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**Critical Literature Review**

## **Plurilingual Pedagogy in Switzerland: Practices and Challenges**

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**ABSTRACT.** This literature review aims to evaluate current implementations of plurilingual practices in the context of Swiss education and determine how such practices are perceived by instructors and students, both in terms of effectiveness and engagement. The works of literature chosen for the review consist of studies that measure Swiss teacher and student attitudes towards plurilingualism and its use in the classroom as well as how plurilingualism teaching methods appear in practice. Analysis shows that there is a disconnect between plurilingual instruction in theory and in practice, with multilingualism viewed largely as a collection of multiple monolingual systems. Such compartmentalization of multilingualism impacted both how successful Swiss instructors were at meaningfully enacting plurilingual measures and students' perceptions of their linguistic resources. While several instructors and students held beliefs affirming the value of multilingualism, instructors expressed difficulty in allowing students to draw on their full plurilingual repertoire, and many students reported that they did not feel encouraged to do so. It is clear that more resources and research are needed for the individual role-players of the Swiss education system to fully implement a true plurilingual shift in education. This article attempts to address these issues through a meta-analysis of qualitative findings to understand why plurilingual practices have not yet universally taken hold in response to the current plurilingualism discourse in SLA studies.

**RÉSUMÉ.** Cette revue de littérature vise à évaluer la mise en place actuelle des pratiques plurilingues dans le contexte de l'éducation suisse afin de déterminer comment ces pratiques sont perçues par les enseignants et les apprenants, et ce, en termes d'efficacité et d'engagement. Les travaux sélectionnés pour cette revue de littérature sont des études qui mesurent l'attitude des enseignants et des apprenants suisses quant au plurilinguisme et à son utilisation en salle de classe ainsi que la façon dont les méthodes d'enseignement du plurilinguisme transparaissent dans les pratiques enseignantes. Les analyses montrent un décalage entre l'enseignement plurilingue théorique et pratique, avec le multilinguisme généralement considéré comme des ensembles de plusieurs systèmes monolingues. Ce cloisonnement influence la façon dont les enseignants suisses adoptent de manière significative des mesures plurilingues, aussi bien que les perceptions qu'ont les apprenants de leurs ressources linguistiques. Alors que plusieurs enseignants et apprenants croient en la valeur du multilinguisme, les enseignants ont exprimé avoir des difficultés à permettre aux apprenants de s'appuyer sur leur répertoire plurilingue complet. D'ailleurs, plusieurs apprenants ont rapporté ne pas se sentir encouragés à le faire. Il est clair que davantage de ressources et de recherches sont nécessaires afin de permettre aux praticiens du système éducatif suisse d'amorcer un véritable virage plurilingue en éducation. Cet article tente de soulever ces problématiques à travers une méta-analyse de résultats qualitatifs afin de comprendre pourquoi les pratiques



plurilingues ne sont pas universellement établies en réponse à l'actuel discours sur le plurilinguisme dans les recherches en acquisition des langues secondes.

**Keywords:** *Plurilingualism, translanguaging, multilingual, Switzerland.*

**Mots-clés :** *plurilinguisme, approche translangagière, multilinguisme, Suisse.*

## **BACKGROUND**

There is a general consensus in the current plurilingualism discourse in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) studies that the field lacks research and action to support translanguaging practices in education—defined here as the positioning of students' multilingual abilities as resources for learning (Cummins, 2014). To facilitate the pursuit, we have chosen to focus on the multilingual nation of Switzerland to investigate translanguaging practices in education. The initial idea of the current study was to examine a place where plurilingualism appeared to be convenient, if not already embraced, in order to focus more directly on evidence of plurilingual pedagogy and its effects. We learned fairly quickly, however, that the assumption that Switzerland was a context that nurtures multilingualism and naturally lends itself to heterogeneous, cross-linguistic interactions, is, in fact, false. After reviewing only a few studies, the truth of a very monolingual-based society was revealed. In reality, Switzerland's seemingly multilingual population is divided among four official, regional languages. This fact seems to go against the encouraging information found on Swiss language policy championing multiculturalism as mandated by the government and enforced by educational institutions. The discovery forced a different path for this article: Rather than describe the successful plurilingual practices of a multilingual nation, we instead aimed to understand the disparity between official policy and practical reality. In examining areas of Switzerland where translanguaging practices were in place, our intention became to determine what the immediate players—the teachers and students—thought about them. We therefore endeavored to gather as many real-life accounts regarding translanguaging, such as case study interviews, observations, questionnaires, and surveys. We analysed those documents to reveal potential patterns among opinions and draft generalisable statements that may contribute to our understanding of plurilingual pedagogy, as these would be relevant to SLA research that aims to address the increasing pressures of globalisation and subsequent increase of multilingual migrant students. Therefore, in this article, our goals were to determine: a) how teachers and students in Switzerland view translanguaging practices within their educational system, and b) if and how Swiss teachers and students use translanguaging practices in the classroom. Our analysis revealed that approaches and attitudes towards plurilingual practices in this seemingly-multilingual context are, at best, mixed.



