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## Research paper

## Teachers' beliefs related to language choice in immigrant students' homes

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## HIGHLIGHTS

- Finnish teachers' beliefs regarding families' home language policies mainly support the importance of home languages.
- A small minority of the teachers believed that only Finnish should be spoken at home.
- The teachers' justifications for their beliefs reflected Ruiz's (1984) orientations in language planning.
- Most teachers oriented toward language-as-resource considering home languages as a valuable resource for students.

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates how Finnish teachers regard immigrant families' home language policies. Of the teachers who responded, 53.3% believed it best for parents to speak their first languages at home, and 31.7% believed that both first language and language of instruction should be used at home. A minority of the teachers believed that only Finnish should be spoken at home. The teachers' justifications for their beliefs reflected Ruiz's (1984) orientations in language planning: language-as-right, language-as-resource, and language-as-problem, with most teachers oriented toward language-as-resource. Thus, many teachers' beliefs align with the current educational stance of supporting multilingualism.

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## 1. Introduction

The language choices immigrant families make are important, as a strong knowledge in one's home language supports one's skills in other languages and subjects (Cummins, 2001; Eunjung Relyea & Amendum, 2019; Ganuza & Hedman, 2018). In this study, wherein the focus is on immigrant families' homes, the term *home language* refers to the language immigrant students use with their parents (see also Seltzer, 2019). We acknowledge the problems related to the term; however, similar terms, such as *heritage language*, *first language*, *mother tongue*, and *minority language*, are also

not neutral (see e.g., Eisenchlas & Schalley, 2020).

Finland is officially a multilingual country (Finnish, Swedish, and Sami<sup>1</sup>). Alongside the official languages, almost 8% of the 5.5 million Finnish citizens are speakers of foreign languages; currently, the most common foreign languages in Finland are Russian, Estonian, Arabic, English, Somali, and Kurdish (Statistics Finland, 2019a, 2019b). Moreover, the number of foreign language students has increased dramatically within the last decade. According to our experiences as teachers, school personnel are often the only authority figures that immigrant parents interact with regularly. These parents may ask for advice on different issues, and

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thus the teachers become influential figures, and their advice to immigrant parents concerning language use at home may play a significant role in “shaping parental language choices and practices at home” (Curdt-Christiansen & Huang, 2020, p. 187). Unfortunately, teachers may often pressure multilingual families to use the school language at home (Spolsky, 2012).

In Finland, all language groups have a constitutional right to maintain and develop their own languages. This viewpoint is also emphasized in the core curricula for basic and upper-secondary education, which require that teachers support multilingualism; all languages should be used as resources for learning, and teachers should encourage the use of home languages both in and out of school (National Agency for Education, 2014, National Agency for Education, 2015). However, this ideological change is not yet applied in every teacher’s practices. Indeed, though most teachers have relatively positive attitudes towards multilingualism, monolingual practices are prevalent in classrooms in Finland (Alisaari et al., 2019; Heikkola & Alisaari, 2021). Similar findings have been reported from other Northern European countries concerning both pre-service and in-service teachers (Iversen, 2019; Lundberg, 2019).

Currently, little is known about teachers’ beliefs related to the language choices made in the homes of their multilingual students. However, investigating these beliefs is important for several reasons: teachers’ beliefs and values influence their actions and language policies (Althusser, 1976; Borg, 2006; Johnson, 2013); strong home language skills support better learning outcomes (Cummins, 2001; Eunjung Relyea & Amendum, 2019; Ganuza & Hedman, 2018); teachers’ beliefs may influence the language choices their students’ parents make at home (Curdt-Christiansen & Huang, 2020; Spolsky, 2012); and, in the Finnish context, the core curricula for basic and upper secondary education require teachers to support multilingualism and the maintenance of students’ home languages (National Agency for Education, 2014, National Agency for Education, 2015).

In this study, Finnish elementary (grades 1–6), secondary (7–9), and upper-secondary (10–12) teachers’ beliefs about the languages multilingual students’ families use at home were investigated. We use the terms *multilingual* (*learner, student, or family*) to refer to people with immigrant backgrounds, though we acknowledge that multilinguals comprise a much wider group. As the theoretical framework for our analysis, we used Ruiz’s (1984) orientations related to language policies or planning: language-as-right, language-as-resource, and language-as-problem (see also Hult & Hornberger, 2016).

