

2 Implementing Translanguaging in an Assessment-Based Education System: The Emerging Challenges for a Multilingual Primary School in the Canton of Zurich, Switzerland

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Introducing translanguaging in education requires time and is today still far from being ‘widely recognized across educational contexts’ (Hornberger & Link, 2012: 240) such as in the Swiss context for example. Several authors have offered insightful and practical thoughts and ideas for translanguaging in classrooms or in schools (Cenoz & Gorter, 2015; Cenoz & Santos, 2020; Charamba, 2023; García & Kleyn, 2016; García *et al.*, 2017; Menken & García, 2010), albeit often in ethnic minority or immigrant contexts. In these cases, the emphasis is on language acquisition as a need for integration or is ‘underpinned by a social justice agenda’ (Juvonen & Källkvist, 2021: 1; Wang *et al.*, 2025: 11).

The current research is, however, embedded in relatively new territory. It seeks to identify the challenges that emerge when translanguaging is implemented in a multilingual school where a strict competition-based assessment system is practised and in which families enrol by choice. In their introduction, Juvonen and Källkvist (2021) list a number of terms originating from several authors to define translanguaging in education, mostly defining it as ‘pedagogy’ or as ‘practice’ in the classroom (Cenoz & Santos, 2020; Lin, 2020; Tian *et al.*, 2020). Our chapter is primarily a

reflection on 12 years of action research and teacher training in a school where a translanguaging pedagogy and practice have been gradually introduced amid monolingual cantonal examination practices.

This chapter contains three main sections. The first briefly outlines the particular context in which this research was conducted, followed by an overview of its framework and methodology. The second identifies factors that initially impeded the implementation of translanguaging and how these factors were addressed. The third section, the focus of this publication, analyses the implementation and the impact of translanguaging in an assessment/evaluation-based school system. It examines the way both teachers and children perceive translanguaging and looks into key issues pertaining to assessment.

Context

Despite Switzerland's rich linguistic diversity, this diversity is not reflected in the language teaching practised in most cantons, from kindergarten to secondary level. [Gorter and Cenoz \(2016\)](#) suggest that owing to increasing language diversity in classrooms and new demographics, this de facto multilingualism in classrooms is forcing school language policies to change and to consider new holistic approaches, especially in the areas of policy and assessment. In Switzerland, such reconsideration is not yet the case for translanguaging, with the exception of exploratory debuts in some bilingual cantons. Currently, translanguaging belongs to more modest, private educational undertakings.

The school in our study was founded in 2004 and started to implement a translanguaging pedagogy in 2010. This school is characterised by a mixture of shaped and natural multilingualism: Children are taught three school languages simultaneously, often additional to their home language(s).

The school is in the canton of Zurich, Switzerland. In most Swiss cantons, learning practices in state schools are based on a 'transfer of knowledge' method regularly assessed with grades. This is the case in Zurich. Applying translanguaging in such a learning and assessment context may at first appear problematic, leading to discord and unrest among teachers and parents. The lack of knowledge on how to merge translanguaging with the required assessment systems for all three languages was indeed a source of unease for both teachers and parents.

The school accommodates over 350 children from the age of 6 months to the end of primary school at age 12, with 90 staff members across all departments and an overall spread of 25–35 different nationalities among staff and children. All classes are taught in English and German. French is introduced in kindergarten, first as an extracurricular subject and then, from the first primary year onwards, is fully integrated into the weekly school programme.

Teaching is 100% project- and enquiry-based in the first grades. By Grade 6, this percentage drops to 10%. The same applies to the overlap in co-teaching. The presence of an English co-teacher gradually decreases in the upper primary grades, with a focus on German as the target language in anticipation of Zurich's cantonal examinations. German and mathematics are the only two subjects tested for admission to secondary school.

Framework and Methodology

Our interest and research in introducing translanguaging as a pedagogy and practice into this school required important adjustments, such as taking the multilingual classroom ecology into account. In this context, a translanguaging pedagogical strategy had to be specifically developed so that translanguaging lessons could be designed, planned, trained for, implemented and evaluated. The adopted approach was to create and offer intensive and regular in-house training and to support teachers in becoming agents of its implementation. Translanguaging needed to be not only experienced by the teachers but also subjected to their observations.

The initial objective was for translanguaging to become an overall teaching philosophy, integrated into all lessons and part of the school's ecology. It had to become a holistic school process, not just a classroom technique. This affected communication with parents, communication between colleagues, evaluation systems, progress reporting systems, marketing and even human resources. The common denominator for these multiple players was the avoidance of misunderstandings and issues arising from the creation of a translanguaging methodology, while, at the same time, taking this country's widespread monolingual philosophy into account, including preparation for intensive monolingual state examinations.

Owing to the multiple levels and players, we used the possibilities of co-construction, cooperation and collaboration that an action research project can offer. All the data were collected using a naturalistic and unstructured method of observation during the training sessions and classes. Other methods of data collection used included drawings (by children and teachers), surveys and transcripts of recorded discussion sessions. The objective of our data collection was to monitor the implementation of a translanguaging pedagogy and, more importantly, to acquire an in-depth understanding of the teachers' perceptions in order to respond to their challenges and, for the future, to identify their wishes and needs.

We adopted a three-tiered approach, mostly using a qualitative methodology based on classroom observations, surveys and discussion groups. The results of the surveys were analysed as an ongoing process together with teachers' input at several weekly staff meetings. Furthermore,

through the regular delivery of specifically designed in-house training programmes, the implementation of translanguaging in the classroom adopted a step-by-step process.

This project was conducted from 2010 to 2022 and took the form of spiral action research: from 2010 to 2019, we conducted an exploratory phase leading up to the last phase, which is the focus of this chapter.

Approximately 40 teachers have participated in this research over the 12 years, taking into account staff turnover. However, we believe that the research has not been affected by these natural staff changes. A complete change of a group of two or three partner teachers in one class in the same academic year never occurred; thus any new teacher learnt from and was supported by their direct partner teacher.