## **Historical Origins of Swiss Multilingualism**

The unique, multilingual composition of Switzerland originated with Napoleon's 1789 forced unification of three language regions, after which French, German, and Italian became recognised as national and official languages under one common republic: Switzerland. Romansch was added as a fourth national language in 1938 (Diem et al., 2020; Csillagh, 2015; Kuzelewska, 2016). In a section entitled "Languages", the constitution calls for multiculturalism to be observed in the lawmaking process among the cantons (i.e., Swiss states). The country's official name, *Confoederatio Helvetica*, implies a certain pride in equality through the use of Latin, a "neutral" language (Kuzelewska, 2016). The consequences of war and territorial conquests led to political negotiations that established the multilingual Swiss identity (Giudici & Grizelj, 2017), which set the foundation for a common theme in literature of Switzerland as a successfully linguistically and culturally diverse nation (Kuzelewska, 2016).

## **National Language Policy**

As a result of this evolved multilingualism, recognition of the four different populations—German-, French-, Italian-, and Romansh-speaking—seemed to create a sort of nationalistic fervour. Learning additional languages became part of the patriotic identity of the Swiss people (Giudici & Grizelj, 2017), and promoted a feeling of social responsibility and dedication towards language teaching (Csillagh, 2015). As mentioned previously, most Swiss are used to learning a language other than the dominant language of one's region; the multilingual setting is acknowledged by the national Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (CDIP), who seek to "promote understanding among Swiss citizens" (Csillagh, 2015, p. 438). In 2009, to fulfil this commitment and in reaction to the effects of globalisation, the tradition of studying a second language in primary and secondary education became a requirement to become comparably fluent in both an L1 and an L2 (Daryai-Hansen et al., 2015). This new pressure, according to Daryai-Hansen et al. (2015), prompted one school in a French-speaking canton to mandate a curriculum precisely for cultivating plurilingualism through integrating pluralistic approaches that endorse the complete use of a student's linguistic repertoire—in this case, French, German, and English. The creators of this programme understood quite well the ambition behind such an approach, as well as how pertinent it was to facilitate a student's connections between prior and current knowledge to reach plurilingual competence (Daryai-Hansen et al., 2015). The challenge of promoting multilingualism continues into post-secondary education in institutions such as the University of Lausanne (UNIL), where diversity is deeply embedded in its mission statement, one that stresses the inclusion of every student's multilingual and multicultural background (Yanaprasart & Lüdi, 2018). Thus, it can be established that plurilingual efforts have been made on a national scale by way of educational institutions.



## **Institutionalised Bilingualism in Official Bilingual Towns**

Some universities have the added benefit of being located within municipalities that have declared themselves officially bilingual—a declaration that reinforces the perceived necessity of plurilingualism in Switzerland. Certain towns, such as Biel/Bienne and Freiburg/Fribourg, are even bilingual by name. Some universities in these towns not only promise bilingual instruction, but proudly promote it by welcoming usage of all other L1s (Schaller-Schwanner, 2018). This level of inclusivity benefits populations like the plurilingual students enrolled at the language centre at the University of Freiburg, where the diversity of L1s among students often forces communication in the common language of English (Neuner-Anfindsen, 2013). Nevertheless, these young internationals are privileged with the choice to take exams in either French or German. That privilege reflects the “consensual cohabitation” status of French and German in these bilingual communities (Elmiger, 2015, p. 35). That is; the mutual acceptance of both languages due to their shared daily functionality is why plurilingualism can be assumed to be integral to these bilingual Swiss societies.

