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Mapping Multilingualism in Norwegian EAL Classrooms: Student Teacher Ideologies and Pedagogical Readiness

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Abstract
This study investigates first-year student teachers' conceptualizations of multilingualism and their perceived preparedness to implement multilingual pedagogies in Norwegian English as an additional language (EAL). Drawing on data from 95 survey responses and 20 follow-up interviews, the research explores how prospective teachers define multilingualism, perceive multilingual classrooms, and reflect on professional training needs. While most participants valued multilingualism as a resource, contradictions emerged between their self-identification as multilingual speakers and beliefs about multilingual pedagogy. Findings revealed a limited understanding of multilingualism, often tied to language proficiency and teacher fluency in students' home languages (HLs). Despite strong support for multilingual approaches, participants expressed uncertainty about their effective implementation. The study highlights the need for more practice-oriented training in teacher education to bridge theory and classroom realities. Results underscore the importance of equipping future teachers with both conceptual clarity and applied strategies to meet the growing linguistic diversity in Norwegian schools.

Keywords: *Multilingualism*, *EAL teacher education*, *student teachers*, *teacher preparedness*, *student teacher cognition, Norwegian classrooms*

1. Introduction

Multilingualism has long defined many societies and is increasingly normalized in classrooms worldwide (Aronin, 2022; Coulmas, 2018; May, 2019). Even in traditionally monolingual contexts, like Norway, demographic shifts have reshaped schools' linguistic landscapes (Neokleous & Karpava, 2023; Vikøy & Haukås, 2023). For the purpose of this study, multilingualism refers to the dynamic and context-dependent use of multiple languages by individuals and communities (Cenoz, 2013; Franceschini, 2011; Horner & Weber, 2017). According to the European Commission (2025), 44.7 million people (10% of EU inhabitants) were born outside the EU, and this number continues to rise due to global mobility and displacement. As a result, education systems are increasingly shaped by linguistic diversity, challenging monolingual norms and prompting renewed interest in multilingual pedagogies (Meier, 2017; Veliz, 2024; Wright, Boun, & García, 2015).

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In line with these broader European trends, Norway has also experienced an increase in the number of students with multilingual backgrounds. Statistics Norway (2025) reports that 21.4% of the population is either immigrant or Norwegian-born to immigrant parents, with particularly high concentrations in urban areas. Consequently, schools must adapt to increasingly diverse linguistic repertoires (Krulatz, Christison, Lorenz, & Sevinç, 2024; Vikøy & Haukås, 2023; Xu & Krulatz, 2023). Despite curricular endorsements of multilingual approaches, classroom practices often remain grounded in monolingual ideologies (Bacon, 2020; Flores & Rosa, 2015; Vikøy & Haukås, 2023). Norwegian research has shown that both student and practicing teachers express uncertainty about incorporating learners' home languages (HLs), citing a lack of training, institutional support, and clear guidelines (Tavares, 2026; Xu & Krulatz, 2023).

Internationally, studies highlight similar tensions between policy and practice. For instance, Slaughter and Cross (2021) documented how teachers in EAL contexts often express support for linguistic diversity yet continue to rely on English-dominant approaches, reflecting uncertainty about how to enact multilingual pedagogies in practice. Similarly, Barros, Domke, Symons, and Ponzio (2021) showed that while mainstream preservice teachers increasingly endorsed multilingualism and the importance of students' home languages, they remained uncertain about how to implement translanguaging in mainstream classrooms, particularly under English-dominant curricula and accountability expectations. Relatedly, research noted that even where multilingual courses exist, their impact on teacher readiness remains uneven (Portolés & Martí, 2020; Wernicke, Hammer, Hansen, & Schroedler., 2021; Xu & Krulatz, 2023). These findings align with research on teacher cognition, which underscores the role of beliefs, ideologies, and prior experiences in shaping teaching (Borg, 2015; Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015; Skott, 2014).

This study is grounded in a teacher cognition framework, focusing on student teachers' beliefs and ideologies about language and multilingualism (Borg, 2015). Multilingual pedagogies, which encourage the use of learners' full linguistic repertoires to support academic development, inclusion, and identity formation, are widely endorsed in policy and research (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021; Palmer, Martínez, Mateus, & Henderson, 2014; Wright et al., 2015). However, their implementation depends largely on teachers' orientations toward language and diversity. Despite this, limited research has examined student teachers' understandings of multilingualism, particularly in the early stages of teacher education and within EAL settings (Dursun, Agirdag, & Claes, 2024; Iversen, Thomassen, & Fylkesnes, 2025). More specifically, the study aims to generate insights into how first-year student teachers conceptualize multilingualism, perceive their own multilingual identities, and evaluate their preparedness to implement multilingual pedagogies. It contributes to both national and international research by identifying knowledge gaps and offering implications for the design of more inclusive and focused teacher education programs.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Defining Multilingualism

Multilingualism has received substantial scholarly attention and is increasingly featured in policy documents and curriculum reforms (Cenoz, 2013; Conteh & Meier, 2014; Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020). As Cenoz (2013) notes, definitions vary because the concept "has been approached from different perspectives" (p. 4). Depending on the disciplinary lens, it is framed in different ways. For example, linguistic and psycholinguistic research has emphasized structural and cognitive dimensions (De Bot, 2004; Franceschini, 2011; Grosjean, 2010), while sociolinguistics and education have focused on social and pedagogical aspects (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021; May, 2019). For example, Cenoz (2013) distinguishes between individual and societal multilingualism, proficiency versus use, and bilingualism versus multilingualism.

Contemporary definitions are increasingly inclusive, recognizing uneven or emergent proficiencies and receptive knowledge (Busch, 2017; Cenoz, 2013; Horner & Weber, 2017; May, 2019). This shift aligns with dynamic, usage-based understandings of multilingualism as a lifelong, context-dependent process (Busch, 2017). In contrast, earlier definitions often required native-like competence (Baker & Wright, 2021; Cenoz, 2013). Multilingualism is now widely used to describe individuals using two or more languages (Baker & Wright, 2021), although some still apply the threshold of three or more (Cenoz, 2013). Building on these developments, the multilingual turn (Conteh & Meier, 2014) emphasizes multilingualism as a dynamic, situated practice characterized by partial competencies, hybrid language use, and flexible linguistic repertoires (Busch, 2017; Horner & Weber, 2017). These features challenge fixed language boundaries and underscore how individuals draw on their full linguistic resources depending on context and communicative purpose (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021; Conteh & Meier, 2014).

2.2 The Norwegian Context

The Norwegian government acknowledges that linguistic diversity can promote language development, as reflected in several policy documents (e.g., Norwegian Ministry of Children, Equality, and Social Inclusion, 2012). The most recent update of the national curriculum (LK20) states that learners should gain "an insight into the rich and diverse linguistic and cultural heritage in Norway (…) and become confident language users and aware of their own linguistic and cultural identity within an inclusive community where multilingualism is valued as a resource" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020, p. 2). While this positions multilingualism as a societal and educational aim, a disconnect persists between policy discourse and classroom practices.

Norway is often referred to as a multilingual country (Haukås, Storto, & Tiurikova, 2021), with two official national languages (Norwegian and Sami), two written variants of Norwegian (bokmål and nynorsk), and widespread use of dialects. Receptive multilingualism is also common across the Nordic region due to close linguistic ties. English, as the first foreign language, is introduced in Grade 1, followed by an optional second foreign language offered from Grade 8.