Translanguaging training was delivered by one of the authors of this article and designed together with the curriculum manager of the school. It is worth noting that the multiple roles held by this author over the years as school founder, headteacher, teacher and teacher trainer have made the integration of translanguaging into the teaching team quite complex. Being deeply involved in both external research and school leadership was a useful combination, as well as a challenging one. Considering that translanguaging carried an arcane aura about it, the team initially wondered whether their headteacher was a misguided idealist or had an inclination for academic jargon. A turning point came three years later, in 2013, when this author also chose to become one of the upper-grade class teachers for a couple of years. Designing, planning and working directly in the classroom with fellow teachers and experiencing first-hand the difficulties of preparing the children for state exams, as well as exploring translanguaging practices and experiencing the visible benefits of children successfully using translanguaging in the classroom, gave the author valuable additional insights and helped to augment credibility among the teachers, especially during teacher discussions and training sessions. Such direct involvement contributed greatly to a smoother implementation by facilitating the validation and authentication of translanguaging as a viable practice rather than a theoretical proposition.

Factors that Impeded the Implementation of Translanguaging and how these were Addressed

Over the past 12 years, there have been the inevitable vicissitudes in the implementing of a translanguaging pedagogy in an elementary school, but also some significant and occasionally unexpected results collected from the teacher surveys and teacher feedback shared during the weekly staff meetings.

Since 2010, during the annual summer in-service training weeks, staff have been trained in ‘translanguaging’: first, in the objectives of a translanguaging pedagogy, followed by in-depth training with lesson

examples and then, gradually over the years, the scope of the training has broadened, introducing new research on the topic and adding to the list of translanguaging skills.

Many teachers, despite their own linguistic interests and affinity, and often being themselves multilingual, still struggled to fully grasp the concept. The reasons were multiple, but four findings predominate:

- (1) Teachers had never heard of translanguaging during their own teacher training nor during their previous teaching experiences. In 2010, translanguaging was a totally new pedagogical concept to them. Teachers had to adapt to compulsory 'teamwork' and could no longer claim 'entitlement' over 'their' classroom or 'their' pupils. We particularly noted that teachers joining the school from the Swiss state system, which could be classified as a traditional 'transfer of knowledge' system, struggled more than teachers joining from other international school systems.
- (2) Translanguaging contradicted other theories and language ideologies previously studied. This was unsettling and called some of their personal beliefs on language learning into question, especially in terms of immersion techniques or in-classroom target language teaching. Teachers more accustomed to 'correcting' a child when not speaking their own set class language were now required to learn to valorise a new and exploratory linguistic step. [Li and García \(2022: 322\)](#) regret the fact that social and political constructs continue 'to erect walls that create differences'. And yet, decades of prevailing assumptions about language learning, strict monolingual state policies and exam selection processes affect even the most privileged schools like the one in this study.
- (3) When a teaching pedagogy does not perfectly align with the school's and the canton's assessment policies, teachers are often at a loss regarding the implementation of translanguaging across subjects. In this case, this led to confusion concerning report cards and the required summative assessments. Collaboration with parents was difficult: there is still a common belief that languages should be taught separately in order to ensure that each language retains its full 'quality'. However, since the detractors of bilingualism in the 1960s have finally been proven wrong, bilingualism has managed to forge its path as being a valuable asset for children's future. Nevertheless, teachers and parents alike were still concerned when faced with monolingual state examinations, which, in Zurich, are decisive for a child's future.
- (4) Time spent on rethinking lesson design became an issue. Teachers felt they had insufficient time owing to the constraints imposed by the necessary preparations and expectations of the Swiss examination system. In fact, they believed translanguaging even jeopardised the students' examination success.

We have used the past tense for these four points – not because they have all become invalid but rather because the school has, over the years, addressed the majority of these points – some more successfully than others. Below, we describe some of the measures implemented and focused upon over the last decade:

- (1) The school began with the implementation of a teacher overlap, i.e. with simultaneous target language instruction and more preparation time for class teachers of different languages to sit and plan together. Training on ‘co-teaching’ and ‘translanguaging teamwork’ was delivered.
- (2) The availability of classroom materials, online learning and tools (dictionaries, tablets, bilingual reading programs, etc.) was increased.
- (3) The translanguaging lens was gradually intensified. Teachers were asked to rethink planning with their co-teacher and to consider the children’s multilingualism throughout all lessons planned. Translanguaging objectives were added to the curriculum and a box was added to the teachers’ lesson planners to this effect. This is monitored and discussed with the curriculum manager every trimester.
- (4) First a server, then a shared drive, were set up for teachers to share all their lesson plans and other ideas pertaining to using a translanguaging pedagogy in school.
- (5) The school simplified the overall academic language pertaining to translanguaging. In 2018, a mind map was created for teachers with all the translanguaging terms and explanations from across varied translanguaging research. This was presented at all following training sessions in order for teachers as well as all colleagues in the school to acquire a quick and simplified overview.
- (6) In 2018, the school opted to focus on using the three poles of García *et al.* (2017): *stance*, *shift* and *design*. This simplification of expectations was unreservedly approved by teachers. *Stance* is the teachers’ own belief in translanguaging, validating all languages and creating a multilingual ecology in their classrooms and throughout the school. Teachers showed a willingness to adopt this approach. *Shift* is what teachers practise anyway within the ‘enquiry lessons’ at the school, i.e. being flexible in adapting and modifying a lesson spontaneously following a child’s ideas on a topic. Teachers ‘shift’ their lessons depending on the child’s linguistic interactions, flow and applied strategies. *Design* was the added novelty for the teachers. It required rethinking their lessons and designing them with cross-linguistic teaching methods and dynamic translanguaging practices in order to validate the children’s full linguistic repertoire. Introducing these three poles was the most effective measure, and one that spoke directly to the teachers. They could immediately relate to them; they caught the drift and this helped in all subsequent training sessions.

Teachers' Perceptions

Over the 12 years, we collected and responded to teachers' reactions, prejudices, cultural interpretations, planning issues and difficulties in implementing translanguaging as a team-teaching concept. Over the years and through the analysis of the results, we came to differentiate between the perceptions of two main groups, one being preschool teachers and the other being kindergarten and upper primary grade teachers. The questions and concerns of the latter group intensify with the children's increase in age.

According to the 2022 survey, after over a decade of translanguaging implementation (Figures 2.1–2.4), the belief in and the enjoyment of a translanguaging pedagogy is clearly more positive among teachers of the younger classes (Figures 2.1 and 2.3).

Meanwhile, in their individual answers, teachers on the lower scale of acceptance and of satisfaction are indeed upper primary grade teachers.

