 2 Linguistic landscape of School 1: flags and other visual celebrations of diversity



Figure 3 Linguistic landscape of School 1: language projects



One of the students participating in this project, S1P5, explained that he enjoyed the project because of the ease of being able to use his first language, while S1P6 chimed in and expressed: “I think because you do something that suits him. Because we love his country, that he can show us you are of course always proud of your own country.” So, the project was not only a chance for students to expand their understanding of other cultures, it was also a chance for students to be positioned as experts of their own languages and cultures. When organizing this kind of projects, schools sometimes collaborate with extracurricular organizations, such as the library. Libraries assist School 1 with various other (multi)lingual matters, such as organizing poetry events or events related to the Children’s Book Week or the National Reading Days.

While these projects were part of a special theme-of-the-month at School 1, educators explained that their focus on multilingualism is also an overall mindset which gets woven

throughout each day and all year. This sentiment was echoed by S1E2, who described that even though Dutch is the main language used throughout the school day by far, teachers will intentionally invite students to share how their family does something at home or how they say something in their home language. These instances can happen “very naturally throughout the day,” which helps frame students’ linguistic knowledge as a resource.

Similarly, at School 3, S3E1 reports, “I think everyone does it a bit in their own way ... We often ask how they say something in Arabic or in Tigrinya, for example.” At School 3, valuing linguistic diversity is also a mindset or an attitude, that shows up in a variety of situations, as one exchange in the interview with educators revealed: “It’s more of an attitude, yes, that you actually come back to it all day long and pay attention to it.”

Educators from School 2 also described pedagogies related to the appreciation of linguistic and cultural diversity. The most important aspect of this for School 2 was framing language as a resource. For example, S2E3 insisted that the word “*achterstanden*,” (in English, “deficiencies”) is a term that is “nearly prohibited” at their school. Within their approach, it is important that students feel both that they are welcome to use any of their languages in school but also that their linguistic background is a strength rather than a deficiency to overcome. Teachers from School 2 reported achieving this with explicit discussions about how a broad knowledge of languages is a strength, both for minority and majority language students. Another educator from School 2 described how she models positive reactions to linguistic diversity for her students in her behavior, saying, “so when the boy says that in Italian, I go all out: ‘Well, isn’t it great that you can do that in both Dutch and Italian? Wow!’”

Educators from all schools described efforts which resembled *funds of knowledge* pedagogies. At School 2, S2E3 referred to this as the “strength that [the children] have in their backpack,” and expressed that it is important that teachers build on this strength. S2E1 described one situation in which paying attention to students’ lives and linguistic backgrounds, and connecting instruction to this prior knowledge, helped facilitate learning about how to tell time. This was similar to an example from S3E2, who described “giv[ing] a space” in the math classroom for students to use and share with the class the different ways they have learned to solve math problems, which often differs from the way the same calculation is taught in Dutch schools. This helped teachers better understand students’ abilities in math and gave students a platform to demonstrate their prior knowledge to their classmates. Another example of a funds-of-knowledge-approach is a project at School 2 in which students took texts related to the curricular content home to translate the key words into their home language with their parents. Students from this school reported enjoying this activity and appreciating the way it helped them learn new words both in their home language and in Dutch. Thus, involving parents in this way not only has the potential to support students’ language development and understanding, it also shows students that their home lives are important and are valued. This practice is one that could be used with texts from any subject. At School 1, a funds-

of-knowledge-perspective was applied to the school newsletter, by including reminders for different holidays celebrated by students and their families, such as Eid al-Fitr, and using these as talking points. To bring the cultural funds of knowledge of parents in the school, School 1 organizes accessible activities. This starts with bringing parents into contact with each other and encourage them to become more involved in the school. For instance, parents are invited to come to school to cut fruit in the morning. The director of School 1 explained that this simple activity helps parents connect, regardless of language barriers, making them feel welcome and more likely that they will be willing to show something of their life in the school.

Parents can also play a role in cultural projects. At School 1, parents were involved in a project with the theme of art and poetry. They were asked to read a poem aloud to their child's class in their home language. A video of this was shared on the school's communication app. 'Then everyone could see how rich we actually are, so many languages within our school.' The aim of this project was to give children and parents an opportunity to showcase something about their lifestyle and culture at school.