## **The Importance of Translanguaging**

To emphasise the importance of focusing on an educational perspective of translanguaging, an instrument of plurilingualism, what must first be specified is the difference between a multilingual individual in society and a multilingual learner in the classroom. As Horner and Weber (2018) have stated, there is a presumption that multilingualism maintains languages as “bounded entities which are countable” (p. 4). This presumption is upheld by the linguistic boundaries perpetuated by Switzerland’s geographical demarcations. However, the linguistic separations imposed by geography cannot be applied to a multilingual student’s linguistic resources. The cognitive processes of an individual who speaks more than one language do not involve accessing each language separately, but represent a more “dynamic” model of multilingualism, where lines between languages are flexible and interact with one another (García & Woodley, 2012). Especially in a language learning situation, each language is its own resource, yet all collaboratively contribute to receiving and producing information. This essentially describes translanguaging, a process that enhances language learning and should be taken advantage of in a classroom setting (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Cummins, 2014). The educational context of Switzerland, with both its historic co-existence of four language communities and its customs surrounding second national-language learning (Horner & Weber, 2018), should present an ideal case study for evaluating whether plurilingual teaching methods are being employed successfully. But to understand why Switzerland enforces the teaching of additional languages in schools, we must first consider the nation’s history.

## **Realities of a Multilingual Nation**

In Switzerland, the combined efforts of history, federal and local governments, and individual school policies ultimately result in an idealised vision of a balanced multilingual nation, reflected in various facets of Swiss life and policy, from the principles that aim to unite multilingual



regions, to the campaign for equally multilingual educational institutions. Multilingual planning of a country does not ensure multilingual citizens (Kuźelewska, 2016). The image of a multicultural environment upheld in Switzerland's historical timeline of events is nothing more than a federally-sanctioned ideology, which merits discussion of what is actually being administered on the cantonal level (i.e., whether canton-level multiculturalism is disparate from federal-level ideology). The education system of Switzerland is decentralised, with multilingual initiatives such as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) programmes implemented largely through local, rather than federal, initiatives (Bieri, 2018). While there is evidence of "true" plurilingual techniques being used in the business sector, implemented to avoid risk of potential economic repercussions from multilingual communication breakdowns (Csillagh, 2015), we have yet to examine if any pluralistic intentions at the societal level originate from translanguaging practices inside classrooms, where progress towards a more profound Swiss multilingualism could be measured.

At a preliminary glance, it appears that the Swiss heterogeneity observed on the surface is quite homogeneous underneath, and the country's attempts to unify several territories seem only to result in a shared border from neighbouring countries rather than a unified Switzerland in its own right. Within that border, linguistic boundaries are upheld, which fuels a sense of monolingualism within the nation (Cotelli, 2013). Moreover, that Switzerland is the sum of a quadrilingual coexistence of communities is only somewhat true, as German and French are the two dominant languages, synchronous with how the cantons are populated, meaning in reality, the country can identify as bilingual at most (Kuźelewska, 2016). Yet even this bilingualism is second to a monolingually-driven mentality—evident in students' limited competency in their second or third languages—that results from inconsistency in policy implementation with regard to school curricula (Giudici & Grizelj, 2017). The fact is, the legislation pressuring fluency in multiple languages complicates the lives of the learner, because it creates countless linguistic choices that challenge one's identity in academics, society, and at home. Even an L1 German student, least threatened among Swiss learners thanks to linguistic majority and educational accessibility, still must deal with the situational diglossia in all of Switzerland, where spoken Swiss-German is considered informal and "lower" than the standard German of instruction (Horner & Weber, 2018, p. 5). Curiosity leads us, consequently, to how these various circumstances are handled on a personal level and on a daily basis, especially when little research in this regard has been conducted (Elmiger, 2015). It became our interest to investigate further the attitudes of the teachers and learners meant to fulfil the authorised expectations of a multilingual nation, and to investigate their actions and opinions towards the pedagogical use of translanguaging.