The misconception that translanguaging creates more work still prevails. The training of new staff is therefore most important. Teacher training and induction have proven to be one of the greatest challenges for a school when implementing a translanguaging pedagogy. As it is still not a recognised module or topic in education degrees in most Swiss cantons, the school has, to date, not been able to hire a teacher with prior experience. This increased need for training can create tensions in a private multilingual institution that has to follow so many other pedagogies and curricula. Furthermore, having to comply with strict assessment and cantonal evaluation programmes compounds these difficulties. Teachers quickly feel overwhelmed by the amount of training needed in all areas of their teaching in addition to the many extraneous expectations imposed on them. Moreover, translanguaging as a concept

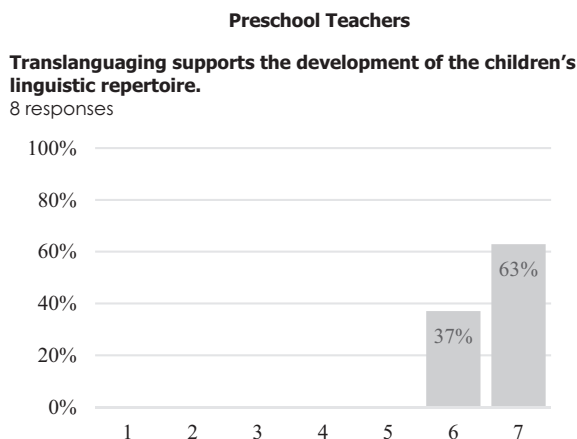


Figure 2.1 Preschool teachers' survey, 2022

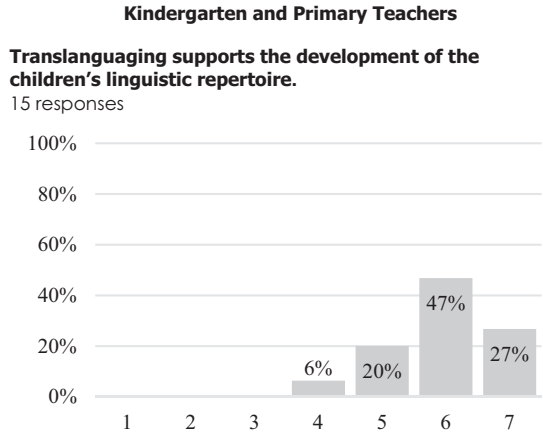


Figure 2.2 Kindergarten and primary school teachers' survey, 2022

is often perceived as vague or obscure, thus resulting in resistance to its implementation. Difficulties mount up: the teachers have been trained in a one-culture teacher training philosophy and not only are they placed in a co-teaching situation but they are also asked to follow a pedagogy they have never heard of before. It must be stressed again that many teachers struggle to grasp the difference between a translanguaging pedagogy and their own practice of multilingual teaching. Some teachers have previously worked in a bilingual school in Zurich, with structured timetables separating and often forbidding the simultaneous use of other languages. To illustrate the difference, one example by a 9-year-old pupil drawn from our research is used in teacher training (Figure 2.5). It shows a 'linguistic slide' expressing the child's own translanguaging dynamic initiatives. This pupil explained that he has to 'slide *through* one of his home languages (Italian flag on the top part of the slide) to be able to speak German (Swiss

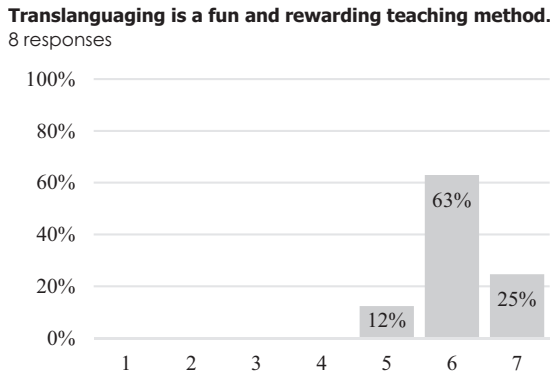


Figure 2.3 Preschool teachers' survey, 2022

Translanguaging is a fun and rewarding teaching method.

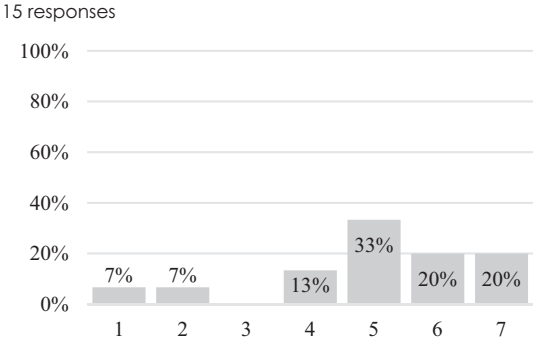


Figure 2.4 Kindergarten and primary school teachers’ survey, 2022

flag at the bottom)’. He added that English was the ‘ladder’ and French was the ‘rocket’ at the top that gave him speed. This school endeavours to create ‘language playgrounds’ in its classrooms. This is part of its *stance* (García *et al.*, 2017), facilitating fluid language movement. Drawings and interviews from their own pupils are used to help teachers visualise and appreciate children’s translanguaging actions as opposed to the process of simply becoming a ‘double monolingual’ (Li & García, 2022: 317). Furthermore, such drawings help the teachers to identify the children’s personal translanguaging strategies and be more effective in the *shifting* and the *designing* of their lessons.



Figure 2.5 A 9-year-old pupil’s translanguaging drawing, 2019

Yet, in our experience, despite sustained intensive training, it takes close to three years to fully understand a translanguaging pedagogy and to feel comfortable in designing it, in implementing it naturally and, as one teacher put it so well in a discussion group, to ‘model’ it in class by creating a culture of linguistic diversity. Schissel *et al.* (2018: 3) highlight this challenge for teachers in distancing themselves from traditional ‘idealized linguistic forms’, to managing ‘a shift in power dynamics’ and to seeing translanguaging as an asset. The authors further point out that ‘changes are required in ideologies, teachers’ beliefs and practices, and in educational systems’ (Schissel *et al.*, 2018: 3). The last mentioned is something we cannot control (and is in fact the most significant obstacle in the implementation of a translanguaging pedagogy), whereas ideologies, beliefs and practices can be influenced by professional development. Pontier and Tian (2022: 142) suggest that ‘introducing translanguaging in teacher education is not enough; preservice teachers must experiment and experience translanguaging as they are introduced to it’. Over our 12-year action research project, we indeed strove to focus on ‘practising translanguaging’, not only by observing both the children’s as well as the teachers’ translanguaging journeys, but also by involving teachers in a dynamic and continuous translanguaging professional development process.