However, many educational settings, particularly in rural areas, remain monolingual in practice, dominated by the majority language, and informed by Norwegian-English bilingualism ideologies (Olaussen & Kjelaas, 2020; Lorenz, Krulatz, & Torgersen, 2021). This orientation is also reflected in educational materials, where multilingualism is often presented as an exceptional rather than an everyday feature of Norwegian classrooms (Vikøy, 2021). This model assumes Norwegian is used for clarification, even when students share additional HLs. Given that 21.4% of Norway's population now consists of immigrants and Norwegian-born to immigrant parents (Statistics Norway, 2025), classrooms are increasingly linguistically diverse. While this demographic shift creates opportunities for multilingual practices, prevailing attitudes often hinder their realization (Vikøy & Haukås, 2023).

Despite this growing, multilingualism is not always framed positively in educational contexts. A deficit-oriented view of multilingualism was documented in Xu and Krulatz (2023), where teachers valued multilingualism only once students achieved sufficient proficiency in Norwegian. In the Norwegian context, the term flerspråklig (multilingual) frequently carries negative connotations, typically referring to individuals still learning Norwegian (Haukås, Storto, & Tiurikova, 2024). Such conditional framings suggest that multilingualism is not fully embraced as a lived reality or as a pedagogical resource. Benediktsson's (2022) analysis of teacher education legal frameworks further reveals that multilingual pedagogies are not prioritized, with "limited space" allocated for their implementation (p. 228).

2.3 Current Multilingual Practices

As classrooms become increasingly linguistically and culturally diverse, researchers urge teachers to view and treat students as multilinguals by default (e.g., Aronin, 2022; Krulatz, Neokleous, & Dahl., 2022; May, 2019), while critiquing traditional language separation ideologies (Fang, Zhang, & Sah, 2022; García & Lin, 2016; Palmer et al., 2014). The so-called "multilingual turn" in education presupposes that speakers of additional languages should be regarded as emergent multilinguals, whose entire linguistic repertoires can be leveraged to support the learning of new languages (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021; García & Lin, 2016). This approach challenges traditional language boundaries and replaces the native speaker ideal with a model of the multilingual speaker – an individual competent in using multiple languages for different communicative purposes (Conteh & Meier, 2014; Meier, 2017).

In response to the evolving demands of EAL classrooms, new pedagogical approaches have emerged that centre students' full linguistic repertoires in the learning process (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021). For instance, translanguaging is increasingly promoted as an inclusive strategy that recognizes languages as inseparable and inherently part of an individual's dynamic linguistic system (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021; Huang & Chalmers, 2023). Students flexibly draw on their linguistic repertoires, selecting features strategically to facilitate communication (García & Lin, 2016). Cenoz and Gorter's (2011) Focus on Multilingualism framework establishes pedagogical connections between the languages students encounter in school. While translanguaging assumes an integrated linguistic repertoire, it is not the only conceptualization of how languages are stored and processed. For instance, Cummins' (2001) dual-iceberg model suggests that languages may be partially distinct systems with a shared underlying proficiency. This perspective implies that while cross-linguistic transfer can occur, some language features remain language-specific.

2.3.1 Multilingual Practices in Classrooms

To optimize the student learning experience, teacher-training departments across Europe have aligned their programs with the multilingual turn in education and introduced multilingualism-focused courses, informed by official guidelines and national curricula promoting a multilingual approach to teaching (Gardiner-Hyland & van den Hoven, 2025; Gkaintartzi, Kostoulas, & Vitsou, 2024; Putjata, 2024). These developments primarily represent policy-level and curricular innovations, yet they do not necessarily translate into sustained changes in classroom practice (Wernicke et al., 2021; Xu & Krulatz, 2023). In many classrooms worldwide, instruction remains grounded in monolingual ideologies, assuming students share at least one common language (Bacon, 2020; Flores & Rosa, 2015; Slaughter & Cross, 2021). This discrepancy has been observed across Europe. For example, multilingual classroom practices have been documented both in intervention and classroom-based research, including resource-oriented approaches in primary language education and translanguaging practices in Scandinavian classrooms (Busse, Cenoz, Dalmann, & Rogge, 2020; Källkvist, Sandlund, Sundqvist & Gyllstad, 2024; Torpsten, 2018). Despite these developments, mainstream teaching often continues to marginalize students' HLs (Alisaari, Heikkola, Commins, & Acquah, 2019; Bosch & Doedel, 2024; Gross, 2025).

This persistence of monolingual approaches reinforces a strict separation of languages and presupposes that learners' HLs are not pedagogically relevant or beneficial (García & Lin, 2016; Palmer et al., 2014; Slaughter & Cross, 2021). Some studies have indicated that minority languages spoken at home are discouraged or marginalised within school environments (Alisaari et al., 2019; Bosch & Doedel, 2024; Hurwitz & Kambel, 2020; Rojas & Chandras, 2025). Although formal bans are rare, implicit pressures and unspoken norms often result in HLs being sidelined (Alisaari et al., 2019; Bosch & Doedel, 2024; Hurwitz & Kambel, 2020). Research has identified several interrelated factors behind this exclusion: 1) teacher insecurity stemming from limited knowledge of students' HL(s), 2) perceived difficulty supporting unfamiliar languages in instruction, and 3) insufficient

training and confidence to implement multilingual pedagogies (Angelovska, Krulatz, & Šurkalovic, 2020; Bosch, Olioumtsevits, Santarelli, Faloppa, Foppolo, & Papadopoulou, 2025; Krulatz et al., 2022; Lorenz et al., 2021; Portolés & Martí, 2020).

In a cross-national large-scale study, De Angelis (2011) found that teachers in Italy, Austria, and the UK showed limited awareness of how HLs could support additional language acquisition. Participants expressed concern that using HLs in class could confuse students or impede development of the target language (TL). Similar reservations emerged in Canada, where Faez (2012) reported that although EAL teachers acknowledged the cognitive benefits of multilingualism, they hesitated to implement inclusive practices. This hesitation reflects a persistent TL immersion ideology, which assumes that maximum exposure to the TL is necessary for language development and that the use of other languages may interfere (Palmer et al., 2014; Shin, Dixon, & Choi, 2020; Slaughter & Cross, 2021). Rodríguez-Izquierdo, Falcón, and Permisán (2020) confirmed this pattern in Spain, linking teacher reluctance to both professional norms and inadequate training. In certain cases, teacher hesitancy is compounded by restrictive institutional policies. For example, Alisaari et al. (2019) documented cases in Finnish schools where learners' HLs were discouraged or disallowed, with teachers recommending the use of Finnish even in multilingual families.

These findings reveal a widespread gap between teacher beliefs and practices, even in the presence of favourable curriculum reforms, across European and Nordic contexts. Collectively, they underscore urgent need for more comprehensive and practice-oriented training in teacher education programs, enabling future teachers to critically reflect on and challenge their own views of multilingualism and multilingual learners (Deroo & Ponzio, 2023; Ojha, Burton, & De Costa, 2024; Van Gorp, De Costa, Ponzio, Rawal, & Deng, 2023; Wernicke et al., 2021).

Although recent studies (e.g., Fischer & Lahmann, 2020; Morea & Fisher, 2025) reported positive effects from multilingualism courses, research consistently shows that teacher education programs often fall short in preparing prospective teachers to implement multilingual pedagogies confidently (Portolés & Martí, 2020; Wernicke et al., 2021). This gap is particularly evident in the Nordic region, where programs may emphasize multilingualism in theory but provide limited guidance on how to enact it in practice (Iversen et al., 2025; Xu & Krulatz, 2023). While the multilingual turn is firmly established in scholarship and supported by policy, the aim of giving teachers "appropriate preparation and targeted instruction to support students of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds" (Faez, 2012, p. 78) remains largely unrealized.