## **ANALYSIS**

### **Current Swiss Plurilingual Pedagogical Practices**

In Switzerland, plurilingual strategies—mainly translanguaging strategies—are encountered at all levels of education. As a result of increased globalisation, the number of international



students at universities has risen. Some teachers have adapted to this change by making more extensive use of English as a lingua franca in the classroom (Schaller-Schwaner, 2018). These attempts to accommodate all students have resulted in innovative plurilingual approaches. For example, students at the French-predominant University of Lausanne are encouraged to ask questions in other languages, through an anonymous question application, if they are unsure of their English (Yanaprasart & Lüdi, 2018). In another instance, a physics professor at the German-predominant Bern University of Applied Sciences used both German and French terms to refer to the process of “wave-jumping” in order to eliminate any confusion with “bending,” as it would be interpreted in German (Gajo & Berthoud, 2018, p. 860). Further, a pre-law course at the German-speaking University of Zurich encouraged three bilingual students to use their L1s—two native German-speakers and one native French-speaker—as a resource in determining the meaning of French legal terminology (Gajo & Berthoud, 2018). This last example of multilingual practice involved a degree of collaboration, which created plenty of opportunities for students to use their full plurilingual repertoires to deepen their understanding of the jargon. Still more universities have sought to expand students’ individual multilingualism. Since its founding in 2003, the Language Centre at the University of Basel has experienced increased enrollment in language courses other than German and English (Meyer et al., 2013). More notable, however, is the university’s development of curriculum encompassing German, French, and Italian in the form of a transdisciplinary, multilingual course, *Kommunikationstraining im mehrsprachigen Umfeld*, which allows students to draw on their core academic disciplines to present information in multiple languages (Meyer et al., 2013).

Plurilingual practices are not restricted to university settings. At the secondary school level, evidence of translanguaging practices is seen in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) programmes. Due to Switzerland’s de-centralised education system, CLIL programmes are mainly implemented through individual initiatives, rather than formal government or cantonal policy (Bieri, 2018). Such decentralization of education impacts plurilingual programmes beyond CLIL. For example, the canton of Berne has implemented a programme called *passepartout*, which aims to shift approaches to language teaching and learning from monolingual to plurilingual. The curriculum was developed based on third-language (L3) acquisition research and includes acknowledgement of the full capacity of students’ complex linguistic resources (Lundberg, 2019). Certain other plurilingual approaches aim to include students’ home languages in the classroom. For example, in areas of German-speaking Switzerland, foreign-language textbooks and curricula encourage the use of home languages (e.g., cross-linguistic comparison between German, home language, and foreign language) in plurilingual activities, with the intent of promoting both multiculturalism and plurilingualism (Peyer, et al., 2020). Thus, primary schools and universities alike face the issue of finding commonalities among differing linguistic repertoires. It is difficult to make generalisations about the extent of plurilingual practices’ use in Swiss education because of variability among classrooms, but there is a clear trend towards both valuing and implementing plurilingual pedagogies.

However, no current shift towards more plurilingual pedagogies is immune to the human tendency to compartmentalise language—to view a person’s known languages as independent



from each other. For example, Schaller-Schwaneer (2018) has explained how the canton of Fribourg's actual bilingual practices are more in line with parallel bilingualism, or *twin monolingualism* of French and German, rather than multilingualism. Use of either German or French is perceived as "intended for their respective L1 speakers" (Schaller-Schwaneer, 2018, p. 119). Institutional expectations prioritise the use of German and English over other languages—including Fribourg's co-cantonal language, French (Meyer et al., 2013). Fribourg's aforementioned *passepartout* curriculum aims to connect languages, yet each language is treated as a separate unit in scheduling and planning. Despite the programme's stated ideology that language learning is a lifelong practice and that other languages are resources rather than obstacles, the schools in which *passepartout* has been implemented have historically aligned themselves with the idea of institutional linguistic separation, treating each language as fixed within its own space (Lundberg, 2019). It is clear that national values of harmonious plurilingualism are still falling prey to monolingual lines of thought. Meyer et al. (2013) noted positive growth in course enrollment at the University of Basel's Language Centre and proposed project guidelines in an attempt to counter compartmentalisation. However, to date, no follow-up study has been done, and projects and programmes in line with Meyer et al.'s suggestions have been neither implemented nor studied. Even so, teacher and student opinions regarding CLIL, *passepartout*, and the increased use of students' home languages in the classroom offer evidence of a struggle between plurilingual pedagogy and monolingual ideology.