Figures 2.6 and 2.7 show the shift over just one academic year, 2021/2022, with the same teachers. The figures show how they changed their opinion on the need for more translanguaging professional development. The awareness of the ‘training stance’ and the need for more in-depth translanguaging training increased during the school year. This need may come from the pressures of team teaching or from the children’s needs, as well as from teachers’ realisation that they have to be proactive in their response.

This shift in teacher awareness needs to be put into context. All such pre- or postservice training is often historically anchored in monolingual education systems, with monolingual policies and under the pressure of ideologies or political agendas. They mostly terminate with summative monolingual examinations. Therefore, teachers entering their first

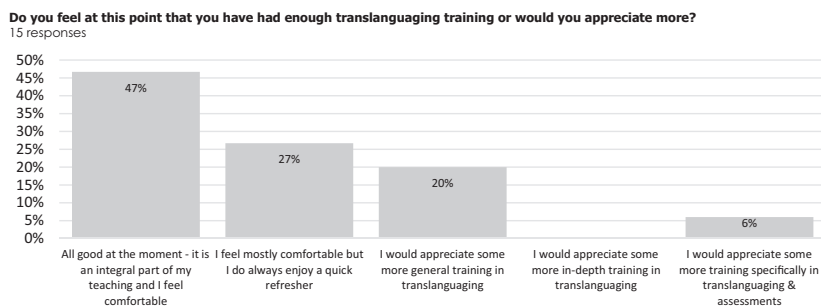


Figure 2.6 Teachers’ survey 2021

About six months ago, in a quick follow-up survey after the last training, we asked you if more translanguaging training was needed... Would you now change your opinion six months later...?
15 responses

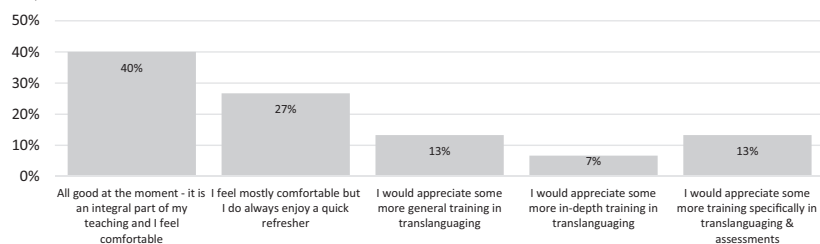


Figure 2.7 Teachers' survey 2022

teaching position often have biased monolingual perceptions (Pontier & Tian, 2022). However, several Swiss universities offering initial teacher training have committed themselves to offering multilingual modules, and more recently, also translanguaging (e.g. PH Berne since 2018, HEP-BEJUNE since 2019¹). Nevertheless, this is not the general rule, and such initiatives predominantly stem from the bilingual cantons.

However, training in German as a Second Language, for example, is still common in the German part of Switzerland. Burton and Rajendram (2019) surveyed English as a second language (ESL) teachers in Canada about their views on the inclusion of translanguaging in ESL courses. Again, their research shows that difficulties in involving target language teachers, fear of creating language gaps and fear of instructor incapacitation and student ostracism are still dominant.

We found, for example, that the need to address and dampen such fears and tensions through professional development was significantly stronger among teachers in the upper primary grades. Teachers working in the Early Years (children aged 0–4), are usually much younger and have done their vocational training studies within this school of research; they are therefore trained in the translanguaging pedagogy from the start. Furthermore, the curriculum is much less structured in the Early Years and leaves more room for creative interpretation. Translanguaging, therefore, does not clash, in their minds, with other standardised curricula or examination expectations.

Robin and Zimmermann (2020) raised the question of the recognition of didactic language studies (in pedagogical institutions) and linguistic studies (in Swiss universities), the former often being reduced to a school discipline instead of being integrated into tertiary research, and the latter lacking a bridge to the former. Language didactics goes far beyond mere classroom practice and is enriched by all the cultural, historical, social and political aspects of the language(s). It incorporates both linguistic theory and its practice. This perspective would indeed support a better integration of translanguaging into teacher training and a plea in a plurilingual Switzerland to be reflected in the classroom.

Children's Versus Teachers' Representations of Translanguaging

From our observations over the years of implementing a translanguaging pedagogy, we have noted that the older the children, the easier it is for them to use an active translanguaging approach to both their learning and their social interactions. Younger children will not as willingly or as spontaneously use their home language or their stronger school language as a vehicle for learning other languages. They tend to be shy when expressing themselves in their weaker languages and are more likely to panic if they do not get it 'right'. Especially with the younger children, we find that before translanguaging becomes an integral part of their learning, they tend to use code-switching techniques, rather than translanguaging. Even at a very young age, it seems that social cues (whether through children's media or family contexts) lead them to use their languages as separate codes to categorise their social environment by language. This was evident in the previous phase of our research: when we led an activity encouraging children to draw their own personal translanguaging characters, their representations were given 'separate heads' or even 'cloned bodies'. While they are code-switching, borrowing or code-mixing (García & Kley, 2016; García & Li, 2014; Grosjean & Li, 2013), they tend to restrict themselves to clear linguistic boundaries and their multilingual practices are not yet 'hybrid' (Cenoz & Gorter, 2015: 5) or 'fluid' (García & Li, 2014: 26), nor do they actively use language as a tool or a resource to expand their own linguistic repertoire (García & Li, 2014). Grosjean (2019: 171), in his bilingual biography, suggests that: 'Many bilinguals do not consider themselves to be bilingual and are critical of their own language competence'. This indeed may be true for bilinguals who, throughout their important primary school years, learn their languages as two monolinguals. However, our observations in the upper elementary grades were very different from observations made in the lower grades. After several years of translanguaging practice at the school, children use translanguaging more confidently, whether in their learning or in their social activities. They enjoy sharing their knowledge, validating their home languages, commenting on the languages, researching in one language and presenting in the other, using technology in class to transfer vocabulary and concepts, or using all languages during one single activity. Here, the children's own representations of translanguaging, through drawing, were rich in information with a strong multilingual identity and demonstrated a compelling language repertoire. One sixth grader drew his translanguaging character as his own DNA. Indeed, with these older children, we found that after several years of trilingual teaching at school, together with their home languages, the children took the lead in implementing a 'holistic experience of translanguaging' in the classroom. Linguistic boundaries become blurred and a natural form of 'assemblage'

(Kim & Choi, 2021: 282) that occurs as children enter into fluid language practices (Andersen, 2017) and collaborative linguistic relationships. The children's drawings clearly show that, as Li and García (2002: 322–323) suggested over two decades ago, children are at ease 'to flow as they construct their own understandings with their own languaging'. More recently, Dovchin *et al.* (2025:1) examined the emotional benefits of translanguaging in classrooms, introducing the term 'translingual entanglements of emotions'. This concept resonates strongly with our student's DNA drawing, which illustrates how emotions are deeply intertwined with language learning and how teaching through translanguaging enables an affirmatory stance that fosters emotional well-being.