2.3.2 Multilingual Practices in Norwegian Classrooms

The lack of targeted instruction in multilingualism has been well-documented in Norwegian research. In Krulatz and Dahl's (2016) study, the Norwegian teacher participants emphasized the need for systematic training that included a solid grounding in language acquisition, culturally responsive teaching, and strategies for linguistically diverse classrooms. These early findings have been echoed in more recent studies (Benediktsson, 2025; Haukås et al., 2024; Lorenz et al., 2021; Neokleous & Natlandsmyr, 2025; Vikøy & Haukås, 2023), which suggest that while both teachers and students recognize the pedagogical value of multilingual practices, actual classroom implementation remains limited**.** Teachers in these studies report that integrating multilingual approaches across subjects, rather than confining them to language learning alone is beneficial, yet they frequently cite insufficient time, limited training, and a lack of institutional support as barriers.

Although LK20 (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020) reflects a clear policy-level commitment to multilingualism, teachers describe enacting these ideals as difficult and

overwhelming (Neokleous, Ofte, & Sylte, 2022; Xu & Krulatz, 2023). Thus, even with growing linguistic diversity and a stated willingness to adopt multilingual approaches, a gap persists between curricular ambitions and classroom realities. This gap underscores the pivotal role teachers play as agents of change, both within educational systems and in shaping classroom practice (Bourn, 2016; Krulatz et al., 2024; Sherman, Teemant, & Prada, 2025; Van Gorp et al., 2023). While policy advocates for multilingual strategies, research indicates that teachers' practices are influenced not only by formal guidance but also by their beliefs, prior experiences, and the nature of training they receive (Debreli, 2016; Portolés & Martí, 2020; Uibu, Salo, Ugaste, & Rasku-Puttonen, 2017; Qiu, Xie, Xiong, & Zhou, 2021). Consequently, student teachers introduced to multilingual frameworks may continue to reproduce monolingual norms unless they are offered sustained, practice-oriented opportunities for reflection and pedagogical experimentation **(**Deroo & Ponzio, 2023; Neokleous et al., 2022; Tavares, 2026; Van Gorp et al., 2023).

2.4 Student Teacher Cognition and Ideologies of Multilingualism

Recent research has increasingly emphasized the importance of understanding student teacher cognition, defined as the beliefs, knowledge, and attitudes that student teachers hold about teaching and learning (Borg, 2015; Krulatz et al., 2024; Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015), in relation to multilingualism. These cognitions, often shaped by previous language learning experiences and institutional discourses, directly influence how multilingual pedagogies are interpreted and enacted (Borg, 2015; Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015). In EAL instruction, student teachers may internalize dominant ideologies that prioritize monolingual norms or view multilingualism through deficit-based lenses (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Kim, Park, & Zhao, 2024; Vo & Choi, 2025).

Studies by Neokleous and Natlandsmyr (2025) and Xu and Krulatz (2023) showed that while student teachers may express support for multilingualism, their instructional practices often reflect a degree of uncertainty or ambivalence. This discrepancy is frequently rooted in ideologies that construct the majority language as a prerequisite for academic success, thereby marginalizing HLs (Krulatz et al., 2022; Spolsky, 2021). Recent international work (e.g., Douglas Fir Group, 2022; Ojha et al., 2024) highlights the importance of exposing student teachers to critical perspectives on language ideologies and providing structured opportunities for reflection. Without such engagement, they may struggle to translate theory into practice, even when multilingualism is promoted at the curricular level.

To bridge this gap, teacher education programmes must move beyond awareness-raising and actively support transformative learning (Sherman et al., 2025; Van Gorp et al., 2023). Participation in targeted professional development can foster inclusive attitudes and normalise multilingual practices, such as translanguaging, while also validating strategies teachers already use (Gorter & Arocena, 2020). Similarly, Krulatz et al. (2022) argue that collaboration and mentorship are essential for helping teachers critically reflect on their linguistic identities and pedagogical ideologies. Developing this reflective capacity equips educators to respond effectively and sustainably to diverse linguistic and cultural realities. Embedding such opportunities for reflection and practice into teacher education fosters pedagogical agency and challenges reductive conceptualizations of language (Baral, Axelsson, & Dewilde, 2025; Gorski & Dalton, 2020), ultimately preparing student teachers to enact multilingual pedagogies with confidence and lasting impact.

3. Rationale and Research Questions

The present study seeks to investigate how first-year student teachers in Norway perceive and respond to the increasing linguistic and cultural diversity in EAL classrooms. As multilingualism becomes a defining feature of education, particularly in urban Norwegian settings, there is a pressing need to understand not only how future educators conceptualize multilingualism, but also how prepared they feel to meet the associated pedagogical demands. While curricular reforms and pedagogical

frameworks promote multilingual approaches, recent research shows that teachers often feel underprepared to implement them (Angelovska et al., 2020; Benediktsson, 2025; Iversen et al., 2025; Neokleous & Natlandsmyr, 2025).

This study was conducted during participants' first year of teacher training, prior to any coursework explicitly addressing multilingualism. This timing allowed the researchers to explore student teachers' initial conceptualizations of multilingualism, their self-reported preparedness to teach in linguistically diverse classrooms, and expectations of how teacher education programs could better equip them. Furthermore, the study aims to determine how early training can most effectively support student teachers in developing the knowledge, strategies, and confidence needed to implement multilingual pedagogies in EAL settings.

Framed within the broader shift toward pluralist discourses in education (Aronin, 2022; Meier, 2017; Veliz, 2024), this investigation is guided by the following research questions (RQs):
RQ1: How do first-year student teachers conceptualize multilingualism?
RQ2: What are their perceptions of multilingual EAL classrooms and the importance of integrating multilingual pedagogies?
RQ3: What knowledge, skills, and expertise do they consider essential for implementing multilingual pedagogies effectively?

4. Methodology

4.1 Participants

For the purposes of this study, purposeful sampling was employed (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2005; Silverman, 2000) to capture a range of representative socioeconomic contexts**.** The sample comprised three first-year student teacher cohorts from two universities in Norway offering primary school teacher education. To ensure homogeneity, the participating cohorts: a) were enrolled in a teacher training program with English as an elective subject, b) included non-Norwegian Erasmus students; c) were training to become primary school teachers; and d) had no prior teaching experience in multilingual settings.

A total of 95 student teachers participated in the questionnaire phase, of whom 59 were female, 34 male, and 2 non-binary. While the majority were Norwegian nationals (68.42%), the remainder (31.58%) identified with other nationalities, as illustrated in Figure 1. To ensure consistency, the interview phase involved participants drawn from the same cohorts. Twenty student teachers (13 female, 7 male) volunteered from among the 95 survey respondents, providing opportunities to elaborate on their beliefs during interviews conducted in the spring semester of 2023.