Educators at all schools explained that shaping multilingual education, that at their schools started with affirming, needs a joint school vision on multilingualism and a solid knowledge base about multilingual education among the members of the school team. Schools 1 and 2 work on the knowledge base of their school team and the vision by keeping the team informed and introducing new teachers to the subject. At School 1, educational professionals noticed that their multilingual approach gained real depth after working with an expert (a professor in the field of multilingualism) to professionalize the team and create a joint multilingual school vision that suited the context of the school. At School 2 the vision on multilingual education is explicitly included in the school's policy. The multilingual policy is regularly discussed during study days and parents are informed about it, for instance at parents' evenings.

School 1 works together with a network of chain partners called 'Together a story'. The network includes for example a speech therapist and someone from the local neighborhood team Youth and Family. The principal of the school and the partners meet several times a year to discuss, inform each other about, and ensure they convey the same vision on various topics, including multilingualism. The aim of this collaboration is to strengthen and inform each other, and to get the organizations to work together based on a shared vision ('the same story').

4.1.2 Scaffolding pedagogies

The second most prevalent type of multilingual pedagogy was scaffolding. One of the strategies within this type of pedagogy is *scaffolding through learning materials*. At School 3, a tech-based program was used to support multilingual learners' math development. S3E3 explained how they use the digital platform Bareka in mathematics instruction, which allowed students to engage with the content without needing to rely on comprehension of the Dutch language. By using this program teachers could more accurately

Figure 4 Picture book translated into different languages from School 1



assess the math abilities of newcomer students and place them in a group that was better suited to their levels. At all three schools, scaffolding through learning materials were helpful in building on students’ prior knowledge to support learning. S3E1 and S3E3 described a method called World Full of Words, which scaffolded learning by helping students make links between concepts in Dutch with their home language.

Scaffolding strategies to promote holistic biliteracy or paired literacy were found at all schools. In some cases, this involved ensuring that students had opportunities to develop literacy in their home language simultaneously with their development in the school language. Educators at all three schools encouraged parents to continue using their language at home with their children, and to read with their children in their home languages. To enable this, Schools 1 and 2 worked closely together with the library to acquire foreign language or multilingual books. At School 1, this was facilitated by inviting parents to “receive a workshop at the library from a reading consultant about how to read to them, what you can do, what you can do with the story,” says S1E1. This was coupled with providing a picture book translated into their home language (see Figure 4), while the same book was available at school in Dutch, to support the simultaneous development of students’ literacies. At School 2, students also had the option to pursue biliteracy at school, where French-speaking students were given the opportunity to form a French reading circle during the normally scheduled reading time. Students at this School 2 also reported appreciating the availability of English books, which was particularly meaningful for one student, S2P10, whose first language was English. At School 2 students’ reading comprehension was also scaffolded by allowing them to work through stories with parents at home first.

At all three schools fostering parental involvement was considered very important because it is believed that parental involvement contributes to the well-being and learning of children. On the one hand, scaffolding pedagogies help to increase parental

involvement, but fostering parental involvement also aids learning, as parents can scaffold their children's learning too. Educational professionals used various tools to overcome language barriers, including interpreters, the interpreter telephone and digital translation tools. At School 3, a special communication app with a translation function (Kwieb) was used. Not only important school information is shared via the app, but also informal information about what the students are working on, the activities being undertaken, or the theme of the month. This has proven to be very fruitful, as S3E2 explains: "They often [the parents] know what I'm saying now. Normally they didn't really know what we were working with but now they know."

For School 3, where many of their students are newcomers in the Netherlands, *emotional scaffolding* was considered very important for students "landing," as according to S3E2, making sure students feel safe within the school is the first priority when they arrive. One way in which she describes doing this is by always checking in with the group about how they are feeling at the beginning of each day, often using English to ensure that students who are still not confident in Dutch can participate in the discussion. At School 2, teachers sometimes ask the Turkish teaching assistant to speak with Turkish-speaking children to resolve conflicts or discuss feelings. This helps teachers gain a better understanding of the students. One teacher noted that this assistance revealed more about the origins of conflicts and provided deeper insights into the students.

4.1.3 Translanguaging-based pedagogies

All three schools used strategies that aimed at stimulating students' systematic use of their full linguistic repertoire to support their learning process. The schools reported not having very strict rules about language separation which makes translanguaging possible. At School 1, they intentionally do not have "fixed days" for different languages, and while they used to do this at School 3, now, "it [using different languages] really just happens" (S3E1). At School 2, S2E2 explained that while students are free to use whatever language they want, they encourage students to be aware of how their language choices include or exclude classmates.

