

Teachers' beliefs on multilingualism in the Basque Country: Basque at the core of multilingual education

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ABSTRACT

The present study analyzes teachers' beliefs by looking at the value teachers give to the languages embodying multilingualism in the south of the Basque Country (Basque, Spanish, English and French). The research has a mixed methods design. On the quantitative side, the sample consists of 1093 in-service, pre-service and university teachers who completed an online questionnaire about multilingualism. On the qualitative side, 20 in-service teachers participated in several focus group discussions. The study revealed that the participants hold strong positive beliefs about a Basque-focused trilingualism. The data confirm protective beliefs toward the minority language, Basque, but also reaffirm the integrative and supportive beliefs of teachers toward multilingualism and the inclusion of other languages, especially English. Although these teachers connect multilingualism with natural, positive and enriching characteristics, our data show that they do not seem to value French. A major implication of the findings is that teachers' beliefs align with the current school of thought supporting up-to-date multilingual approaches in a context where a minority language under revitalization process coexists with a national-state language and a *lingua franca*.

1. Introduction

The exploration of teachers' beliefs can be of great value as they 'serve as guides to actions' (Fischer & Lahmann, 2020, p. 2) and could therefore directly affect teachers' behavior, choices and practices (Pajares, 1992). In multilingual settings, particular attention has been paid to the beliefs teachers hold on multilingualism (e.g., Alisaari et al., 2019; Haukås, 2016; Lundberg, 2018; Portolés & Martí, 2020), especially after a paradigm shift in multilingual education that has challenged monolingual ideologies and advocated for softening boundaries between languages (Cenoz & Gorter, 2019a; Conteh & Meier, 2014).

This study explores the way teachers understand multilingualism but also how they value each of the languages present in the official curriculum of the Basque Country. By doing so, it seeks to enrich the discussion on views on multilingualism within a multilingual education system where a national language, a minority language and a *lingua franca* are present. Therefore, this paper is likely to be of interest to other contexts where language diversity is characteristic. In addition, this paper is unique in that it explores the beliefs of three groups of teachers: in-service primary school teachers, pre-service teachers and university teachers. By comparing the beliefs of these three target groups, we aim at exploring possible tendencies toward a change in the understanding of multilingualism and valuing the main languages present in our schools. The results of this study will contribute to further advancing knowledge in this inquiry.

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2. Theoretical framework

2.1. The context of the Basque Country

The Basque Country is made up of seven territories on both sides of the Pyrenees, between Spain and France (see Fig. 1). Three of them (Lapurdi, Nafarroa Beherea and Zuberoa) belong to the northern part of the Basque Country called *Iparralde* (the North), located in the French domain. In terms of administration, the other four territories (Araba, Bizkaia, Gipuzkoa and Navarre) are separated into two neighboring autonomous communities: the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC) and the Foral Community of Navarre. In this paper, the beliefs of the teachers of these two autonomous communities in the Spanish territory, the South of the Basque Country, will be investigated.

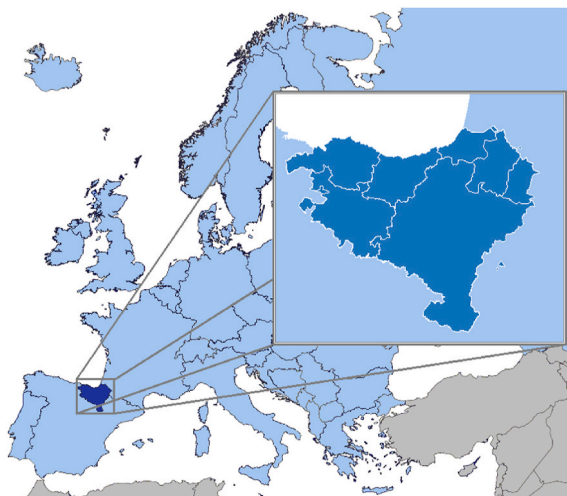


Fig. 1. Map of the Basque Country."

Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basque_Country_\(greater_region\)#/media/File:Euskal_Herria_Europa.png](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basque_Country_(greater_region)#/media/File:Euskal_Herria_Europa.png).

2.1.1. Bilingualism in the south of the Basque Country

The legal and official status of Basque is different in Navarre and the BAC. In the BAC, Basque and Spanish are official languages since the Statute of Autonomy in 1979. In 1982 the Law of Normalization of Basque ensured the right to decide in which linguistic model students in basic education could enroll (see Table 1). This fact has led to a considerable promotion of Basque since the 1983/138 Law Decree was issued.