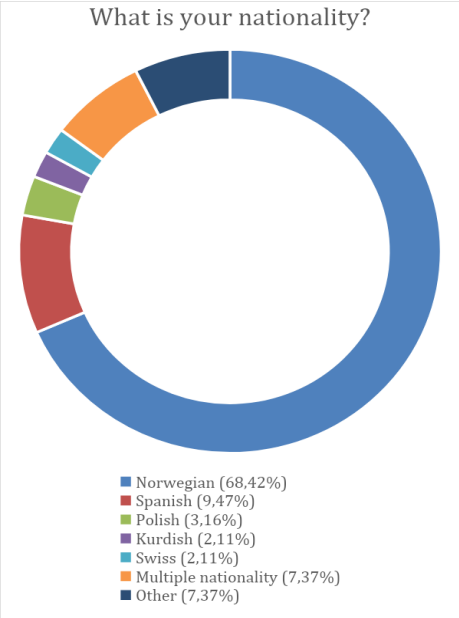

Figure 1 Participants' nationalities

4.2 Data Collection Strategies

The study addressed its RQs using data collected through an online questionnaire (n=95) and follow-up interviews (n=20). The questionnaire, developed to explore participants' perceptions of multilingualism and preparedness to implement multilingual pedagogies, comprised two sections. Section 1 gathered background information through five items. Section 2 examined participants' views on multilingualism, beginning with conceptualisations of the term, followed by perspectives on integrating multilingual pedagogies using open-ended questions. A final subsection presented 24 statements addressing the knowledge, expertise, and skills needed to enact multilingual pedagogies, rated on a six-point Likert scale from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*.

The instrument was piloted twice in spring 2023, and feedback from five colleagues with expertise in multilingualism informed refinements to ensure clarity, relevance, and validity (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010). The online survey tool Nettskjema was used for its compliance with local regulations, ease of use, and secure data handling. The questionnaire was only available in English because all participants majored in English and had a proficient command of the language, and some were not proficient in Norwegian.

To complement the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were conducted in English with 20 volunteer participants (13 female, 7 male) from the same cohorts, ensuring consistency. The interviews took place on university premises and allowed participants to elaborate on their preparedness, clarify questionnaire responses, and share illustrative examples of multilingual pedagogy in practice. This design supported a richer and more nuanced understanding of the research questions.

4.3 Data Analysis

Building on the description of the instruments and procedures above, the analysis was designed to capture both the breadth and depth of participants' perceptions. An interpretational approach was adopted, as it aligns with the study's aim to explore participants' subjective meaning-making regarding multilingualism and multilingual pedagogies. This approach is a "process which involves a systematic set of procedures to code and classify qualitative data to ensure that the important constructs, themes, and patterns emerge" (Gall et al., 2005, p. 315).

Open-ended questionnaire responses and interview transcripts were coded using Saldaña's (2015) two-cycle coding process. The First Cycle detected initial patterns, while the Second Cycle organised and refined these into broader themes and conceptual clusters addressing the RQs (Saldaña, 2015). Likert-scale items were descriptively analysed in Excel to identify trends in participants' attitudes and perceived preparedness. In addition to calculating response frequencies and distributions, patterns in the Likert data were interpreted alongside qualitative findings to provide contextualised insights, thereby adding an interpretive dimension to the quantitative results.

The integration of Likert-scale findings, open-ended responses, and interview data through methodological triangulation strengthened the trustworthiness of the results (Gall et al., 2005). All procedures complied with ethical guidelines, ensuring confidentiality, voluntary participation, and secure data handling.

5. Results

5.1 Participants' own conceptions of multilingualism

Given the increasingly linguistically diverse nature of EAL classrooms, and in light of growing calls for multilingual pedagogies, the first RQ explored how first-year student teachers conceptualize multilingualism and perceive their own multilingual identities.

5.1.1 Survey Results

A total of 69.5% of student teachers identified themselves as multilingual**,** while 30.5% either refrained from identifying as such or expressed uncertainty**.** Notably, none of the students in the latter group reported speaking only one language; all had competence in at least two languages, and some spoke three or more. This suggests that self-identification as multilingual is not determined solely by language count**,** but by more complex, personal, and context-dependent criteria.

The number of languages spoken nonetheless featured prominently in participants' definitions. According to the survey results (Figure 2), most students defined multilingualism as knowing two or more languages, while a slightly smaller group associated it with three or more languages. A further group referred to "multiple" or "several" languages without specifying an exact number.

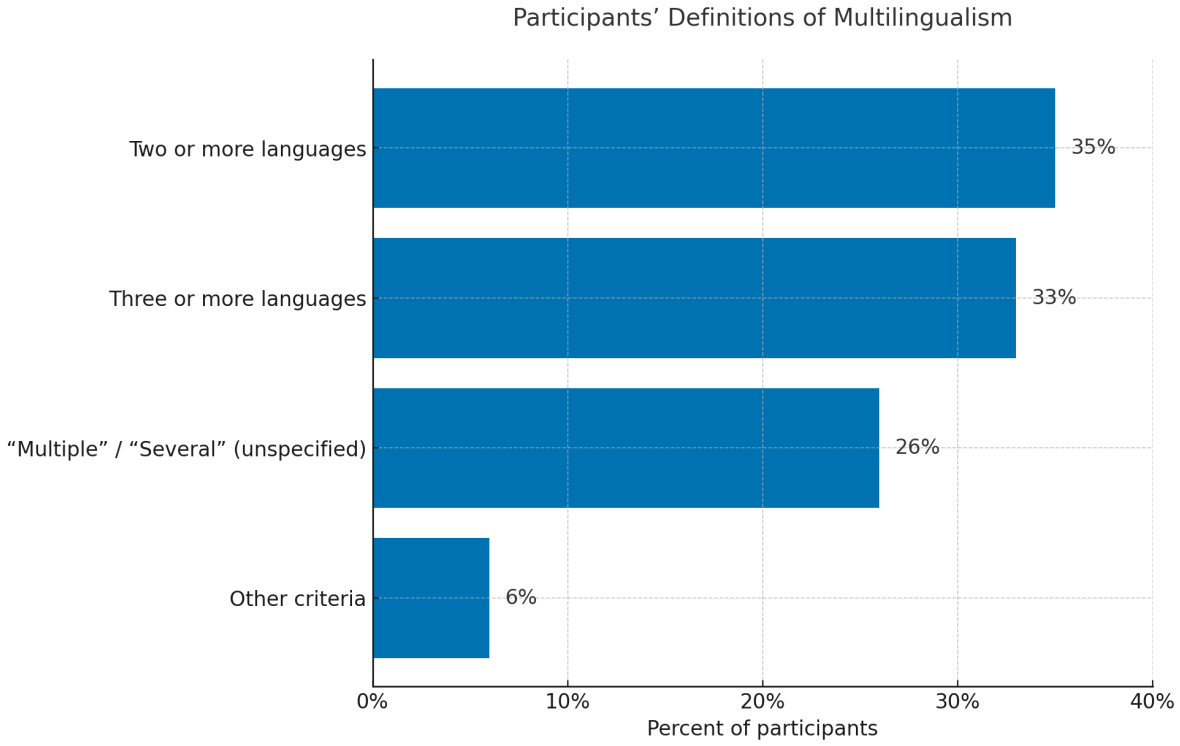

Figure 2 Thresholds for defining multilingualism.

Beyond numerical thresholds, a small group of participants (6%) referred to other criteria when defining multilingualism (Figure 3). These definitions reflected broader and more holistic perspectives, emphasizing factors such as linguistic background shaped by family and schooling, cultural affiliation and understanding, and the ability to sustain conversations across a range of topics. Some participants highlighted proficiency-related aspects, including the ability to "speak fluently," "communicate effectively," or "use a language meaningfully," while others mentioned literacy-based skills such as reading and writing abilities.