However, for teachers, the situation is reversed. Preschool and kindergarten teachers explained that children come to this multilingual school with so many different linguistic backgrounds, as well as such varied levels of competence, that translanguaging occurs naturally to these teachers. It blends into all daily lessons, and these teachers believe this helps the children to progress and to gain confidence. Teachers in the preschool and in the kindergarten take the lead in playing more with the languages, commenting on them regularly, reading stories in all three school languages, incorporating the home languages into songs, rhymes, poems, stories, morning circles, etc. Andersen (2017: 168) identifies the benefits of regularly using similar methodologies combined with translanguaging practice in an early childhood context, and explains how, over time, this combination contributes greatly to building children's ability to translanguage with increased fluidity and to develop their capacity to 'make meaning'.

On the other hand, the upper primary grade teachers no longer actively promote translanguaging and sometimes even restrict its use. As examination time approaches, the older children are asked to limit themselves to one language. This may stem from the teachers' 'emotional labor' increasing, as Dovchin *et al.* (2025: 2) suggest. The authors argue that sociocultural tensions and language power dynamics place an emotional burden on language teachers and on students. This is particularly evident among our teachers, who are feeling the pressure of the upcoming cantonal monolingual examinations for the students, alongside growing parental demands for strong performance in German only. Nevertheless, despite these limitations, and in contrast to the position advanced by Dovchin *et al.* (2025), the older children themselves, as Andersen (2017) predicts, practise translanguaging naturally and fluidly.

From the above-mentioned observations, the surveys and the teacher group discussions, there is a clear inverse effect between children and teachers (Figure 2.8). This correlates with García and Kley's (2016: 21) extension of the term 'stance', with teachers feeling compelled to choose a 'scaffolding stance' until the children no longer need it to learn the target

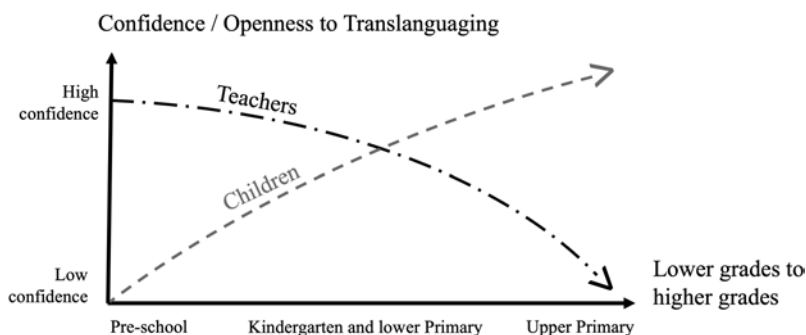


Figure 2.8 Teachers' perspectives versus children's perspectives on translanguaging

language, rather than a 'transformative stance' offering a more holistic linguistic perspective to break down the target language's power positions.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that [Figure 2.8](#) disproves [Gorter and Cenoz \(2016\)](#), who suggest that multilingual programmes in primary education are just a weak form of multilingualism, as strong forms are those that continue through secondary education and into university. On the contrary, our classroom observations confirm that children apply natural translanguaging and have strong metalinguistic knowledge by the age of 12. Taking the long view, we would suggest that children continue to use strategic translanguaging throughout their monolingual secondary school years, through self-learning and self-research.

Target Language Teaching Versus Translanguaging

In the teaching of metalinguistic knowledge, [Pogranova \(2020: 72–73\)](#) emphasises the difference between what is explicit (i.e. objective knowledge of the target language) and what is implicit (i.e. the use and functioning of a language or, in this context, of several languages). Pogranova notes that even when learning the target language, or several target languages, by breaking down and recomposing the lexicons and grammar of the languages, a child will develop metalinguistic skills through these exercises of comparison. The theory, according to which the target language is improved if learnt through the lens of other languages, is favourably argued by many authors ([García & Kleyn, 2016](#); [García *et al.*, 2017](#); [Gorter & Cenoz, 2016](#)). [García *et al.* \(2006: 63\)](#) emphasise that:

(...) even in an English-medium instructional context, teachers can create an environment that acknowledges, communicates respect for, and promotes students' linguistic and cultural capital.

The mere fact that these authors, more than 15 years ago, highlighted the word 'can', already pointed to the potential for conflict involving teachers' choices between monolingual teaching and translanguaging.

Indeed, although teachers responded positively to translanguaging training and the surveys, and participated actively and constructively in the discussion groups, when it came to the daily classroom routine and when under pressure to lead children to the examinations, it was nevertheless observed that some teachers tended to focus their lesson design on their target language only. They would, however, often allow shifts and cross-linguistic strategies and, especially in enquiry lessons, they clearly allowed children to use these skills comprehensively. Upper elementary teachers struggled mostly with maintaining a balance between target language instruction and translanguaging, especially in the context of assessments, as discussed in the next section.

Assessment

In the initial stages of implementing translanguaging in the classroom, we needed to determine how translanguaging would be integrated into an assessment-based programme. We found that in the early years of our investigations, there was a great deal of confusion among teachers (and parents); this unease gradually translated into concern, which intensified as the school pursued the implementation of a translanguaging pedagogy. During professional development sessions, teachers increasingly voiced their concerns about assessments, especially the teachers of the upper primary grades. As the school went forward with the new translanguaging pedagogy, and once it was established in the curriculum, teachers felt they had to clear any ambiguity and decide between two possible assessment objectives:

- (1) Continue to assess the children's target language skills while using new translanguaging techniques, or
- (2) Assess children's actual translanguaging skills as a new set of skills.