However, the situation of the minority language in Navarre is rather complex. The province is fragmented into three linguistic zones restricting the legal status and the teaching of Basque (see Fig. 2): the Basque speaking zone in green, the mixed speaking zone in yellow and the non-Basque speaking zone in red. Due to the 1986/18 Foral Law, Basque has official status only in the Basque speaking zone, i.e., in the northern part of the community. The teaching of Basque is also limited to this linguistic zoning. For instance, learning

Table 1

Linguistic models in the BAC and the Foral Community of Navarre.

| Linguistic model | Description of the model |
|------------------|--|
| Model A | Spanish is the main language of instruction and Basque is taught as a subject. |
| Model B | Both languages are equally balanced as languages of instruction. |
| Model D | Basque is the main language of instruction and Spanish is taught as a subject. |
| Model G | Spanish is the language of instruction and Basque is not part of the school curriculum. This model is only available in Navarre. |
| Model X | Spanish is the language of instruction and Basque is not part of the school curriculum. It is only available in the BAC and it usually gathers very few students living temporarily in the region. |



Fig. 2. Linguistic zonification in the Foral Community of Navarre.

Source: Nabarlur, 2017

Table 2

Distribution of Primary School linguistic models in the BAC and Navarre.

| | Model A | Model B | Model D | Model G/X |
|---------------------|---------|---------|---------|-----------|
| BAC (2020/2021) | 3.2% | 17.6% | 78.4% | .8% |
| Navarre (2018/2019) | 14.4% | .7% | 17.3% | 66.9% |

Source: Eustat (2021) and Nastat (2021).

through Basque is only possible in the Basque-speaking zone and some areas of the mixed speaking zone. The enrollment data by linguistic models in both the BAC and Navarre are shown in Table 2.

As can be seen in the case of the BAC, model D is the most popular option. Even though this model was originally designed as a maintenance program for L1 Basque students, today Basque immersion programs gather students with different linguistic backgrounds in the same classroom (Cenoz & Gorter, 2019a). As for Navarre, the program with no Basque in the curriculum is the most widespread alternative all along the territory, being the enrollment rate in the model D substantially lower than in the BAC.

The choice in the linguistic model has a direct effect on the knowledge of Basque. The VI Sociolinguistic Survey (2016) indicated that, in the BAC, the high rate of enrollment in model D had a positive impact on the youngest generations, as 71.4% of the population between the age of 16–24 and 49.3% between ages 25–34 have the highest mastery level of Basque. Due to the linguistic zoning and the consequent limitations to enroll in the D model, the situation is different in Navarre. In the Basque speaking zone, only 13% of the population is Spanish monolingual, but the percentage increases to 77% in the mixed zone and up to 90% in the non-Basque zone.

2.1.1.2. From bilingualism to multilingualism in the south of the Basque Country

European institutions encourage that all European citizens have knowledge of two other languages in addition to their L1. In line with that, one of the main aims of the Basque education system is to ensure that students achieve an adequate proficiency level in the two official languages, and a sufficient level in the foreign language within a multilingual education system that has Basque as its foundation (Basque Government, 2019).

English and French are the most spoken foreign languages in the south of the Basque Country. Although French used to be the main foreign language, English is today the most studied foreign language for the majority of Basque students due to globalization and its status as a lingua franca. In Navarre, 49.4% of the population older than 15 have some knowledge of English, and 30.1% know a little bit of French (Government of Navarre, 2020). According to a study conducted by the Basque Government (2017), around 45% could 'speak and write', 'just read' or 'just speak' in English in the BAC, while 20% have some knowledge of French.

The survey also showed that 95% of Basque people considered the learning of foreign languages as 'quite important' or 'very important' and 68% were happy with the value given to the teaching of foreign languages by the education system. In fact, in the last years, both administrations in the south of the Basque Country have implemented programs to foster multilingualism such as the early introduction of English at the age of four or English-medium programs. To a lesser extent, French is also taught and learned in schools in the Basque Country, although it is usually the second foreign language studied and is often optional.

2.2. Multilingualism

Multilingualism is not only a societal phenomenon. Economic globalization, the democratization of new technologies, the increasing transnational mobility and migration have also facilitated the integration of multilingualism in educational settings.