Educators from all schools offered examples of how *pedagogical translanguaging* was used to aid students' comprehension, although they rarely used the term translanguaging. Sometimes this involved the teacher drawing from their own linguistic resources and encouraging students to do the same. S1E2 often translanguages with a multilingual student in English, a shared language of theirs, to ease their communication. At School 3, students were facilitated to use translanguaging to help each other. As S3E3 describes, "I noticed very quickly that if I started explaining something that at a certain moment a child understood what I meant and that he would explain it to the rest in Tigrinya. The whole group then knew what I wanted." Educators from Schools 1 and 2 also described using this strategy. One student, S3P1, expressed their appreciation of this practice, explaining: "If you don't know the word in Dutch, you can ask someone who speaks Dutch very well and who can also speak Arabic." S1E1 described their pedagogical

approach as focused on “learning from and with each other.” S3E3 also described this kind of collaboration happening sometimes at their school, in one case where students with differing levels of language ability and time they have lived in the Netherlands were able to help each other out through questioning and co-problem solving to understand a civics lesson.

Buddy pairing was a frequently employed practice to support multilingual students in all three schools. As S1E2 explains, “sometimes you just need that other student who gets over the hump to make it work again.” At School 3, S3E2 described how they sometimes intentionally pair students with the same language background together, but that it also often happens “a bit automatically that they pull towards each other.” In general, teachers do not see this as a hinder to students’ language development, but as supportive of learning, as S2E1 explained, in the math classroom, “the goal is math, the goal is not language.” By pairing students with the same language background together, it helps remove barriers to learning by allowing them to focus on the instructional content. Students also saw advantages of buddy pairing. For example, S1P5 remembered how being able to use her home language with other children helped her when she first arrived in the Netherlands, and now she expressed pride in her ability to help other children using her linguistic resources, explaining: “I can speak English myself since I was 3, so I can say that too. I can speak Tigrinya and I’m learning Turkish and Arabic now, so if I know those languages, I can help other people too. So that seems nice to me.”

4.1.4 Cross-linguistic pedagogies

Finally, a few cross-linguistic pedagogies played a role in the multilingual approaches of the participating schools, although they were far less salient than the other types of pedagogies. Mostly, cross-linguistic pedagogies appeared in the form of engaging students in *explicit discussions about multilingualism*, particularly at Schools 1 and 2. For example, S2E1 specifically mentioned using Cummins’ common underlying proficiency model (García & Li, 2014) to explain to students how language acquisition works and how their multilingualism is a strength. At a later point he describes this as “telling the story of multilingualism.” At School 1, there is a similar belief in “the power of multilingualism,” as S1E1 calls it, and the idea that “another language can also be a connection between languages.” There, the examples that educators brought up about their multilingual projects in March and the importance they place on building on students’ home languages demonstrate this awareness of the cross-linguistic connections between languages.

Educators at School 2 were especially vocal about how they used *comparisons between languages* and *translation activities* to support students’ learning. Beyond the translation activities students at School 2 completed with their parents at home, S2E1 described using connections between Dutch and Arabic, Turkish, or Moroccan to support students’ grammar development, explaining, “linking it to their own language does make it more accessible and I don’t have to speak Arabic, Turkish or Moroccan for that.” Several stu-

dents expressed happiness about the fact that the translation activities they did with parents helped them acquire new words in their home language which they were able to use at home. In school 3 no cross-linguistic pedagogies were applied.

5 Conclusion and discussion

In response to the need to translate insights from multilingual pedagogical theory and research into usable practices for educational professionals (e.g. Lorenz et al., 2021), we conducted an instrumental case study at three multilingual-oriented primary schools in the Netherlands. The study examined how educators translate theory and research insights on multilingual education into concrete and usable practices. All schools used a combination of four evidence-informed strategies – affirming, translanguaging-based, scaffolding, and cross-linguistic – in everyday classroom settings. The four strategies offer complementary perspectives and together support a holistic approach. The examples show adaptable, overlapping strategies that support multilingual students and that can inspire further innovation on other schools. They should not be seen as an exhaustive list of possible multilingual pedagogies, but rather as a menu of ideas which can be used in adaptable and overlapping ways to support multilingual students in primary education. Each school tailored these strategies to its specific context, reflecting findings from prior research highlighting the importance of taking into account the unique context of the school and the specific students within this context (e.g. Castillo & Wagner, 2019; Corcoll, 2013; Mgijima, 2021; Molyneux et al., 2016; Peyer et al., 2022). For example, in Schools 1 and 2, teachers used translanguaging-based pedagogies by encouraging peer support to build on students' linguistic diversity. Students who were more proficient in Dutch supported classmates by translating key terms and collaboratively solving tasks, reflecting a pedagogy of "learning from and with each other." This approach was feasible because the classrooms included students with different levels of Dutch proficiency and varying lengths of residence in the Netherlands, allowing them to draw on each other's complementary linguistic knowledge and experiences.