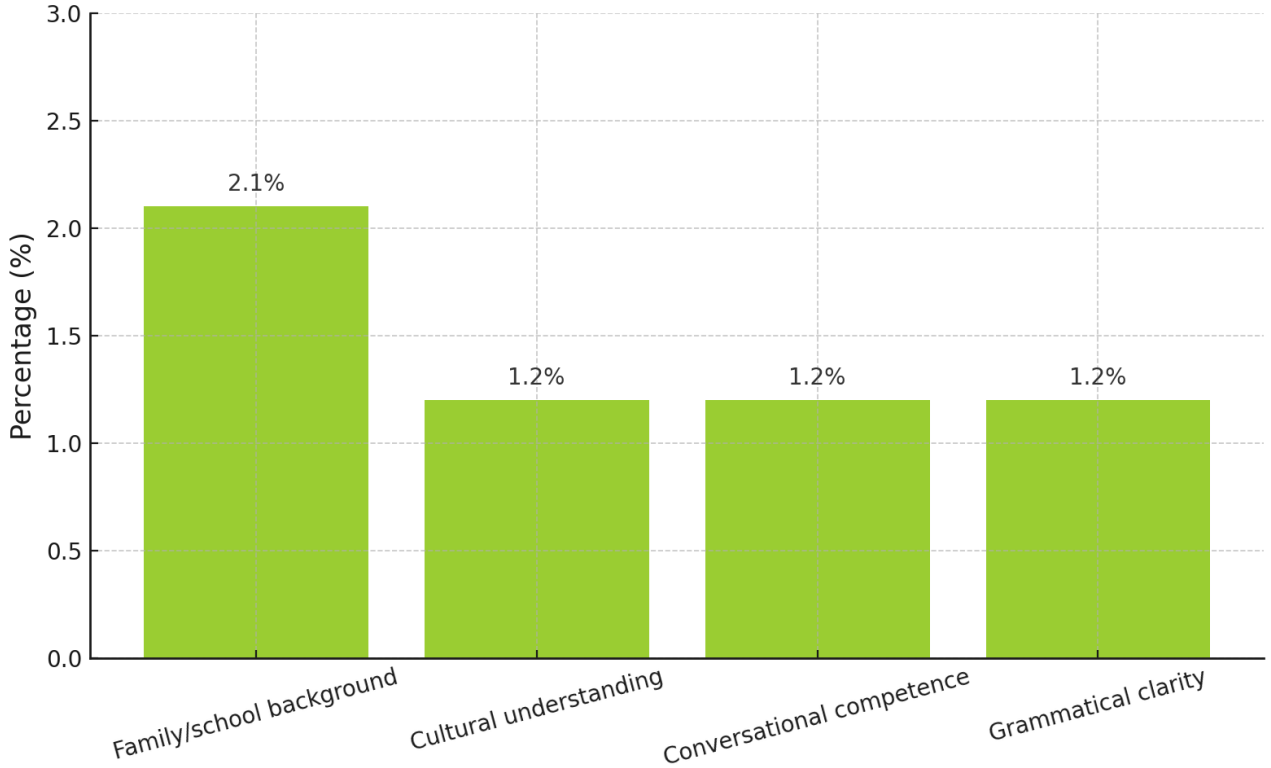

Figure 3 Additional criteria in defining multilingualism

5.1.2 Interview Results

The interviews revealed richer, more nuanced insights into how students internalize and apply their definitions of multilingualism. Among those who did not claim a multilingual identity, the most common concern was a perceived lack of fluency or proficiency. Fourteen students drew a clear distinction between languages they "understand" and those they actively "use" with multilingualism associated only with active use. As one participant explained, "I understand Polish quite well, but I wouldn't say I'm multilingual because I don't use it enough."

A related theme building on the notion of active use was the emphasis on high proficiency and consistent language use across multiple contexts. Several participants noted that mere exposure or classroom familiarity was not enough. Languages had to be in "constant use" and mastered to a high level of fluency. One respondent stated, "I don't count English even though I use it daily because I still feel like I make too many mistakes. It's not perfect." Some even excluded Norwegian, the majority language, from their multilingual profiles. They cited a lack of "perfect command", despite being degree-seeking students based in Norway. "Norwegian is not really mine," one student said. "Even if I live here", he continued, "I'm not confident enough to call it one of my languages."

Six participants referenced second language acquisition theories, which shaped their understanding of what constitutes language knowledge. These theories appeared to raise the bar for what it means to "know" a language. This prompted some to exclude languages previously included**.** "After reading about the CEFR levels," one student explained, "I realised I'm probably not 'proficient' in the way it's defined, so I stopped listing French as one of my languages." This finding suggests that academic framing can strongly influence students' self-perceptions.

A particularly notable finding was the disconnect between the students' definitions and self-perceptions. Although some stated that knowing two or more languages qualifies as multilingual, they still did not identify as such. This dissonance reflects internalised hierarchies and forms of gatekeeping**,** where students refrained from claiming a multilingual identity due to perceived

shortcomings, despite their actual linguistic repertoires. “It feels like you have to be really good at each language to call yourself multilingual,” one participant admitted. “I speak three, but I don’t feel like I qualify.”

Overall, the combined survey and interview findings reveal that while most first-year student teachers embrace broad, inclusive definitions of multilingualism, their self-identification is often constrained by perceptions of proficiency and active use, underscoring the influence of internalised language hierarchies and the need for teacher education to address these beliefs alongside practical skills.

5.2 Participants’ Views on Multilingual EAL Classrooms and Pedagogies

Considering the context of general education schools in Norway and the significant role of multilingualism in teaching EAL, as reflected in national legislation, the second question of this study explored first-year student teachers’ perceptions of multilingual EAL classrooms and the importance of integrating multilingual pedagogies.

5.2.1 Survey Results

As illustrated in Figure 4, most student teachers defined a multilingual classroom as one comprising speakers of at least two languages or students who know and speak different languages. Some respondents referred more vaguely to students with “different backgrounds” or equated multilingualism with nationality rather than linguistic competence. Several participants also highlighted cultural dimensions, associating multilingualism with opportunities for cultural exchange, increased empathy, and a broader understanding of diverse worldviews, traditions, and ways of communication.

Student teachers differed in their criteria for quantifying multilingualism – using descriptors such as "more than one," "several," or "multiple" languages. A few respondents proposed specific thresholds, such as over 20% of students speaking a language other than the majority or TL. Others suggested that even the presence of a single multilingual student could reshape a classroom’s linguistic landscape. These findings were drawn from participants’ open-ended responses, where they could list more than one defining feature. Consequently, the percentages shown in Figure 4 indicate the proportion of participants mentioning each theme rather than a total that adds up to 100%.