### **Student and Teacher Attitudes to Plurilingual Pedagogy in Switzerland**

Fostering multilingualism is widely perceived as beneficial by both students and teachers; it is seen as offering students more resources and opportunities. For example, when surveyed, a group of Swiss teachers overwhelmingly agreed with the statement "Multilingualism is good for all of us!" (Lundberg, 2019, p. 5). Another study found Fribourg University students felt the same; many recognised the importance of plurilingualism and cited it as necessary for success in academia as well as in their future careers (Meyer et al., 2013). A similar consensus regarding beliefs about multilingualism and pedagogy was found among primary school instructors in German-speaking Berne, including the beliefs that teachers should support the development of their students' individual multilingualism, and that translanguaging strategies are and should be permitted in the classroom (Lundberg, 2019). Yet despite cases of teachers promoting translanguaging strategies, the predominant opinion in the Swiss education system favours plurilingual attitudes but continues to use monolingual practices. Two teachers observed to use translanguaging strategies in CLIL courses stated that they viewed their classrooms as "idealised monolingual spaces" (Bieri, 2018, p. 103) and noted that encouraging students to speak English was difficult. Both teachers' attitudes were influenced by their confidence in immersion as beneficial to language learning: The stricter the focus on the target language, the more students will learn (Bieri, 2018). These findings suggest that instructors in Switzerland—potentially guided by institutional perspectives—have underlying monolingual ideas about how to foster individual students' multilingualism. Swiss teachers further evidenced that they held beliefs about language based around notions of linguistic compartmentalization. Despite majority support for fostering plurilingualism in individual students, teachers largely opposed what they considered "forced trilingualism" (Lundberg, 2019, p. 6) and the use of translanguaging



practices in the classroom. Furthermore, implicit beliefs that language is compartmentalized appear prevalent among both students and teachers. Almost forty-six percent of surveyed students at a Language Centre at the University of Basel expressed a desire to use their knowledge of languages other than German in their studies, but did not feel encouraged to take advantage of opportunities to do so (Meyer et al., 2013). Teachers' beliefs that translanguaging is disruptive or forced may have led university students to assume that only one language could be used at a time, for a single purpose. Additionally, there is a tendency to assume that a multilingual student's competency in each language is equal, as seen in a study by Peyer et al. (2020), where the common assumption made in primary schools was that migrant children had balanced, monolingual-like competency in their home languages—a belief that became problematic when implementing plurilingual methods of instruction. When examining this issue, Peyer et al. (2020) noted that students are "supposed to be competent and fluent speakers (and writers) of their home languages" (p. 10) by teachers and other students. That study found that many primary school students in the study did not know how to answer requests for words in their home languages; even if they knew the word, they often did not know how to write it. Parallel bilingualist assumptions can turn attempts at pluralistic strategies into embarrassing moments for learners.

Consistent inadequate implementation of plurilingualism, such as that described above, highlights a broader issue: Instructors lack proper training and resources in plurilingual pedagogy. In a framework proposed by Galante et al. (2019), success in implementing plurilingualism in English for Academic Purposes programmes was contingent on: 1) support from the administration, 2) the institution's openness to all languages; that is, an acknowledgment of students' full linguistic repertoires, 3) collaboration between policy drafters (in this case, researchers) and policy practitioners, and 4) the degree of learner-centredness of the tasks. In the current analysis, Galante et al.'s four key factors seemed consistently absent across the Swiss context. For example, in many instances of *comparons nos langues* tasks in Peyer et al.'s (2020) study, teachers' reactions to students' cross-lingual comparisons were shallow. Rather than elaborating on plurilingual students' input, teachers often had nothing more to say than "interesting" (p. 12). Teachers' choice of words—particularly the phrase "your language" (p. 10)—when asking a student how to say something in their L1 implied, unintentionally yet problematically, that migrant students could not claim Swiss German as *theirs*. Thus, while the teachers were attempting to foster an openness to all languages, they lacked the knowledge to do so effectively. For example, it was apparent that the instructors were ill-prepared to make use of input from non-Germanic or non-Romance languages in particular. One quarter of the students—whose L1s were overwhelmingly derived from linguistic families other than Germanic or Romance—reported that their home languages had never been included in class prior to the study (p. 6). The way tasks were made "learner-centred" also presented issues. When students with a home language that was not an official Swiss language were asked whether they liked their home languages being included in the classroom, over half responded that they did; however, over 6% stated that they were embarrassed by it. Reasons for feeling embarrassed included self-perceived lack of home-language proficiency, and fear that their language would "sound weird" to other children (p. 6). Overall, Peyer et al.'s study demonstrated that, where plurilingual practices are in place, they are not meaningful without