In this respect, as boundaries between the languages embodying multilingualism are becoming softer (Cenoz & Gorter, 2022), multilingual speakers have abundant linguistic resources at their disposal and use them naturally for communicative purposes, academic goals and learning additional languages (Tedick & Lyster, 2020). In other words, multilinguals make more flexible use of their linguistic repertoire (García & Wei, 2014) and, although they seem to recognize those boundaries to be artificial, identify themselves as multilingual identities (García & Otheguy, 2020).

This research understands multilingualism as the characteristic of acquiring at least a second language and being able to use them to communicate effectively without placing barriers with theoretical proficiency levels for each of the languages (Cenoz & Gorter, 2019a). Historically, multilingualism has been understood from a monolingual point of view, requesting to demonstrate the unattainable native speaker level in each of the languages the multilingual speaker knows (Conteh & Meier, 2014). This idealization has fed the monolingual myth and brought the multilingual speaker to hardly achievable linguistic goals, affecting the way languages have been taught in the classroom (Cenoz & Gorter, 2019a). Traditionally, multilingual speakers' knowledge about the languages has been ignored and the languages building up multilingualism in the curriculum have been taught isolated from each other (Cenoz & Gorter, 2019a, 2022; Conteh & Meier, 2014; García, 2009; May, 2014).

The conception of multilingualism has moved to more holistic grounds thanks to the contributions of The Multilingual Turn (Conteh & Meier, 2014), and the reality in the Basque Country is not an exception as this European region has shifted from the bilingual scope to the multilingual (Cenoz & Gorter, 2019a). Even though the features of the Basque educational context favor multilingualism, the hard and traditional boundaries between the languages still make their integration complex in the Basque educational context (Gartziarena & Altuna, forthcoming b; Gorter & Arocena, 2020).

2.3. Teachers' beliefs on multilingualism

Beliefs are extremely difficult to define due to its inconsistent definition, lack of conceptualization, unlike understanding and its inner complexity (Pajares, 1992). However, beliefs are reckoned to form systems on individuals to decode the context and to adjust the teaching practice to the classroom reality (Zheng, 2013). More precisely, those systems do not only command the cognitive processes but also regulate the external and internal factors such as specific aspects of the context and their unique teaching experiences (Kalaja & Barcelos, 2019). Teachers' beliefs refer to what teachers know, think and expect (Borg, 2011), and provide a basis to guide conscious and unconscious teaching practice (Borg, 2015). As for language teaching, beliefs about learning languages are decisive, since they classify the information inferred by teachers in the classroom to direct and modify their teaching practice (Li, 2012). In resume, beliefs serve as a guideline for teachers as teaching practices tend to be mirrored in those beliefs. Therefore, investigating teachers' beliefs is key to comprehending educators' understanding of multilingualism and becoming conscious about the approaches they use when implementing multilingualism in educational settings (Vikøy & Haukås, 2021).

2.3.1. In-service teachers' beliefs on multilingualism

Several international investigations have contributed to the knowledge about teachers' beliefs about multilingualism. In the case of in-service teachers, the study of Haukås (2016) investigates the beliefs about multilingualism of Norwegian language teachers from a qualitative perspective. The findings show that teachers hold positive beliefs toward multilingualism and toward the languages representing multilingualism in the Norwegian educational context. The teachers also reported that their linguistic repertoire had helped their own language learning process, although they seem unable to make conscious use of these learning benefits with students. Teachers teaching an additional language use the students' knowledge of the L1 and L2, but they are unlikely to make use of these metalinguistic strategies when teaching the L2.

In a similar study, Alisaari et al.'s (2019) quantitative study investigates 820 teachers' beliefs about multilingualism in Finland. The data show that teachers hold positive beliefs about multilingualism and consider previously learned languages to be beneficial to learn new ones; however, many of these teachers did not consider migrant students' home languages as learning resources, and in this sense, the researchers request specific training for teachers to shape their existing beliefs toward linguistically responsive teaching and more multilingual approaches. In the Swedish context, the quantitative study conducted by Lundberg (2018) also shows parallel conclusions with the previous research as the teachers in this study also have positive beliefs about multilingualism. Teachers showed welcoming beliefs on the introduction of more than one working language in the same lesson and subject. Digging deeper, Lundberg's (2019) qualitative research describes teachers' beliefs about multilingualism in the German-speaking area of Switzerland. The research explores teachers' beliefs in the Swiss educational settings after the educational reform and the consequent shift toward more multilingual plans. One of the conclusions drawn is that despite the existence of varied and fragmented ways to understand multilingualism, there is a minimum consensus about the value and the need of multilingualism in school contexts in order to enhance heteroglossic teaching practices and to respond to the migrant students' linguistic needs and multilingualism more effectively.