### 1.1. Language as right, resource, or problem

Ruiz’s (1984) orientations have gained a lot of attention in educational research. They have also been widely used in the analysis of language policies and ideologies (see also Hult & Hornberger, 2016; Iversen, 2019), which are influenced by factors such as the individual choices that speakers of different languages make in their daily lives (Moustaoui Srhir, 2020), changes in linguistic contexts, political atmospheres surrounding these changes, national policies, and the guiding principles of curricula (Johnson, 2013). In this section, Ruiz’s orientations will be discussed in relation to the Finnish core curricula, which are the main framework for educational policies in Finnish basic and upper-secondary education (National Agency for Education, 2014, National Agency for Education, 2015).

The current Finnish core curricula highlight the language-as-right and language-as-resource orientations (National Agency for Education, 2014, National Agency for Education, 2015). Supported by international treaties on human rights, the language-as-right orientation views speaking and maintaining one’s home language

as a human right (Hult & Hornberger, 2016; Ruiz, 1984; UN General Assembly, 1948, p. 217). Moreover, Skutnabb-Kangas (2008) has defined linguistic human rights as inviolable basic rights. In the current Finnish core curriculum for basic education (National Agency for Education, 2014), Ruiz’s (1984) language-as-right orientation is explicit: “The community recognizes the right to one’s own language and culture as a fundamental right” (National Agency for Education, 2014, p. 27). Languages are seen as having intrinsic value, students are taught to value all languages (National Agency for Education, 2014), and “parallel use of various languages in the school’s daily life is seen as natural, and languages are appreciated” (National Agency for Education, 2014, p. 26).

In Ruiz’s (1984) language-as-resource orientation, multilingualism and cultural diversity are valued as resources for both individuals and society. Moreover, language is seen as having value with regard to identity construction, self-esteem, and intellectual engagement (Cummins, 2001; Hult & Hornberger, 2016). In addition, when a person’s home language is valued, their identity is affirmed, and they are better able to feel a sense of belonging within their community (Cummins, 2001). In contrast, when people are not allowed to use their home languages, their identities are limited and their voices are silenced (de Jong, 2011), as language is vital to both individual and collective identities (Tabouret-Keller, 1997). This “coercive relations of power” (Cummins, 2001, p. vii) is harmful for multilingual students’ identities. However, advocating for home languages supports pupils’ identities (Cummins, 2001), and when identities are affirmed, individuals feel valued for who they are, and “spaces for diverse – voices” are created (de Jong, 2011, p. 174).

Furthermore, home-language skills have a significant effect on students’ learning of other languages and subjects (Cummins, 1979, 2007; Eunjung Relyea & Amendum, 2019; Ganuza & Hedman, 2018; Goldenberg, 2008; Krompæk, 2018; Ovando & Combs, 2011; Slavin & Cheung, 2005); multilingualism promotes academic achievement when language learning is additive, not subtractive. Promoting *additive multilingualism* means valuing all languages, considering all languages equal, and supporting the use of all the languages an individual knows (de Jong, 2011; Lucas & Villegas, 2011). A number of studies have shown a cognitive advantage in bilingual adults and children (for a systematic review, see van den Noort et al., 2019), although in adults, this has been contradicted (for a meta-analysis, see Lehtonen et al., 2018). Regardless, it is widely acknowledged that bilingualism or multilingualism is not detrimental. According to the Finnish national core curriculum for basic education (National Agency for Education, 2014), multilingualism is a resource for learning, and school is a place where languages and identities interact with each other; language is essential to thinking and learning, as well as interaction, collaboration, identity development, and integration into society.