teachers' full understanding of the purpose of the activities or how to empower, rather than single-out, multilingual students

Problems with implementing plurilingual pedagogy extend beyond multilingual primary schools. For example, at the University of Lausanne, the Director of the Center of Languages admitted that "a number of teachers do not do enough to exploit students' linguistic resources" and instead "stay in a monolingual perspective of teaching and communicating" (Yanaprasart & Lüdi, 2018, p. 831), despite the school's fervent support of plurilingualism practices to promote diversity. This is another example of a lack of openness to languages—which would actively encourage students to draw on their full linguistic resources (Galante et al., 2019)—on the part of the teachers, as well as evidence of a disconnect between the policies promoted by the university's Diversity Officer and the practicing teachers (Yanaprasart & Lüdi, 2018). Difficulty implementing plurilingual teaching practices was particularly common amongst non-foreign (i.e., Swiss) language teachers (Lundberg, 2019). Exceptionally, one teacher observed and interviewed in Bieri's (2018) study cleverly incorporated plurilingual practices into his non-CLIL biology course: He carried over his CLIL strategy of comparing the roots of unknown words to words students may know in English, French, and in some cases, Greek. Bieri also noted that biology was a great context for translanguaging practices because of its high number of English and Latin borrowings. However, in Bieri's study, incorporation of plurilingual practice was unique to the one instructor, and that instructor still believed a multilingual student's languages existed as separate entities.

Thus, reported perspectives on plurilingual education often demonstrate an inaccurate understanding of what such practices entail. Even after undergoing training in plurilingual pedagogy, teachers may misinterpret the intentions behind plurilingual curricula. For example, in Zurich, an experimental introduction to English as a language of instruction in primary schools, known as School Project 21, treated English as a tool for communication rather than as a separate subject (Stotz & Meuter, 2003). Though teachers involved in the experimental programme underwent language and methodological training prior to and during the study, there remained a tendency to oversimplify translanguaging as "switching to English" (Stotz & Meuter, 2003, p. 90). Although School Project 21 was never fully implemented, its particular issues appear to further exemplify both a tendency to view multilinguals' languages as compartmentalised, and a lack of understanding of plurilingualism as a practice. And while other plurilingual programmes have taken hold, many teachers involved maintain monolingual interpretations of plurilingual methodology. Lundberg (2019) states this succinctly: "Changes in teachers' beliefs and pedagogical approaches take time and only happen if the teachers are convinced that the modifications are for the better" (p. 3).

## **Globalisation and the Shifting Linguistic Landscape**

It is impossible to ignore the consequences that globalisation has had on language education and language use in Switzerland. In some cases, English is taught as an additional language before any national languages; for example, this typically occurs with French in German-speaking cantons. Concerns about English potentially undermining Swiss national identity