In the Basque context, the conclusions drawn by Arocena et al. (2015) are aligned with the previous studies as positive views of multilingualism were reported by Basque and Frisian teachers. A more recent study conducted by Gartziarena and Altuna (forthcoming a) in the south of the Basque Country confirms that in-service teachers have a positive set of beliefs toward multilingualism and protective beliefs toward the minority language. A last contribution from Gorter and Arocena (2020) indicates that effective training courses are able to shape teachers' beliefs about the languages of the curriculum, language separation in the classroom, the use of the

linguistic repertoire and the implementation of more multilingual approaches when teaching.

2.3.2. Pre-service teachers' beliefs on multilingualism

With regard to pre-service teachers' beliefs, Fischer and Lahmann (2020) analyzed to what extent teachers' beliefs on multilingualism can be influenced after a course on linguistically responsive teaching. The post-evaluation results confirmed that the course had a positive effect on modulating German pre-service teachers' beliefs toward multilingualism. The participants also showed more supportive attitudes toward integrating other languages in the classroom after completing the course. Indeed, Iversen's dissertation (2020) explores Norwegian pre-service teachers' first encounter with multilingualism in field placement. The data from four focus group discussions (N = 24), linguistic autobiographies (N = 6) and classroom observations showed that these pre-service teachers did not have an adequate understanding of multilingualism and considered themselves monolingual speakers of Norwegian. Although the participants were hesitant to engage with multilingualism during field placement, the findings showed that they actually made use of students' multilingual repertoires in the classroom when necessary.

One of the few studies investigating pre-service teachers' views on multilingualism in the Spanish context is that of Portolés and Martí (2020). The study, set in the bilingual region of Valencia, showed that although holding positive beliefs toward multilingualism and multilingual education, these pre-service teachers also showed some monolingual ideologies such as the younger the better. In the Basque Country, a parallel study investigating pre-service teachers' beliefs about multilingualism (Gartziaarena & Altuna, forthcoming b) mirrored the conclusions drawn in the Valencian context.

As seen in the lines above, several studies in different contexts have explored teachers' views on multilingualism and multilingual approaches to teaching. However, to our knowledge, no study has yet explored this issue by comparing the beliefs of in-service primary teachers, pre-service teachers, and their trainers, i.e., university teachers. The exploration of these three groups of teachers is of interest as it might give us information about possible generational changes on the value given to multilingualism and the languages spoken in the area of the Basque Country. A study was designed to answer the following research question:

What are the beliefs of pre-service teachers, in-service teachers, and university teachers regarding the languages in the curriculum and multilingualism in the Basque Country?

3. The study

3.1. Objectives and overall design

The aim of the study is to report teachers' beliefs about the value they give to the four languages of the curriculum in both territories of the south of the Basque Country. The foremost goal is to explore and describe the major characteristics of those beliefs and then make comparisons between the three target groups and the four languages. This article intends to give insight into the languages teachers believe to be of high value toward the Basque multilingual education and draw attention to the existing differences between the three key actors in this area: university teachers, in-service teachers and pre-service teachers. The main findings in this paper are key to comprehending the specific beliefs teachers currently have and that future generations may have.

In order to address the research objectives, the investigation adopted a mixed methods design combining questionnaires and focus groups. Although the study is constructed mainly on a quantitative foundation, the qualitative data from the focus group discussions were also used to contrast, compare, reinforce and deepen knowledge. This research approach is common when using mixed-methods because "a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena arises from a researcher's simultaneous look at the phenomenon from two perspectives" (Joslin & Müller, 2016, p. 1044).