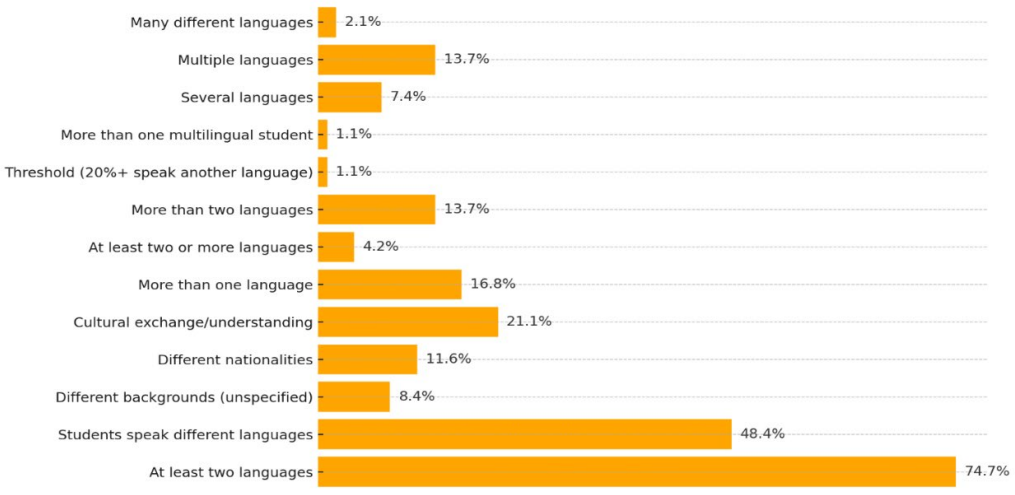

Figure 4 Criteria for identifying a multilingual classroom based on open-ended responses

On the topic of integrating multilingual pedagogies in EAL teaching, 68.4% of respondents expressed support while 31.6% were unsure. Although none opposed the idea, some struggled to articulate its value, and a few questioned potential disadvantages for monolingual students. Nonetheless, many explicitly linked multilingual pedagogies to improved learning outcomes and greater inclusion. Overall, most participants viewed multilingualism as an inherent asset to education.

5.2.2 Interview Results

Building on the survey findings, the interviews provided deeper insight into how first-year student teachers conceptualise multilingual EAL classrooms and the role of multilingual pedagogies within them. Nine interviewees viewed multilingualism and multiculturalism as closely linked, noting that linguistic diversity enriches the classroom with cultural perspectives. As one interviewee explained: **"**Each language carries its own identity. It's not just words, it's how people express themselves, how they celebrate, how they think. So, when students speak different languages, you also get their cultures in the room." Another reflected on practicum experience: "In my practicum, we had kids from five different countries. They all brought something new… it was about who they were.**"**

When asked whether almost every classroom could be considered multilingual, 12 interviewees agreed, often citing practicum examples. One described: **"**We had students who didn't speak Norwegian at all when they started. The teacher had to use English, gestures, even Google Translate. That class was multilingual, even if most weren't fluent in several languages.**"**

Support for integrating multilingual pedagogies was strong. Nineteen interviewees (95%) endorsed the idea, with sixteen emphasising that learning new languages builds on prior linguistic knowledge. As one explained: "You don't learn English in a vacuum. You compare it to what you already know. That's why using students' HLs in class makes sense.**"** Others highlighted the social and emotional benefits, such as making students feel recognised and valued: "It helps them feel seen. Using their language validates it." Ten participants referenced the Norwegian national curriculum's encouragement to build on students' HLs, and four gave examples of multilingual students supporting peers' language learning. One shared: "There was a girl in my practicum who translated for a new student every day. It helped the new student, and it also gave her a role, leadership." Despite widespread support, only one interviewee explicitly framed linguistic diversity as a "resource" or "asset." This suggests that although first-year student teachers acknowledge the value of linguistic diversity, few apply a pedagogical lens to it.

In summary, both survey and interview findings indicate that first-year student teachers generally view multilingual EAL classrooms positively and support integrating multilingual pedagogies. However, their interpretations range from broad cultural appreciation to targeted teaching strategies. The data underscore the importance of practicum in shaping confident and inclusive multilingual teaching approaches.

5.3 Knowledge and Skills for Implementing Multilingual Pedagogies

Considering the increased number of multilingual students and consequent recognition of multilingualism as a norm in the Norwegian school curriculum, the final RQ aimed to assess the student teachers' level of preparedness to face the challenges of working in a multilingual classroom. More specifically, it examined what knowledge, skills, and expertise they consider essential for the effective implementation of multilingual pedagogies.

5.3.1 Survey Results

To implement multilingual pedagogies effectively, respondents consistently emphasized the need for more targeted preparation in teacher education. Almost 90% agreed that teacher training courses play a central role in equipping future teachers to work with linguistically diverse students, and nearly three-quarters expressed confidence that their university education provides the necessary tools for teaching EAL in multilingual classrooms. As these findings derive from Likert-scale items, the percentages in Figure 5 represent the share of participants who agreed or strongly agreed with each statement. Figure 5 illustrates participants' perceptions of teacher education needs for multilingual pedagogy implementation. Participants also highlighted the importance of in-service professional development, with two-thirds indicating that practicing teachers require additional training in this area. Collectively, these findings underscore both the value placed on optimizing student learning and the perceived gaps in current teacher preparation.

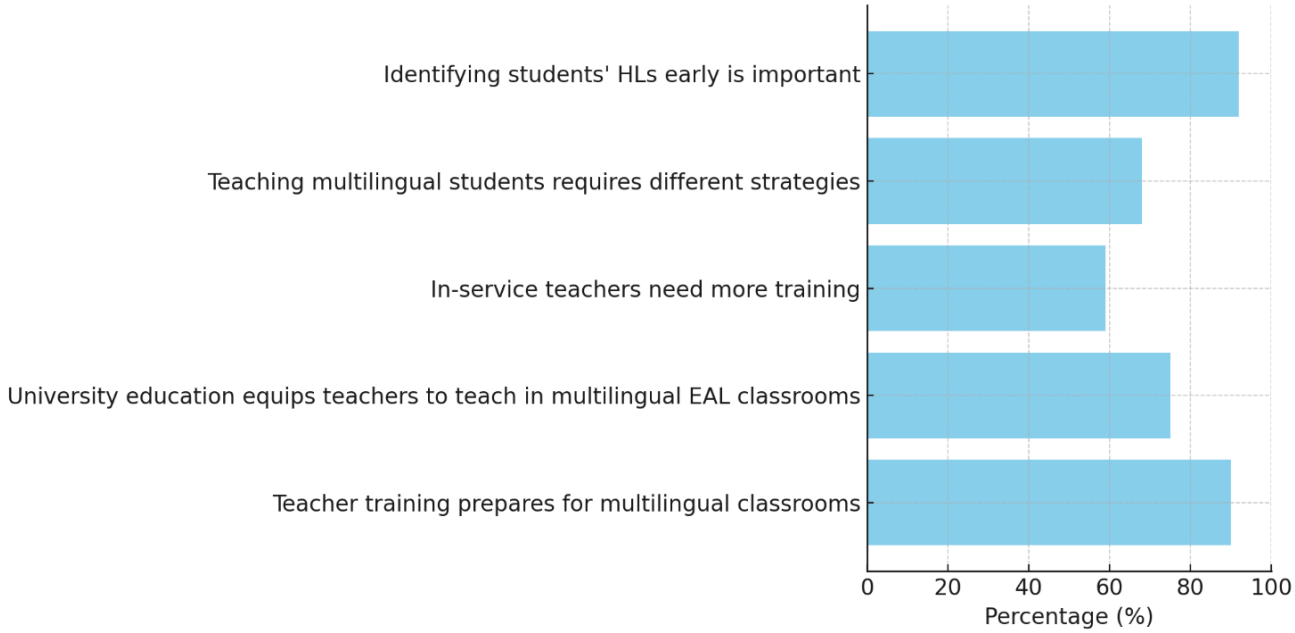

Figure 5 Agreement with Likert-scale statements on teacher training for multilingual pedagogies)

As illustrated, participants also highlighted the need for in-service teacher training, with two-thirds stating that practicing teachers require further professional development in this area. These findings underline both the value placed on optimizing student learning and the perceived gaps in current teacher preparation.

More than two-thirds of respondents believed that teaching multilingual students requires strategies distinct from those used for monolingual learners. However, almost 60% also considered teaching multilingual students more challenging, pointing to the perceived complexity of the task. An overwhelming majority (over 90%) agreed on the importance of identifying the languages students speak early in the academic year as a foundation for effective instruction.