In contrast, in the language-as-problem orientation, monolingualism is valued, while multilingualism is perceived as a threat to national unity (Ruiz, 1984). Multilingual speakers are believed to lack ability in the majority language (Ruiz, 1984) and have “reduced academic achievement” (Hult & Hornberger, 2016, p. 33), and issues of language learning are seen to correlate with larger societal problems. In the Finnish context, immigrant languages are not yet considered national resources (Pyykkö, 2017), and although teachers value multilingualism in general, in practice, monolingual ideologies are still promoted (Alisaari et al., 2019; Repo, 2020). While previous studies (Alisaari et al., 2019; Repo, 2020) asked teachers about their beliefs and practices concerning multilingualism in the classroom, this study aims to examine teachers’ beliefs related to language policies in immigrant families’ homes: Do positive beliefs related to multilingualism support families in maintaining their home languages, thereby aligning with the

principles of the curricula (National Agency for Education, 2014, National Agency for Education, 2015), or do teachers advise families to use Finnish or Swedish at home?

Ruiz's (1984) concepts of language-as-right, resource, or problem are a useful paradigm for analyzing beliefs about language policies (see also Hult & Hornberger, 2016). In this study, Ruiz's language orientations were a relevant framework to qualitatively analyze, categorize, and discuss teachers' beliefs regarding the language choices made by immigrant parents.

### 1.2. The significance of promoting and maintaining home languages

Language use and language policies are always related to power dynamics and social contexts (Tseng, 2020); those in power determine what language is considered appropriate (May 2017). Families play a crucial role in motivating children to maintain and develop their home languages, but societal pressures related to assimilation may cause language loss, especially if minority languages are discriminated against (Cho et al., 1997). According to Moustoui Srhir (2020), using home languages is a way for minority-language parents to manifest their agency, and perhaps the only way for them to have "linguistic authority and legitimacy" (p. 117). Thus, using home languages might be a way to resist "the pressures of different forms of assimilation" and "guarantee ethnolinguistic vitality in terms of identity" (Moustoui Srhir, 2020, p. 109).

Home languages' importance to identity may explain families' motivation to maintain them (Tseng, 2020). However, children and parents may have different views on language use, which can result in insecurity about language choices (Curd-Christiansen, 2015) or conflicts within multilingual families (Little, 2014; Tseng, 2020). Furthermore, children may have negative attitudes toward their home languages if their families have strict language policies with no appreciation of or space for the language of the surrounding society (Wilson, 2020), or if they fear criticism due to incomplete skills in that language (Cho, 2015). However, children typically understand the value of multilingualism and that maintaining the home language is important to their parents, thus they are happy to use it, even if they prefer to use the language of the society in which they live (Wilson, 2020).

However, if parents speak a language other than their first language with their child, the child's overall language development may be hindered due to insufficient language exposure (Mueller Gathercole & Hoff, 2007). Moreover, while opportunities for interaction are crucial for home-language maintenance, they are inadequate if the speakers do not recognize the benefits of multilingualism (Purkarthofer, 2020). Indeed, families play important roles in the transmission of home languages and development of children's identities (Melo-Pfeifer, 2015), but the school's role in valuing the languages of multilingual learners is essential (Wilson, 2020) in influencing parents' language policies (Curd-Christiansen & Huang, 2020; Moustoui Srhir, 2020). As teachers are in a position to support home language skills, it is important to know what kind of guidance teachers give parents regarding what language to use at home. Thus, the current study is framed by the following research questions:

RQ1: What beliefs do Finnish teachers have regarding the language choices in the homes of their immigrant students?

RQ2: How do Finnish teachers justify their beliefs related to language choices in their immigrant students' homes?

## 2. Methods

This study is a part of a larger research project investigating teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and practices related to linguistically

and culturally diverse students. The focus of this sub-study is on two open-ended questions asking how teachers believe they would react if a multilingual parent asked their opinion on what language to use at home. In this section, the study's instrument, participants, data collection, and data analysis are presented.

### 2.1. Participants

A total of 820 teachers participated in the larger study. Of these participants, 87% ( $n = 717$ ) answered the two open-ended questions that were the basis for this sub-study. Of the 717 respondents, 78% were female, 21% male, and 1% other. The mean age of the participants was 48. The gender and age structure is relatively representative of the larger Finnish teacher population (see Kumpulainen, 2017). The participants were mainly primary school classroom teachers (grades 1–6) and secondary or upper-secondary school subject teachers (grades 7–12).