3.2. Questionnaire

This study is part of a larger study that analyzed the beliefs of teachers on multilingualism and language teaching methodologies. A large-scale online questionnaire based on previous investigations carried out in the DREAM research group was designed in order to gather the level of agreement toward the statements reflecting teachers' beliefs about the languages. The full questionnaire was closed structured and Likert-Scale, with a range from 0 to 4 from very low value to very high with a neutral choice in the middle. Five research members of the research group DREAM and eight volunteering in-service teachers piloted the questionnaire. The questionnaire was available in Basque, Spanish and English and consisted of three main parts based on concrete areas of research: first, specific beliefs about multilingualism with 11 items; second, beliefs about language learning with 28 items; and third, beliefs about language teaching methodologies with 25 items. As for this study, out of the whole, four items measuring the value teachers gave to Basque, Spanish, English and French were selected. The four items corresponded with the questions 'How much do you value Basque/Spanish/English/French?'

The questionnaire took less than 30 min to fill. The participants filled in the questionnaire online in the academic year 2017/2018, through e-mail invitations that were sent ensuring anonymity and freedom to participate. The link to the questionnaires was active for nearly two months. Gentle reminders and follow-ups were sent again in that time period and an e-mail address was facilitated to answer and to solve any question or problem during their participation.

3.3. Background characteristics of the sample

With regard to the quantitative side of the study, the sample (N = 1093) that filled in the questionnaire consisted of three different

groups of teachers: university teachers (N = 111), in-service teachers (N = 418) and pre-service teachers (N = 564). The quantitative results of the three groups will be compared and contrasted.

Delving deeper into the main characteristics of the teachers filling in the questionnaire, Table 3 presents the common aspects of their profiles such as sex, age and mother tongue. University teachers had, on average, 17.2 years of teaching experience, while in-service teachers had 18.6. As for the pre-service teachers, 21.1% were in the first academic year of the degree, 35.3% in the second, 22.3% in the third, 17.2% in the fourth and 4.1% were in additional academic years.

In the case of the in-service teachers, 84.4% were currently teaching in model D, 6.2% in model B, 4.8% in model A, 2.6% in model G and 1.9% taught in other models. Of the pre-service teachers, 19.1% were enrolled in the university degree in pre-primary education, 79.1% were students in the Primary Education degree and 1.8% indicated other related training courses. Table 4 shows the data about the linguistic model the teachers attended during their schooling years.

Concerning the in-service teachers' teaching profile, 69.4% were language teachers and 30.6% were content teachers. University teachers were asked whether they had ever given lessons in pre-primary and primary schools, and interestingly, more than half of the university teachers (54.1%) had some experience in pre-primary or primary education. Table 5 gives data about the in-service and university teachers' languages of instruction.

On the other hand, the qualitative data in our study was obtained from four focus group discussions, in which 20 in-service primary school teachers took part. The focus group discussions were semi-guided and semi-structured, with the intention to have less structural limitations and a more relaxed environment that helped interaction between the participants as it "usually reveals more about subjects' point of view than would be the case with a researcher-dominated interview" (Ary et al., 2013, p. 408).

Participants were recruited through email invitations. The four focus groups were held toward the end of the 2017/2018 academic year and the beginning of 2018/2019. All four focus groups were sex-balanced and lasted around 1 h each. In-service teachers had the chance to choose between Basque, Spanish and English, and in all four cases, Basque was chosen as the language of communication. During these meetings, they were asked about the following topics: the personal meaning of multilingualism, their understanding of multilingualism, the relationship between multilingualism and their school, students' and families' understanding of multilingualism and the value given to the languages in the school curriculum of the South of the Basque Country.

3.4. Data analysis

The data were analyzed by using SPSS (26th version) and four one-way ANOVAs were conducted to compare how each group valued the four languages. Tukey HSD post-hoc analysis was conducted to compare the statistical significance between the three groups of teachers. The new means were calculated with the values teachers gave to the languages ranging from 0 to 4, from very low value to very high. The model was based on López-Roldán and Fachelli's (2015) model, explaining that ANOVA calculations can be made with groups with more than 30 participants. The effect size magnitudes, eta-squared (η^2) and Cohen's d (d) were calculated (Cohen, 1988; Sawilowsky, 2009). With regard to the qualitative data, the software Atlas.ti (8th version) was used for analysis.

Concerning anonymity and confidentiality, this study obtained the approval from the Ethics Committee (UPV/EHU) and followed their research procedure and guidelines for data collection and analysis (identification code: M10_2017_143). To preserve participants' anonymity, codes are used when reporting teachers' words in the results section. The codes used in the results chapter for the in-service teachers' excerpts can be summarized in the following example: FGN2. The first two letters mean Focus Group, the third the province (in this case, Navarre) and the identity number of the participant.