persist; for example, when Zurich gave priority to English over French as a second language in its primary schools, the balance of Swiss language policy was perceived as being threatened, and “a major language-ideological debate” known as the *Sprachenstreit* resulted (Horner & Weber, 2018, p. 92). However, despite concerns, the value of English as a lingua franca (ELF) has been widely recognised. Universities in particular make great use of ELF. Over 80% of students at the University of Basel reported in a survey that they considered English to be “very important” for their future careers (Meyer et al., 2013, p. 415). Due to globalisation, universities are increasingly composed of international students, which leads to classrooms in which students speak a variety of L1s. In a study that observed translanguaging practices in one beginner German and one beginner French class at the bilingual University of Fribourg, both teachers used English as a resource for explaining features of grammar. When interviewed, the German teacher explained that she had tried using French for this purpose, but not enough students in the class had knowledge of French, either as an L1 or an additional language (Schaller-Schwane, 2018). Further proof of ELF’s instrumental value is found in TESOL practitioners’ perceptions of global Englishes. Though “traditional” English classrooms are based on “native English norms”, a survey conducted by Murray (2003, as cited in Cameron & Galloway, 2019) revealed that 67.6% of the 253 surveyed English teachers working in Switzerland wanted more respect for non-native Englishes (p. 152). The survey did not investigate the origins of teachers’ attitudes, but it served to demonstrate current trends of English use as a tool for communication among speakers of varying L1 backgrounds. The increase in popularity of ELF poses challenges additional to perceived threats to nationalism. English proficiency is becoming a necessity to academic success, particularly at the university level. This causes students concerns surrounding their English competencies, and ties academic success not to knowledge, but to how well one can use their linguistic repertoire to represent what they know (Meyer et al., 2013). It appears that English is considered an important resource in Swiss universities, but is one that comes with its own set of challenges.

## **DISCUSSION**

It is apparent that more research is needed concerning attitudes towards plurilingual classroom practices from instructors and students in Switzerland, as well as clear frameworks for implementing language policy. Current evidence shows that while there is a shift towards plurilingual pedagogy in the Swiss education context, it is not being implemented consistently, leaving many of those involved in Swiss plurilingual education unable to reap its potential benefits. This is an ongoing struggle familiar to action researchers (e.g., Bieri, 2018; Galante et al., 2019; Peyer et al., 2020) and current teachers pursuing graduate education (e.g., the authors), who are continually trying to narrow the gap between theory and practice to within a collaborative distance. Despite evidence of beneficial cross-linguistic comparisons being made in Swiss classrooms, prevailing ideas surrounding linguistic compartmentalisation interfere with efforts towards plurilingualism in Swiss education, mostly because those in the field have not been adequately informed by those in the laboratory. Swiss teachers are ill-equipped to take full advantage of students’ linguistic knowledge because they are largely unaware of how plurilingual methods of instruction benefit comprehension and processing. That is, Swiss teachers lack the understanding of the cognitive benefits of plurilingual pedagogy that



researchers have, and thus may undervalue or misinterpret plurilingual curricula. However, a training programme initiative could potentially address this situation and improve the circumstances that many teachers, like those in the CLIL and non-CLIL courses discussed earlier, are creating for their students. Maintaining critical awareness of powerful and existing attitudes that directly influence learner motivation is imperative for teachers, as these factors affect overall language acquisition and development, and any programmes designed to train teachers to use plurilingual strategies effectively must be research-informed.

Likewise, better understanding and implementation of plurilingual pedagogy will allow Swiss students to recognise opportunities to use their full linguistic repertoire. Without appropriate and explicit encouragement from informed teachers, students may become discouraged by feelings of awkwardness or fears of rejection when using languages other than the language of instruction or the dominant language of society. Furthermore, the advantages of effective cross-linguistic comparisons will benefit learners of all levels. This claim has been supported by Piccardo and Galante (2018), who stated that exercising the functional aspect of translanguaging, which draws on personal experiences for content used in communication and social interaction, not only promotes learner agency and validates a person's prior knowledge, but also avoids "linguistic homogenisation and stimulates heterogeneity" (p. 158) in the language learning environment. Without this wisdom, Thus, by treating multilingualism as the sum of multiple sets of monolingualism, rather than as a plurilingual toolbox, the Swiss education system denies students the ability to maximise the full potential of their linguistic repertoire for personal, educational, and societal benefit.