Despite this recognition, responses also revealed tensions and uncertainties about practical application. While 63% believed teachers should incorporate students' HLs into instruction, nearly one-third disagreed. Similarly, over 60% expressed willingness to learn their students' HLs, but one-third argued that multilingual pedagogies should not be implemented unless the teacher speaks those languages. Roughly 20% remained undecided.

A further contradiction emerged in language-of-instruction beliefs. Over 70% of participants stated that EAL instruction should be delivered exclusively in English, even though many supported multilingualism as a norm in schools. This suggests that while student teachers conceptually endorse multilingualism, there is limited consensus, and at times conflicting views, on how to integrate it meaningfully into classroom practice. Figure 6 illustrates these tensions between general support for multilingualism and more restrictive approaches to HL use in EAL teaching.

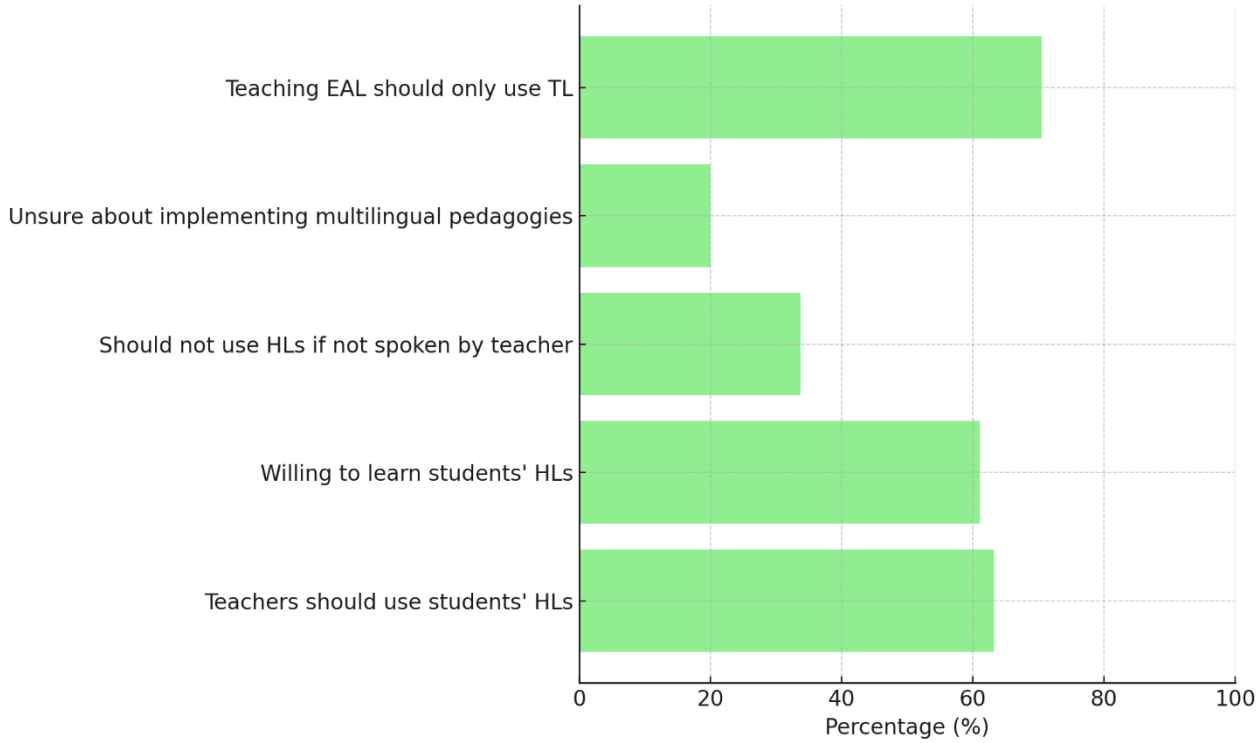

Figure 6 Proportion of participants agreeing with statements related to attitudes towards language use and multilingual pedagogy)

5.3.2 Interview Results

The interviews provided deeper insights into the survey findings, particularly the tensions around applying multilingual pedagogies in practice. Seventeen interviewees agreed that training in multilingual pedagogies is essential not only for effective instruction but also for improving the learning experiences of linguistically diverse students. Many called for more targeted and practical preparation, advocating for sessions that focus on concrete tips, resources, and strategies tailored to diverse classrooms. While they acknowledged the value of theory, several noted a lack of practical application. As one participant put it: “Fostering multilingual pedagogies cannot be achieved if teachers do not have the information, knowledge, and skills to bridge theory and practice.”

Specific strategies highlighted included training to help teachers identify and activate students’ prior linguistic knowledge (mentioned by six interviewees) and the meaningful integration of students’ HLs (mentioned by ten). One suggested collaborative tasks in which students explain concepts to peers in their strongest language, noting the cognitive and emotional benefits of peer scaffolding. Others proposed using visuals and technology to connect languages beyond vocabulary, and two stressed the value of a “bank of concrete examples and lesson plans” to ensure HL use is strategic rather than symbolic. Seven participants expressed concern that current training still treats multilingualism as supplementary rather than foundational.

Despite general support, some interviewees remained cautious. Four questioned the feasibility of using HLs when teachers do not speak them, and five preferred maintaining English as the primary

instructional language, warning that HL use should not "overshadow" TL exposure. Four also worried that overuse of HLs could reduce learners' opportunities to practise the TL, while one feared misinterpretation by parents or schools, who might believe the teacher was not prioritizing English. Another stressed the need for a shared, whole-school philosophy to avoid tensions and inconsistencies.

Several participants underscored that meaningful multilingual competence cannot be achieved through a single course. Eight advocated embedding multilingual principles across teacher education so that diverse classrooms are seen as the norm rather than an exception. Two emphasised that multilingualism should extend beyond language subjects into areas such as mathematics and science. One participant proposed "language awareness workshops" in which future teachers experience learning through an unfamiliar language, fostering empathy for multilingual learners.

Taken together, both the survey and interview findings highlight strong conceptual support for multilingual pedagogies among first-year student teachers, but also reveal significant gaps in practical preparation, consistent pedagogical frameworks, and institutional alignment needed to translate these beliefs into effective classroom practice.

6. Discussion

This study explored student teachers' perspectives on the multilingual realities of Norwegian EAL classrooms. Specifically, it examined how student teachers understand multilingualism, how they perceive multilingual classrooms and the integration of multilingual pedagogies, and how prepared they feel to implement such pedagogies. The findings are consistent with international research that shows teachers often associate multilingualism with quantifiable factors such as the number of languages spoken, their functional use, and fluency, as well as broader socio-cultural dimensions such as identity and background (Dursun et al., 2024; Haukås, 2022; Lange, Pohlmann-Rother, Plohmer, & Müller, 2025). However, the mismatch observed between students' linguistic profiles and their reluctance to self-identify as multilingual reflects an internalized hierarchy of languages and forms of academic gatekeeping, a phenomenon also linked to the influence of language ideologies in educational contexts (Bosch & Doedel, 2024; Flores & Rosa, 2015; Griffiths, Neumann, Zappa-Hollman, & Van Viegen, 2025). Such findings underline the importance of teacher education programs that not only provide theoretical definitions but also engage students in critical reflection on their own language ideologies and professional positionalities, in line with research on teacher cognition (Baral et al., 2025; Borg, 2015; Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015).