4. Results

In this chapter, we present the main findings of the questionnaires and the focus groups. The ANOVA analysis investigates how the three groups of teachers relate to multilingualism. Afterward, selected excerpts from the in-service teachers' focus group discussions will be added.

4.1. Quantitative findings of the teachers' beliefs on the value of the languages

Four one-way ANOVAs were conducted to compare the differences on how each group valued the four languages. Again, the dependent variables ranged from 0 to 4, so a high mean score indicates teachers hold beliefs that value the languages positively while a low mean score shows the opposite. There were significant differences between the three target groups and Basque [$F(2, 1090) = 3.407, p = .033, \eta^2 = 0.006$], Spanish [$F(2, 1090) = 4.559, p = .011, \eta^2 = 0.008$], English [$F(2, 1090) = 3.154, p = .043, \eta^2 = 0.006$] and French [$F(2, 1090) = 70.654, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.115$]. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test showed the differences

Table 3
Teachers' common background characteristics.

| Teachers | Sex | | | Age (M) | Mother tongue | | | |
|----------------------|-------|--------|------------|---------|---------------|---------|-------|-------|
| | Male | Female | Non-binary | | Basque | Spanish | B + S | Other |
| University teachers | 29.7% | 66.7% | 3.6% | 45.2 | 39.6% | 53.2% | 7.2% | 0% |
| In-service teachers | 19.9% | 79.2% | .9% | 43.3 | 41.6% | 45.5% | 12.4% | .5% |
| Pre-service teachers | 21.8 | 77.1% | 1.1% | 21.2 | 36% | 44.1% | 19.1% | .6% |

Table 4

Teachers' data about the schooling model immersed in school years.

| Teachers | A model | B model | D model | G model | Other |
|----------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|-------|
| University teachers | 21.6% | 6.3% | 44.1% | 27.9% | .1% |
| In-service teachers | 23.2% | 8.9% | 47.8% | 18.4% | 1.7% |
| Pre-service teachers | 1.4% | 9.4% | 88.3% | .9% | 0% |

Table 5

Teachers' data about the language of instruction.

| Language of instruction | Basque | Spanish | English | Basque and Spanish | Basque and English | Others |
|-------------------------|--------|---------|---------|--------------------|--------------------|--------|
| University teachers | 45.9% | 8.1% | 3.6% | 26.1% | 9.9% | 6.4% |
| In-service teachers | 50% | 3.8% | 9.8% | 25.7% | 6.7% | 4% |

between the groups of teachers for each of the languages (see Table 6, only significant findings reported). In the case of Basque, the mean score for the group in-service teachers was slightly higher ($M = 3.6$, $SD = 0.8$) than for pre-service teachers ($M = 3.5$, $SD = 0.8$) and that difference was statistically significant ($p = .048$, $d = 0.15$) with a small effect size. For Spanish, the differences in the mean scores between university teachers ($M = 3.2$, $SD = 0.8$) and pre-service teachers ($M = 3$, $SD = 0.9$) resulted to be statistically significant ($p = .019$, $d = 0.28$) with a small effect size. With regard to English, there was a statistically significant difference ($p = .036$, $d = 0.31$) between university teachers' ($M = 3.2$, $SD = 0.8$) and in-service teachers' ($M = 2.9$, $SD = 0.9$) mean scores with a small effect size. Regarding French, the mean score of university teachers ($M = 2.3$, $SD = 1.1$) had statistically significant differences with in-service ($p = < .001$, $d = 0.41$) and pre-service teachers ($p = < .001$, $d = 1.01$).

4.2. Qualitative findings of the in-service teachers' beliefs on multilingualism

In-service teachers were asked about their beliefs on multilingualism and which languages constructed their definition of multilingualism in the Basque educational context. This question had the mission to break the ice and gain their general overview about these specific languages. In general, in-service teachers in the two territories shared similar beliefs about multilingualism in the Basque Country. They believed the mission of their educational center was to push multilingualism, being Basque the core language as well as gaining knowledge in Spanish and English. Excerpt 1 illustrates this belief:

Excerpt 1

FGA2: For the Ikastola, multilingualism is an objective. One of our goals is that students achieve similar proficiency levels in Basque and Spanish, and a good command of English too.