This critical differentiation needed urgent clarification, as ambiguity was feeding teachers' resistance to translanguaging overall. Some teachers' comments confirmed their concern:

Children should be allowed to express themselves during assessments using all their language repertoire. That sounds nice in theory. In my experience, it's just not how children tick. If they realise that we don't understand their home language, they simply don't use it. (Grade 1 teacher)

If you are testing one language e.g. grammar, then you can't really allow students to give answers for their mother tongue grammar as it wouldn't be applicable (usually). (Grade 3 teacher)

Translanguaging shouldn't take away from the proper learning of new languages. It definitely has its value, but it shouldn't be overemphasised. (Grade 6 teacher)

Such teachers' questions were well founded; little research to date has been carried out on the relationship between translanguaging and assessment, and the trials and suggestions so far often demonstrate similar teacher concerns, especially for target language teachers (Ascenzi-Moreno, 2018). Schissel *et al.* (2019) confirm that there is a shortcoming in the integration of translanguaging into language assessments. They cite, however, several authors who identified this gap in research early on (Otheguy *et al.*, 2015, 2018; Shohamy, 2011, as cited in Schissel *et al.*, 2019). As early as 2009, García offered some very specific ideas on the assessment of bilinguals. Our research will shed light on how similar approaches and strategies have been implemented over a long period of time, especially in the last three years of our study, and to what extent this has led to successful or unsuccessful implementation.

In our 2021 survey, the teachers were relatively positive and open to the attempt of combining translanguaging and assessments (Figure 2.9). It must be noted that the school uses international standardised language tests as benchmarks so that parents, children and teachers understand progress and proficiency in each of the school's three languages (DEL F Prim examinations, UK Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SATs) and Swiss Lernlupe²). In recent decades, institutional and standardised assessments and certifications have multiplied. They are often driven by the political desire to generate statistics and create an image of the 'success' of a public school system, or as diagnostic evaluations relating to migration and integration (Huver & Springer, 2011) or, as in the case of the canton of Zurich, by the need to streamline children in order to limit admission to higher education. Capacity is determined by infrastructure and available teaching staff. Gronemeyer (1996: 15, as cited in Bachmann *et al.*, 2009: 40) calls these school systems a 'social rank assignment agency'. Such 'results-driven' assessments have become the norm for many parents who measure their children's academic success by these monolingual assessments and ranking scores. Therefore, for private primary educational establishments that want to remain competitive and prepare

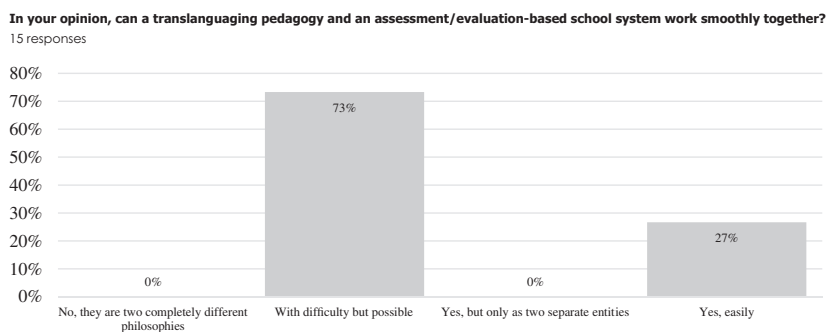


Figure 2.9 Teacher survey, 2021

children to enter upper secondary state schools, there is no other option than to prepare children for monolingual assessments.

However, in a modest attempt to counterbalance this standardisation, the school has developed its own Reflection Portfolios. Since 2010, language reflections and skill reflections have been introduced for children to self-reflect on the imbedded use of all their languages. These Reflection Portfolios differ from the Council of Europe's Language Passport³ for young children in that pre-written reflections are not presented in the form of tables or linear language proficiency ratings, but rather in self-reflections, using their own words, imagery and colouring in pictograms. This tool allows them to reflect on their own intercultural skills, their use of language and their own thoughts on language proficiency. This falls in line with García *et al.*'s (2017: 71) idea of a 'student translanguaging self-assessment'.

Formative versus summative assessments

To address and tentatively alleviate teachers' concerns and to include them in the process of assessment, we began by analysing the types of assessments teachers use and focus on in the school. In addition, to further explore how translanguaging might fit into their assessment programme, we conducted a number of discussion groups, training-day activities and individual survey questions.

We were first interested in what types of assessments teachers preferred and for which lessons, and how they designed their assessments in target language, mathematics and enquiry lessons. Figure 2.10 shows that teachers favour a verbal formative assessment format (in white) for enquiry lessons (presentations, research, debates, plays), while a more formal written summative assessment format (in black) for question-and-answer tests is regularly chosen for mathematics. In grey are assessments that may have a mix of formative and summative elements.

These results were very interesting for the teachers themselves as they brought to light their own practices across topics. In a discussion group, they spoke at length about the pressure created by the cantonal examinations at the end of Grade 6. Teachers from Grade 4 to Grade 6 felt that this

Which format do you use to evaluate/assess children?

15 responses

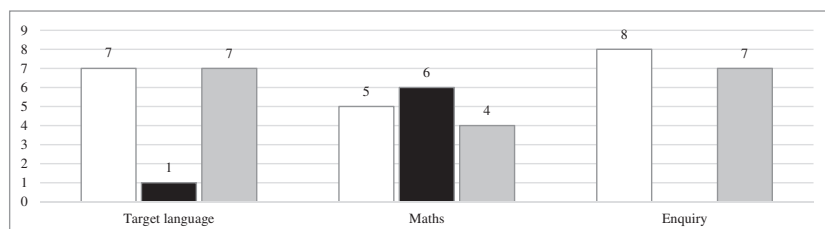


Figure 2.10 Teachers' survey, 2021

pressure increases gradually as the examination approaches. One Grade 4 teacher stated that the switch from formative to summative assessments occurs at the beginning of Grade 4; unsurprisingly, she felt that this switch was driven more by parents than by herself. At this stage (i.e. less than 3 years ahead of the examination), parents start to feel anxious, and want clearly defined summative tests that lead to a commendable average, especially in German, the target language, and in mathematics.

In addition, teachers of Grades 5 and 6 explained that they conduct formative assessments in all subjects, but these are not included in the report card. For admission to both cantonal and most private upper secondary schools, or gymnasiums, children must achieve a high level of proficiency both in German, the target language, and in mathematics on the cantonal written proficiency evaluations⁴. One teacher in the upper primary grades even suggested that although he might wish to rethink assessments and include translanguaging in his assessment planning and formats, he felt he could not, owing to the cantonal examination system and because children need to be prepared with the same summative template assessment year after year.