Unfortunately, research to date provides little insight into the particular viewpoints of Swiss students and how receptive they are to plurilingual education, which creates difficulty for implementing plurilingual programmes. Few studies address how students in Switzerland perceive the role of their linguistic competencies in their studies. Peyer et al.'s (2020) study on primary school children addressed the growing trend towards "valorisation" of home languages and its impact on students. The study makes it apparent that, in reality, sociopolitical factors influence how Swiss plurilingual programmes function. Just as teachers may be ill-equipped to implement bi/multilingual teaching practices and curricula, students may feel under-capable of engaging in plurilingual activities. Even without the push for translanguaging pedagogy, one author of this paper has experienced a range of L2 learner beliefs within the extremes of two opposite camps of thought: Some of her L2 students have argued for the necessity of use of L1 resources in the classroom, while others have expectations of full immersion through use of the L2 alone. Without research on Swiss students' perspectives regarding plurilingual strategies, it is difficult to see whether or not students have internalised the idea of languages as separate entities. The inconsistent learner beliefs found in the research reinforces the need to support learners and teachers by sharing the pedagogical gains seen in plurilingual studies. More research on student attitudes towards and perceptions of plurilingualism will strengthen current findings and offer further evaluation of the effectiveness of current and potential practices.

Nevertheless, there exists support for developing students' multilingualism in the Swiss context, and pedagogical practices that reflect that support are being implemented at local and cantonal



levels. Ultimately, however, the success of plurilingual pedagogy in Switzerland boils down to individual players. To date, not much has changed since Meyer et al.'s (2013) study. Projects following their proposed guidelines—that is, those that take a cross-disciplinary approach that requires cross-linguistic and cultural analysis—have not been widely reported on. It is difficult to know where progress has been made. Several studies since Meyer et al.'s have identified similar issues of policies founded on beliefs of languages as separate entities, lack of training for instructors, and a general misunderstanding of what plurilingual practices are and why they are effective. It is no surprise that Swiss teachers have not made much headway in successfully integrating these strategies in their classrooms. The clearest solution is to evaluate current training offered to teachers working in settings such as universities, CLIL classrooms, L1-diverse classrooms, and in the *passpartout* programme, and identify any shortcomings. New guidelines for training should include thorough definitions of multilingualism, plurilingualism, and how translanguaging works to enhance learning. The Swiss context faces the challenge of a decentralised federal government; changes to curriculum in one canton are unlikely to be implemented in another. Given that many current programmes are the result of individual initiatives—for example, by university language centres, or parents seeking CLIL courses for their children—any spread of plurilingual strategies among Swiss classrooms will likely continue to be inconsistent and variable.

## **CONCLUSION**

Plurilingualism is not about “switching to another language” for part of a lesson. It involves cross-linguistic references that serve as bridges for students’ understanding. It allows students to draw on their resources—linguistic or otherwise—and to reevaluate content from the perspective of an additional language. It encourages students to use what they know to decipher what they do not know. For plurilingualism to be successful, participation must be active and meaningful. An analysis of the Swiss educational context reveals that language education continues to lack a truly plurilingual perspective. As long as globalisation continues to be the driving force it is today, the ongoing trend of mixed-language classrooms is in no danger of disappearing.

To combat that danger, educational programs, such as those in Switzerland, must keep a few key points in mind. First, previous attitudes towards plurilingual education and separation of languages are outdated and unrealistic. However, these attitudes remain highly prevalent, even in a nation like Switzerland, which prides itself on its harmonious multilingualism. Reeducation on how plurilingual students can use their languages as resources is needed. Misconceptions regarding immersion and exposure, translanguaging, and supposed limitations of plurilingual strategies must be thoroughly addressed and countered when implementing educational programmes that make use of plurilingual pedagogy.

Finally, the compartmentalisation of languages that persists in institutions and attitudes alike is problematic, and is far from unique to Switzerland. It is a deep-seated belief that is difficult to counter. Ideologies aligned with monolingualism and multilingualism treat languages as separate systems. However, once it is recognised that students using their L1s or other



additional languages in class is an opportunity for, rather than an obstacle to, immersion and exposure, teachers have the potential to seize the moment and contribute to student success—provided the resources are in place to do so. It is imperative that, as we continue forward in our globalised, increasingly multilingual world, we adapt systems of education that no longer reflect the linguistic reality of today's students, and embrace research-based initiatives towards plurilingual classrooms.

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