Another teacher added to this that they focused on training students' communicative skills and pursued natural relationships with the languages and multilingualism. Excerpt 2 gives evidence of that belief:

Excerpt 2

FGN1: Multilingualism is guaranteed in our school, isn't it? Students are immersed in Basque throughout compulsory education. Many students learn Spanish at home and learn English at school thanks to our methodology. They start communicating at an early age. Students keep this relationship with the languages since childhood. Multilingualism is natural for them.

In-service teachers understood languages as a communicative resource and tried to find a balance between the three languages. In general, in-service teachers held positive beliefs about multilingualism:

Table 6

Tukey HSD post hoc comparison between the groups and the mean scores about the value of each language.

| Multiple Comparisons | | | | | |
|----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|------------|-------|-----------|
| Language | (I) Target group | (J) Target group | Std. Error | Sig. | Cohen's d |
| Basque | In-service teachers | Pre-service teachers | .1 | .048 | .15 |
| Spanish | University teachers | Pre-service teachers | .1 | .019 | .28 |
| English | University teachers | In-service teachers | .1 | .036 | .31 |
| French | In-service teachers | Pre-service teachers | .1 | <.001 | .59 |
| | University teachers | In-service teachers | .1 | <.001 | .41 |
| | | Pre-service teachers | .1 | <.001 | 1.01 |

Excerpt 3

FGB5: I believe that multilingualism gives further and greater opportunities than monolingualism. In that sense, being multilingual is always enriching! And the more languages involved, the better, right?

This belief is common in the Basque society: the more languages you are able to learn the better. Teachers consider multilingualism to bring more opportunities and to provide a brighter future for students. In fact, students' families give extra value to multilingualism, especially to learning English, and excerpt 4 can be illustrative to confirm that there has been a progression toward more integrative views toward the languages in the educational context:

Excerpt 4

FGN3: I think there has been a huge change, and now it -multilingualism- does look like a benefit, doesn't it? Students enroll in different language academies, especially to learn English. And yes, I think families in general believe that learning languages at an early age is positive.

FGN4: I agree with you. I think it is crystal clear that attitudes have changed over the years. I've been teaching here for many years, and I still remember what they said at the beginning of my career: that the bilingual model was detrimental to students' brains. They said that to harm Basque. Today, nobody says such things.

Experienced teachers can provide evidence of that shift. Nowadays, families welcome multilingualism and value languages highly. They seem to believe that learning more languages is a natural fact, and at the same time, old negative discourses against the minority language have ceased. In this sense, English has gained high value and is constantly escalating positions among the four languages that constitute multilingualism in the Basque society. However, when the key actors in education are asked directly about their thoughts on the most important language to learn, out of the four, they hold tacit beliefs toward the minority language, as excerpt 5 reveals:

Excerpt 5

FGN1: Basque in the first place, as we have to keep and care for it, and as the other languages have their own weight and support. Then, I think that Spanish is relevant in everyday life, but I would place English and Spanish at the very same level. Then I would also place French there.

In-service teachers have developed protective beliefs toward Basque. They demonstrate to be fully aware of its fragile situation and the solid and secure base of both lingua franca. In that sense, they hold a strong belief about guaranteeing that solid ground for Basque in the educational context as excerpt 6 reflects:

Excerpt 6

FGG2: As we live in the Basque Country and we have our own and rich language, I would say: if we do not value Basque, who will?

5. Discussion

The main focus of this research was to investigate how pre-service, in-service teachers and university teachers relate to multilingualism in the Basque Country. The study reported here shows the divergences and common points between the three groups of teachers about these specific languages. Overall, the three groups had positive beliefs toward Basque, Spanish and English.

In fact, it seemed that teachers shared a common belief: French is not regarded as a language of minimum value. This situation suggests that teachers do not consider it worthwhile to add French to the languages embodying multilingualism in the south of the Basque Country. Out of the three groups, only university teachers appeared to value this language at an acceptable level. Nevertheless, the large effect size of the significant differences between this group and the other two may be illustrative. In-service teachers do not value French and pre-service teachers appear to value it even to a lesser degree. The gap between university and pre-service teachers mirrors the decreasing value they give to this language. At the same time, another conclusion may be drawn indirectly, as data suggest that teachers in the south of the Basque Country value Basque, Spanish and English positively, or in other words, trilingualism.

