

In-service and pre-service language teachers' beliefs about plurilingualism and pluri-interculturalism in schools

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One of the specific objectives of the LEA project was to elaborate a questionnaire to analyse the beliefs that both in-service and pre-service language teachers have with regard to plurilingualism and pluri-interculturalism in schools. Having now fulfilled this objective, we present the most pertinent findings in order that they may contribute to the aims of the LEA project, which revolved around developing awareness and positive attitudes to diversity in educational contexts, enriching language teacher education and facilitating curricular changes which incorporate plurilingual and pluri-intercultural dimensions.

This research has been a success in terms of participation. In total, 675 informants from 23 European countries completed the questionnaires. Of these, 289 were in-service teachers and the remaining 386 were in pre-service teacher training. The ages of the participants ranged from 16 to 75 years.

The first part of the questionnaire collected the participants' bio-data. The next section included open-ended questions about informants' personal teaching experiences. Then, participants were asked to respond on a likert scale to various measures of attitudes and motivation in regard to plurilingual and pluri-intercultural activities in their classrooms. The next section asked informants to indicate whether they did any plurilingual and pluri-intercultural activities with their students and to describe these activities. Finally, the in-service teachers in the study were asked to respond to a number of measures related to the realities of their jobs.

In analysing the data, one of our interests was to see if there were any differences between in-service and pre-service teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards introducing plurilingual and pluri-intercultural activities in their classrooms. The main findings show that pre-service teachers have less favourable attitudes in this regard than in-service teachers. Among the latter, the most experienced teachers demonstrated more positive attitudes than their less experienced colleagues.

We also found that the more experienced teachers were most in favour of integrating such activities into the school curriculum. These teachers also believed that these kinds of activities can help teachers to change their teaching style and can influence the content and objectives of the lessons in order to make the process of teaching and learning more beneficial. Furthermore, they believed that plurilingual and pluri-intercultural activities may help to integrate families of immigrant origin into the school life by incorporating cultural exchanges into the fabric of the school.

Moreover, the most experienced teachers indicated that using plurilingual and pluri-intercultural materials encourages student autonomy in searching for reference materials, leads students to transfer skills and positive attitudes to other non-language specific areas of the curriculum and accelerates the learning of other languages. They also remarked that students became more aware of language systems in general and became more able to recognise non-familiar sounds, words and structures from languages they had never learnt before.

To sum up, this research provides support for the benefit of using plurilingual and pluri-intercultural activities in classrooms, that foster language awareness, positive attitudes towards languages and their speakers and that encourage knowledge transfer. These activities also have a positive influence in driving teachers to change their teaching style to better suit the globalised world in which we operate.