In conclusion, two key components in particular proved to be valuable for implementing multilingual education in primary schools. Firstly, it is crucial to create policies that bring coherence to multilingual practices (vision). Research has shown that while many schools acknowledge the benefits of multilingual education, few have formal policies in place to guide their implementation (Forbes & Morea, 2024). This lack of structured policy often results in fragmented or ad hoc multilingual practices, limiting their effectiveness. Even when teachers are aware of the importance of supporting students' home languages, schools often struggle to embed this into an overarching strategic approach (Forbes & Morea, 2024). Secondly, embedding them in a supportive context (solid knowledge base and working with parents) is of great importance. This includes providing teachers with a solid knowledge base in multilingual pedagogy and fostering meaningful

collaboration with parents and extracurricular organizations. Parental involvement is widely recognized as beneficial for children's academic development (Fan & Chen, 2001), yet specific guidance on how to engage parents in supporting multilingual learners is scarce.

Taken together, these findings underscore that both a coherent policy framework and a context that actively supports teachers, parents, and the wider community are essential for the successful implementation of multilingual education. However, there remains a clear need for research and practice to better articulate strategies for parent collaboration and the integration of out-of-school resources, particularly for multilingual learners.

The practical examples, consistent with earlier research, show that embracing multilingualism in education often requires no major changes to teaching methods or language of instruction. It can be a "progressive and self-sustaining process" (Newcomer, 2020), building on existing resources and curricula (Castillo & Wagner, 2019; Mgijima, 2021). This is particularly true for affirming pedagogies that are based on an attitude of valuing the cultural and linguistic background of students. We interpret that affirming pedagogies function as an ideological entry point. They require primarily attitudinal change, limited technical knowledge and minimal structural adaptation. This may explain why the implementation of multilingual education often starts with employing affirming pedagogies. The implementation of these pedagogies needs a joint school vision on multilingualism and working on a solid knowledge base about multilingualism among the school team members. These pedagogies also help deepen the vision. Visual artefacts created by students can further support a culture that values multilingualism by signaling inclusivity to teachers, parents, and peers.

Implementing other multilingual pedagogies often follows affirming ones, likely because they demand more teacher preparation. Scaffolding pedagogies were the second most common, helping to connect learning to prior knowledge of students and encouraging parental involvement. We could interpret scaffolding as a shift from recognition to instructional design. Translanguaging pedagogies were less frequently reported. While teachers rarely labeled their practices as translanguaging, the absence of language separation rules use aligns with its core idea – "softening boundaries between languages" (Leonet et al., 2020, p. 57), which can be beneficial particularly for language teaching and learning. However, to be able to speak of pedagogical translanguaging, there must be consciously planned activities and conscious choice of the used languages. All schools mentioned buddy pairing, often to facilitate translanguaging among students. Further research into this type of pedagogy would be helpful, to more closely investigate what teachers need and can do to expand and deepen this pedagogy in their education.

Based on the interview data, cross-linguistic pedagogies seem to be least applied. A possible explanation for this is that this type of pedagogy requires most preparation and knowledge from the teacher compared to the other types. The other types of pedagogies can be applied in a more oral, and spontaneous way, from an attitude of valuing students cultural and linguistic backgrounds, or, in the case of scaffolding pedagogies, using sup-

port materials and strategies. For applying cross-linguistic pedagogies a teacher needs knowledge of specific languages. Translanguaging-based and cross-linguistic pedagogies require metalinguistic awareness and curricular intentionality, which aligns with Cenoz and Gorter's (2021) concept of *pedagogical translanguaging*. The observed implementation sequence can be interpreted as a progression from low-threshold, identity-affirming practices toward increasingly knowledge-intensive and instructionally complex pedagogies. This mirrors research suggesting that teacher belief change often precedes shifts in instructional design (Lorenz et al., 2021) and that identity affirmation forms the foundation for more cognitively demanding multilingual practices (Cummins, 2018). The sequence suggests that schools initially prioritize recognition (valuing identities) before engaging in redistribution (structuring access to academic content through multilingual means), echoing Duchêne's (2020) argument that recognition without redistribution risks remaining symbolic. The limited presence of cross-linguistic pedagogies may reflect what Lucas and Villegas (2010) describe as the "missing piece" in teacher education: preparation for linguistically responsive instruction that extends beyond positive attitudes toward multilingualism. The reason why cross-linguistic pedagogies are used the least may well be due to the need for specific knowledge of specific languages. Applying this approach in a super-diverse classroom therefore places high demands on the teacher. How to make translanguaging-based and cross-linguistic pedagogies practical for teachers, and how AI technology could play a role in this, could be explored in further research.