On the other hand, the kindergarten teachers and the first primary grade teachers predictably expressed that for them this was the complete opposite, as they use mostly formative types of assessment. All assessment material that leads to parental information in the report cards is gathered through observation (including diagnostic assessment), individual child–teacher discussions and portfolio work, as well as the level of class participation. For these teachers, the natural inclusion of translanguaging into their assessment programme is not considered to be an issue.

Assessment design

Further questions in the same survey in 2021 focused on asking teachers how they designed their assessment. We wished to understand which language approach they tended to implement most (Figure 2.11).

Unexpectedly, there was an overall higher percentage of multilingual design than initially thought. However, a closer look at individual answers shows that most teachers choosing the target language only were indeed mostly teachers from the upper primary grades.

In a subsequent discussion group, although no teacher responded positively to the question of using all three school languages, lower primary and kindergarten teachers argued that assessments designed using multiple languages, school languages and home languages could be successfully applied to formative assessments. Teachers underlined that in the enquiry lessons it was easier to be creative across all grades, as these lessons were not affected by any examinations for school admission.

Formative assessments are particularly well-suited to the designing of translanguaging assessments, for example, to encourage children to do

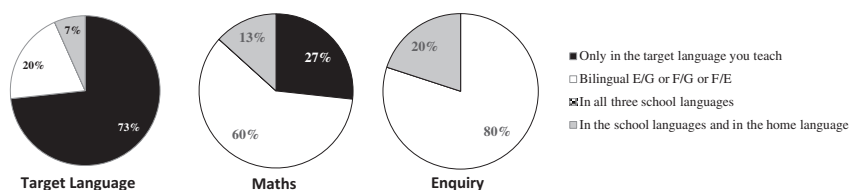


Figure 2.11 Teachers' survey, 2021

their research on a topic in a home language, prepare their written presentation in one school language and give their oral presentation in another school language. This same idea can also be applied when creating multilingual posters, conducting debates etc. Teachers in the upper primary grades preferred to include translanguaging with this type of assessment design, as it does not affect the children's report cards.

Surprisingly, although Figure 2.11 indicates that enquiry tests are designed to be bilingual or to include translanguaging, one upper primary teacher did not allow children to switch languages during a written test, as shown in Figure 2.12. In this teacher's opinion, this would result in a different grade. This could be confusing for a child. Unfortunately, such assessment measures are based on preconceived notions about assessment processes and also on teachers' belief that children need to build awareness of the pressures they will be subjected to in secondary school.

The upper primary grade teachers therefore suggested that one way to reduce concerns about the disparity between secondary schools' assessment-based systems and this school's assessment designs was to ensure that translanguaging pedagogy only applied to enquiry lessons, which are exploratory by definition. It must be noted that in these enquiry-research lessons, language teacher overlap and group work is most important, which is consistent with García and Kleyn's (2016) suggestion that designing a translanguaging lesson requires more social group work and peer interaction. It could therefore be argued that with intensive training focused on one type of lesson only, the quality of the translanguaging lesson design would be enhanced and the assessment

Do you allow/encourage the 'unplanned use of translanguaging' in your enquiry evaluations, if a child feels the necessity to express himself/herself... without this affecting the grades you give?

15 responses

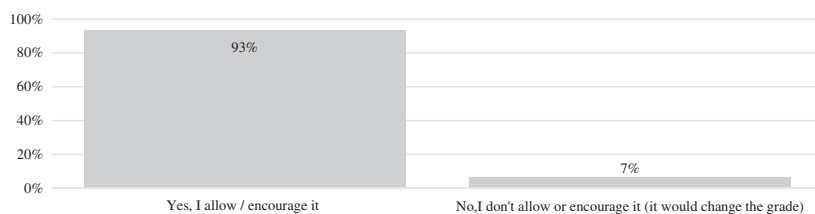


Figure 2.12 Teachers' survey, 2021

designs rendered more child-centred. The survey also showed that those lessons are most suited to the inclusion of home languages. Kindergarten teachers and lower primary teachers supported the idea of limiting translanguaging to enquiry lessons for the upper grades; however, they expressed their wish to continue a translanguaging pedagogy across all subjects as well as in all diagnostic assessments for the lower classes.

The school's art and music teachers, on the other hand, are not subjected to the pressure of external examinations; nevertheless, their subjects still appear on the report card and grades are assigned to children. Both teachers explained that they also use a mix of formative and summative assessments, the latter to assess art history or music theory, for example. Both teachers use translanguaging techniques in their assessment process. They design them primarily in English (although they have also created bilingual assessments); however, they willingly explain that the assessments in other languages that they speak allow children to translate the instructions using a device or a friend, and/or if a child fills out an answer in a language other than the language of instruction, the grade will not be affected.

In their research on classroom assessments in linguistically diverse communities, [Schissel *et al.* \(2019: 10\)](#) describe how one teacher found the assessment task of reading a text in one language while answering questions about it in another language 'taxing' and described it as an exercise in 'translation'. However, by implementing translanguaging techniques in the design of assessments from the early years of primary school, our school believes that it is effectively preparing children to counteract this possible difficulty of perceiving tasks as being pure translation.

Suggestions from Teachers

In the summer of 2022, the final phase of research came to a close. The school was entering a new phase of full, independent integration of translanguaging into the curriculum. In a last survey, as well as in a teacher discussion group, all teachers from preschool to the upper grades were asked what could/should be done to enhance the understanding and communication of translanguaging across the school.

Here are their suggestions:

- (1) One teacher suggested that the school create a 'frequently asked questions' document with the key features of the school's use of translanguaging practice in the hope, she said, of making translanguaging pedagogy more 'approachable' and 'understandable' by teachers and parents. This idea was echoed in one of the discussion groups, where teachers suggested the creation of a translanguaging

policy for the school. These two suggestions bring to light the need for teachers to rely on a framework to guide them when they are unsure about new terminology and about a pedagogy that does not match their initial teacher training. With this in mind, an induction document was prepared in the autumn of 2022 for all new members of the staff.