The significant differences of the pre-service teachers indicated that they consider Basque to be the most valuable language and even give a central and distinctive position to it. It is important to note that the present evidence may rely on the revitalization process and the effort put by the Government to promote Basque in the educational sphere. Additionally, data suggest that this finding is shared with the other two groups of teachers in indicating that teachers place Basque at the center of multilingualism along with Spanish and English. This finding is in line with [Cenoz & Gorter's \(2019a\)](#) analysis of the situation of minority languages that coexist with a national state language alongside English in the European context. From the findings of our study, we can conclude that Basque Education goes beyond bilingualism and fosters multilingualism, placing Basque as the core language of the curriculum and giving equal level and status to Spanish and English.

The qualitative data from the in-service teachers coincided with the quantitative to highlight the pivotal role of the minority language. Teachers' strong and positive beliefs toward trilingualism were revealing and seemed more open to learning French and

other languages than the quantitative findings revealed. Our findings confirmed that teachers' protective beliefs toward Basque were not discriminatory, as they firmly believed multilingualism to be natural, positive and enriching. The only drawback data showed might be the dubious value teachers give to French. As explained in the introduction of the paper, the Basque Country is made up of three different administrations, two of them located in the Spanish territory and one in the French. In this sense, the fact that the territories on the Spanish side do not value French may create a linguistic barrier between the cross-border communities. The limited promotion and presence of French in the southern Basque society or the fact that French is taught as a second foreign language to only a reduced number of students may be possible explanations for this finding. Nevertheless, it might be an excellent opportunity for Basque to become the bridging language between both communities. Thus, this fact may increase the use and presence of the minority language on one hand, and expand the understanding of multilingualism in the whole Basque Country on the other.

The qualitative findings made it clear that in-service teachers try to find a balance mainly with Basque, Spanish and English. This group holds strong beliefs toward the idea "the more languages the better", but only if Basque is given a key role, as they are well aware of the vulnerable situation of the minority language. The findings in this investigation are consistent with research showing teachers' positive beliefs about multilingualism (Alisaari et al., 2019; Arocena et al., 2015; Gartziaarena & Altuna, forthcoming b; Gorter & Arocena, 2020; Haukås, 2016; Lundberg, 2018). Lundberg's (2019) research about multilingualism in the German speaking Switzerland can be extrapolated to the Basque situation. This research concludes that teachers are constantly trying to establish and ensure the transmission of positive beliefs toward multilingualism as an integrative attitude toward the languages as a natural reaction to the heteroglossic reality that challenges the existing monolingual identities. These findings corroborate the ideas of García & Otheguy (2020), who explain that multilinguals are more flexible users of the languages and build their identities up as multilinguals. It is interesting to note that almost all teachers in this investigation placed Basque at the very center as the core language constituting their own multilingual identity, and position themselves as multilinguals.

To conclude, experienced in-service teachers confirmed the evolution and the progression of multilingualism in the Basque Country. Their long and rich testimony is key to comprehending how negative beliefs of families and society have moved to more integrative grounds. This shift is particularly significant for Basque. There has been a development in the monolingual discourse with respect to the minority language, moving from a context of detrimental and monolingual beliefs to a more holistic and sustainable reality. From an international scope, softer boundaries between languages are normalizing multilingual learners' linguistic resources for communicative and learning purposes (Tedick & Lyster, 2020) by using their linguistic repertoire more flexibly (García & Wei, 2014). The general European reality and the specific sociolinguistic context of the Basque Country have led to shaping beliefs toward welcoming the integration of English but with a special focus on the minority language (Cenoz & Gorter, 2019b).

6. Conclusion

Our findings have explored what present and future educators think about the languages present in their school curriculum. These teachers' beliefs are a reflection of a strong multilingual education system with a minority language as its core element that has reached that point thanks to years of effort on the revitalization of the language, in which Basque-immersion schools have been a key element. Teachers show great language awareness as they understand that each language has its role in the puzzle of multilingualism, being the minority language part of their identity that needs to be protected, the national language also essential for their everyday life, and seeing the foreign language as an instrument that provides future generations with better opportunities in life.

Thus, teachers' views show that minority language education is compatible with the learning of other languages, whether national languages or foreign languages. Although sociolinguistic and cultural factors differ from context to context, this finding may be of interest for policy makers in other contexts with minority languages or local languages that see English become the main language of schools and their societies.

To develop a more detailed picture of the matter under scrutiny, further research should investigate how these beliefs are reflected in classroom practices while exploring if teachers' pedagogical action is oriented toward multilingual approaches that use multilingual repertoires as a tool in the teaching and learning process.

Authorship and copyright

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