This study shows that creating impactful, coherent multilingual education involves more than implementing isolated multilingual pedagogies. Four supportive conditions on meso (school level) and macro level (beyond school level) supports its development. First, our study confirms findings from previous research that shaping coherent multilingual education starts with a shared vision on dealing with multilingualism that is supported by the school team, and preferably also by parents and students (Demie & Lewis, 2018; Duarte & Günther-van der Meij, 2018; Strobbe, 2022). The educational professionals in the study all agree in their vision that students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds should be valued and used as resources, rather than deficits.

Second, teachers need a solid knowledge base in multilingual education. Professional development helps ensure that multilingual activities are grounded on well-founded knowledge, vision and attitude, making the multilingual activities more meaningful.

Third, parents are involved in the multilingual policy by informing them about multilingualism and including them in learning projects. Some of the multilingual pedagogies increased parental involvement, which, in turn, supports students' learning. For example, parent involvement was seen at all three schools as an effective way to incorporate home language learning from a funds-of-knowledge-perspective into instruction. This can be done by inviting guest speakers, as in Zaidi (2020), by assigning homework which involves working together with family members in the home language, as in López (2016), or by improving communication with parents. Working together with family members of stu-

dents is also recommended by Back and colleagues (2020) as a cost-effective alternative to hiring additional home language instructors. These insights may be reassuring for mainstream schools interested in a multilingual approach, as most of these initiatives did not require significant additional resources.

Finally, sustainable *cooperation with extracurricular organizations*, like libraries, speech therapists and neighborhood teams was perceived as important for coherent multilingual education. These types of collaborations ensure that expertise can be exchanged and strengthened.

A limitation is that this study focused primarily on the perspectives of educators. We interviewed from each school, teachers and someone of the staff actively involved in multilingual school policy. This could have affected our results. Also, although we interviewed students, their perspectives remained nevertheless somewhat underexposed, as it proved difficult for students to elaborate on specific multilingual strategies. Nevertheless, students' accounts were largely consistent with the teachers' intentions, suggesting that even when the approaches were experienced as self-evident, they were meaningfully enacted in classroom practice. To obtain a more complete picture of how multilingualism is incorporated into education, observational data could be included in future research. Additionally, it would be valuable for future studies to explore creative methods for enabling students to reflect more explicitly on the multilingual approaches they experience in the classroom. Teachers and students mentioned positive results of multilingual pedagogies in the interviews. A limitation of this study, however, is that it does not systematically map the effect of multilingual pedagogies on student outcomes. Further research could be conducted into the benefits of multilingual approaches in terms of student results.

As Robertson and Graven (2020) emphasize, multilingual education must balance between showing students that they are valued for who they are in the school context (inclusivity), and ensuring they are given the tools they need to succeed in primary education and beyond (access). While on the one hand, inclusivity is needed to positively affirm minority students' diverse linguistic and cultural identities, placing insufficient focus on access to the tools they need to succeed in education, and support "would then put them at risk of ongoing marginalization, and existing societal inequities would also then continue, unabated, unchanged and unchallenged" (Robertson & Graven, 2020, p. 6). This advice is further strengthened by Duchêne (2020), who argues that multilingual approaches which aim at "breaking down barriers" in society must employ both recognition and redistribution in their practices (p. 95). From this view, we see that the general tendency in the studied Dutch primary schools to favor both affirming and scaffolding-based multilingual pedagogies is promising. By continuing to balance between these two pedagogical types and enhancing this with translanguaging and cross-linguistic pedagogies, educators can ensure that they are supporting multilingual students and their learning from all sides. The findings suggest that multilingual pedagogies do not function as isolated classroom strategies but are embedded in an ecology of support

structures (cf. Strobbe, 2022). Schools that developed coherent multilingual approaches did so within networks of professional development, policy alignment, and parental engagement.

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Edda Veerman: conceptualisation, data curation, methodology, investigation, formal analysis, writing – original draft, visualization, supervision, writing – review & editing; Emma Danbury: conceptualisation, data curation, methodology, investigation, formal analysis, writing – original draft, visualization; Joana Duarte: conceptualisation, methodology, writing – review & editing, supervision, project administration; Monique Volman: conceptualisation, writing – review & editing; Lisa Gaikhorst: conceptualisation, methodology, writing – review & editing, project administration, supervision, funding acquisition.

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The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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- ChatGTP was used to improve language and readability.

Supporting information

None.

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