- (2) Another suggestion from the upper primary grades was to limit translanguaging lesson design to the three school languages only but to nevertheless allow home languages as part of the spontaneous translanguaging *stance*. All teachers unreservedly agreed to this, and there was a feeling of relief when it was accepted by the management.
- (3) Teachers also made suggestions concerning training and professional development sessions. They would like to have more regular short refresher courses coinciding with the curriculum staff meetings, with the opportunity to share, discuss and reposition ideas and needs. They also suggested that the more intensive training sessions should be reserved for new staff only. A few teachers of the Early Years (children aged 0-4) asked for training sessions to address the specific needs of kindergarten and primary separately.
- (4) In one of the later discussion groups, a Grade 1 teacher suggested that the school should include translanguaging as a soft skill in the report cards, assessing how children use all their languages in social situations to communicate, resolve conflict or manage a difficult social situation; how children use language strategically for themselves or to support another child; or simply how they define their own identity and create meaning in social interactions.
- (5) Several teachers also suggested that the objectives for translanguaging be put into a rubric so that children would have a better idea of what is expected of them when, for example, they work on an enquiry project using several languages.

These teachers' ideas complement García *et al.*'s (2017: 70) suggestion to assess a child's use of all features of their linguistic repertoire, and this could indeed be made clear in a test rubric based on the translanguaging objectives set by teachers in their planners.

García's suggestion is still being debated by teachers in staff meetings, though, as some do not agree with these views and are concerned with generalising the translanguaging goals along with assessment – a sensitive topic that needs to be discussed further. However, this very debate attests to the progress accomplished and underlines the importance of continuous teachers' professional development (Pontier & Tian, 2022). Thus, after the initial panic caused by translanguaging and assessment, further steps and possible ways to include translanguaging as a dynamic skill within assessments are now being considered as an integral part of a general pedagogy and school philosophy.

Assessing with Translanguaging or Assessing Translanguaging?

We close this analysis by answering the initial question that has caused so much apprehension. After a three-year focus on assessment design and translanguaging practice, the teachers all agreed that in correlating a translanguaging pedagogy with an assessment-based programme, they have nevertheless maintained their focus on the assessment of children's competence in each language independently, as opposed to assessing translanguaging skills *per se*. Supporting some of García's (2009) suggestions, the majority of teachers came to the conclusion that translanguaging applied in formative assessments is indeed an instrument and an asset to help support, value and encourage children to better express themselves. Furthermore, teachers all agreed that the use of translanguaging in formative assessments should not lead to the downgrade or the upgrade of a child. In contrast to García's suggestion that translanguaging can be used even in the context of large-scale standardised summative examinations, the upper primary teachers in this study, after several years of experimentation, were clearly in favour of denying the use of translanguaging in the preparation for cantonal target language and mathematics examinations, since translanguaging is not accepted by the cantonal examination authorities.

Acknowledgment by the management of the validity of these points made by teachers in the wake of the past 12 years of action research eased teachers' concerns as to the appropriate implementation of a translanguaging policy in this school.

Conclusion

This action research project, initiated in 2010, ended with the school year in the summer of 2022. During this long period of time, all actors (teachers, learners, parents and the trainer) have shown forbearance, thus enabling the project to be completed, and this was in spite of the COVID-19 health crisis. We were able to gain a deep understanding of the teachers' perceptions and challenges while identifying many of their wishes and needs.

The teachers' willingness and openness to implementing a translanguaging pedagogy increased over the years. A clear differentiation in acceptance was observed between preschool and kindergarten/primary school teachers. In the focus groups, a further distinction was observed between kindergarten/lower primary grades and upper primary classes. While most teachers in the upper grades have readily adopted a translanguaging stance and design, especially during enquiry-based lessons, the challenges and concerns associated with expectations and preparations for standardised cantonal assessments have been acknowledged as impeding a full and smooth implementation.

In addition, despite teachers providing a number of constructive ideas to facilitate the implementation of a translanguaging pedagogy in this school, ranging from the creation of a translanguaging policy to the integration of rubrics in assessments or comments to be added to school report cards, it is nevertheless clear from this research that the obstacles to the implementation of translanguaging in an assessment-based education system are not so much at the micro-, but rather at the meso- and macro-levels: obstacles that emanate from national and cantonal institutions, and from the language policies from which stem the international language examinations. It must be emphasised that the recognition of translanguaging practices is not currently integrated into these examinations, even though the Council of Europe promotes the recognition and enhancement of plurilingual and pluricultural skills at the individual level as social factors in a globalised world of life and work.

The new Common European Framework of Reference for Languages Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2018) could, perhaps, under certain conditions, initiate an evolution of teaching practices and the assessment of multilingual skills in order to develop translanguaging in the didactics of third languages.

This research shows that, at the micro-level, it is possible to implement a translanguaging pedagogy but, currently, this is only through individual initiatives in private educational institutions.

Although there is very little other longitudinal research on the implementation of translanguaging, parallels can nevertheless be drawn with, for example, Schissel *et al.*'s (2018) action project. This research demonstrates that regardless of the linguistic or sociopolitical context in which a translanguaging pedagogy is to be implemented, teachers' beliefs, practices and focus on monolingual assessments are indeed difficult to influence when related to and linked to standardised state education systems.

However, we have established that at the micro-level case of this school, formative assessments were clearly highlighted as an ideal and useful tool for the practice and the design of translanguaging assessments. Teachers also recognised the benefits of implementing these formative assessments as early as possible in the younger grades.

At the same time, teachers feel that they are still very limited in their use of translanguaging for summative assessments because of having to prepare students for large-scale standardised assessments in which translanguaging is non-existent. The micro-level is clearly subjected to the constraints of the meso- and macro-levels, where the practice of translanguaging has not yet been implemented.

The duration of this study also demonstrated that time is an essential factor in the implementation of a translanguaging pedagogy. This study shows that in order to counter the pressures of meso- and macro-challenges that weigh on teachers' objectives and constrain their acceptance of

translanguaging, particularly in the design of assessments, regular professional development, open discussion and co-teaching exchanges are essential to ensure teachers' engagement.

Notes

- (1) Universities of Teacher Education: Pädagogische Hochschule BERN and Haute École Pédagogique BEJUNE
- (2) DELF Prim: International French Diplomas specifically designed for 8- to 12-year-olds (Fondation Esprit Francophonie, 2024). UK Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SATs): UK national curriculum assessments, commonly called SATs. (UK Government, 2025). Lernlupe: Online orientation tests indicating the students' level of competence against the state curriculum: Lernplan 21 (Lehrmittelverlag St.Gallen, 2025).
- (3) Council of Europe's Language Passport (ELP). See <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portfolio/the-language-passport> (accessed June 2023).
- (4) Zentrale Aufnahme Prüfung für ein Langgymnasium.

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