While there was general appreciation for linguistic diversity, participants also displayed uncertainty regarding their own multilingual identity and about the nature of multilingual classrooms. This ambivalence echoes research where teachers valued linguistic diversity primarily when coupled with majority language proficiency (Bosch & Doedel, 2024; De Angelis, 2011; Rodríguez-Izquierdo et al., 2020; Zheng, 2025). Similar findings have also emerged from Nordic contexts, such as Krulatz and Dahl's (2016) baseline study, which showed that Norwegian EAL teachers often felt unprepared to meet multilingual demands. Taken together, these studies suggest that teacher cognition is shaped by deeply held ideologies of language status and proficiency, which can constrain teachers' sense of preparedness to engage with multilingual realities.

Our findings confirm research in Norwegian settings that student teachers frequently call for concrete, practice-oriented strategies to support multilingual learners (Benediktsson, 2025; Iversen et al., 2025; Neokleous & Natlandsmyr, 2025; Tavares, 2026; Xu & Krulatz, 2023). They want to see multilingual

practices modelled and integrated into their training. This is consistent with international calls for teacher education to move beyond abstract discussions of language policy and instead provide opportunities for applied practice, such as activating students' prior linguistic knowledge, incorporating HLs meaningfully, and designing collaborative tasks (Angelovska et al., 2020; Beltran-Palanques, Liu, & Lin, 2025; Bosch et al., 2025; Busse et al., 2020; Cenoz & Gorter, 2021; Fang et al., 2022). These insights carry direct implications for curriculum design. Multilingual pedagogies must be embedded across core courses, practicum experiences, and assessment training, rather than confined to optional electives.

The 2020 revision of the Norwegian curriculum explicitly acknowledges the presence of languages other than Norwegian in the EAL classroom and frames them as "an asset at school [for enhancing students' TL knowledge] and in society in general" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020, p. 2). Student teachers in our study expressed support for this orientation, which aligns with similar shifts in teacher-training courses in countries such as Ireland, Greece, and Germany (Gardiner-Hyland & van den Hoven, 2025; Gkaintartzi et al., 2024; Putjata, 2024). However, as international scholarship warns (Gorter & Arocena, 2020), curricular change must be accompanied by opportunities for modelling, experimentation, and reflective practice. Recent research echoes this concern, showing that although teachers often endorse multilingual orientations in principle, they frequently report uncertainty about how to translate these curricular aims into concrete classroom practices (Burton, Wong, & Rajendram, 2024; Morea & Fisher, 2025). Without this, teacher cognition remains dominated by monolingual ideologies, limiting the translation of curricular ideals into classroom realities.

Almost a decade after Krulatz and Dahl's (2016) study, the need for systematic training is even more pressing. Norwegian classrooms have grown more linguistically diverse, echoing international trends across Europe and North America. Some universities, such as NTNU, have developed courses on multilingualism, but research suggests that isolated courses risk marginalizing multilingualism as an "add-on" rather than embedding it as a guiding pedagogical perspective (Barros et al., 2021; Krulatz et al., 2022; Wernicke et al., 2021). To counter this, teacher education must adopt multilingualism as a lens for all aspects of preparation, from subject teaching and assessment to classroom management and student engagement.

At the same time, our findings reveal enduring contradictions. Participants' support for multilingualism was often undermined by a strong belief in English-only instruction, reflecting dominant ideologies of target language immersion (Alisaari et al., 2019; Shin et al., 2020; Slaughter & Cross, 2021; Tannenbaum, Haim, & Shohamy, 2026). Concerns that HL use may confuse learners or hinder TL acquisition reveal the persistence of monolingual norms, even within multilingual contexts. Research on teacher cognition suggests that such beliefs persist because they are rarely challenged during teacher preparation, leaving teachers with limited conceptual tools to reconcile ideology with practice (Deroo & Ponzio, 2023; Tavares, 2026; Van Gorp et al., 2023).

Participants also tended to associate the feasibility of multilingual pedagogies with their own linguistic knowledge and perceived expertise. Research suggests that student teachers may experience uncertainty about how to work with languages they do not know, which can lead them to perceive multilingual classrooms as more difficult to navigate (Busse et al., 2020; Dursun et al., 2024; Lange et al., 2025; Portolés & Martí, 2020). This uncertainty illustrates how teacher cognition is shaped by insecurities about expertise and by limited training in flexible multilingual strategies. Effective multilingual pedagogy, however, does not require fluency in all students' languages. Instead, as international research highlights, it relies on scaffolding, peer collaboration, and language awareness activities (Busse et al., 2020; Conteh & Meier, 2014; Fang, Zhang, & Sah, 2022). Teacher education programs must therefore build not only technical competence but also the affective capacities of confidence, empathy, and reflexivity to help teachers thrive in linguistically diverse settings.

Finally, our findings echo international concerns that many student teachers may not yet fully grasp the realities of multilingual classrooms (Fang et al., 2022; Lucas & Villegas, 2013; Morea & Fisher, 2025; Neokleous & Natlandsmyr, 2025). Limited exposure to multilingual pedagogical theory and practice risks reinforcing unfounded assumptions about HL use and perpetuating monolingual norms. To counter this, teacher education must integrate sustained opportunities for critical reflection, inquiry, and practice. This requires positioning multilingualism not as a peripheral issue, but as central to teacher cognition and professional identity. Only then can future teachers be adequately prepared to create inclusive classrooms that reflect the linguistic and cultural diversity of contemporary Norwegian schools.

7. Conclusion

The present study, conducted in Norway, investigated student teachers' conceptualizations of multilingualism, their perceptions of multilingual EAL classrooms, and their preparedness to implement multilingual pedagogies. The findings point to three central issues. First, student teachers demonstrate conceptual uncertainty: while they can define multilingualism, they struggle to identify as multilingual themselves or to recognize what a multilingual classroom entails. This reflects the continued influence of monolingual ideologies in English language teaching (e.g., Griffiths et al., 2025; Lange et al., 2025). Second, misconceptions persist, particularly the tendency to associate effective multilingual teaching with a level of linguistic and pedagogical expertise that student teachers do not feel they possess. This confirms recent work in Norwegian settings by Neokleous and Karpava (2023), showing that teachers remain underprepared for multilingual practice despite curricular reforms. Third, participants called for practical guidance (e.g., Tavares, 2026). They valued linguistic diversity but lacked confidence and reported too few opportunities to translate theory into practice (e.g., Iversen et al., 2025; Neokleous & Natlandsmyr, 2025).

These findings underscore the urgency for teacher education programs to offer not only theoretical input but also sustained, hands-on training. Currently, the lack of applied strategies and training resources undermines teacher confidence and efficacy. As linguistic diversity in schools continues to increase, comprehensive, research-informed, and practice-oriented teacher education becomes essential for cultivating inclusive, linguistically responsive pedagogies.

The study is limited by its small sample size, single institutional context, and reliance on self-reported perspectives, which may not fully capture classroom practice. Nonetheless, the results reflect key realities in Norwegian EAL classrooms. A more extensive longitudinal design would offer a deeper understanding of long-term challenges and affordances associated with implementing multilingual pedagogies. Future research should therefore draw on larger, more diverse samples across institutions, include classroom-based and longitudinal designs, and pursue comparative studies across national contexts. Such work would enrich understanding of how teacher education systems can best prepare candidates for increasingly multilingual classrooms.

While limited in scope, the present study makes a valuable contribution to the literature by highlighting the realities of Norwegian EAL classrooms and reinforcing the need for systemic changes in teacher education, moving beyond symbolic support for multilingualism toward tangible pedagogical readiness.

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