### 2.2. Data collection

Data were collected in the spring of 2016 via an online survey that was created based on a preliminary version of a linguistically and culturally responsive teaching survey by Milbourn, Viesca, and Leech (2017). A link to the survey and a cover letter (in Finnish or Swedish) that included information about the purpose and protection of the data were sent to all local education offices in Finland, and advertisements were placed on social media, professional websites, and relevant email lists, as well as at the national educational fair. A participation percentage was not calculated, as the number of people who received or saw the survey link is unknown.

### 2.3. Instrument

The survey used in the larger research project included 59 Likert scale (1–5) statements and 11 open-ended questions investigating teachers' linguistically and culturally responsive pedagogy and beliefs related thereto. In this sub-study, we examined the responses to two of the open-ended questions describing a hypothetical scenario:

Q1: *At a parents' meeting, an immigrant parent who is studying Finnish asks you whether they should speak only Finnish at home. How would you respond?* (717 responses).

Q2: *Please indicate the reasons for your answer.* (701 responses).

### 2.4. Data analysis

All of the responses were in Finnish or Swedish. The coding was done in Finnish; the examples presented in this paper were translated into English by the authors. Two areas were defined for more detailed content analysis: 1) teachers' beliefs about families' language choices; and 2) the justifications for these beliefs. These two areas formed the main categories of the analysis. To begin the qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 1980), the first author read the responses to gain an initial understanding of the data and identify sub-categories for coding the data. The suggested categories were then discussed among all three authors; categories were decided upon (presented below), and the first 100 responses were coded by all three authors independently.

After the initial coding, the categories were discussed again, and some were combined and revised. If cases were unclear, the definitions of the categories were negotiated and recalibrated. The categories were then divided to reflect Ruiz's (1984) three language orientations. The data for both open-ended questions were analyzed and coded in the following manner: The first two authors

analyzed all 717 responses independently, then compared their coding. The agreement rate between the first two authors was 98% for the first question and 94% for the second. The disagreed upon items were discussed until agreement was reached. Responses from the second research question were then coded into different categories.

Possible links between the teachers' background factors (age, years teaching, years of experience teaching immigrant students, percentage of immigrant students at the teacher's school, and teaching field) were also investigated by cross tabulations and Chi-Square tests. As no statistically significant results were found, these statistical analyses are not discussed in this paper.

### 3. Results

First, we present the frequencies of the teachers' responses to the first question (see Fig. 1). Second, we examine the teachers' justifications for their responses and discuss these according to Ruiz's (1984) orientations.

#### 3.1. Teachers' Beliefs Regarding Language Choices in the Homes of Immigrant Families

To answer the first research question, we looked at the category frequencies of the teachers' responses (Fig. 1). Over half of the teachers (53.3%) believed it best if immigrant families speak their home languages at home (Ex. 1), which aligns with the current understanding of the important role home languages play in all learning (Cummins, 1979, 2007; Eunjung Relyea & Amendum, 2019; Ganuza & Hedman, 2018; Goldenberg, 2008; Ovando & Combs, 2011; Slavin & Cheung, 2005). Furthermore, many of the responses reflected Skutnabb-Kangas' (2017) view of linguistic human rights: everyone has the right to maintain and develop their languages. This will be further discussed when examining teachers' justifications for their responses.

Of the participating teachers, one-sixth (15.9%) reported that both languages should be used at home but with emphasis on the home language (Ex. 2), thereby acknowledging the value of home languages. Another one-sixth (15.8%) believed it was equally important to use both home languages and Finnish at home (Ex. 3). However, 7.1% opined that while both languages should be used at home, Finnish should be emphasized (Ex. 4).

1. *It is important to maintain one's home language skills. Learning a new language is based on good home language skills. I would recommend the family maintain the language they have previously*

*used as their common language. Naturally, it may occur that the home language changes, but it should not be forced, especially when the new language skills are still beginner-level.*

2. *I think they should primarily communicate in the home language, but every now and then, they could speak only Finnish for 10 min, for example.*
3. *Not completely, but half of the communication [should be in Finnish].*
4. *One must not forget one's home language. However, it is good if the parents speak Finnish with their children, too, because the children will learn it faster, and the parents will learn it as well.*

These beliefs could be interpreted as promoting additive multilingualism, which acknowledges the value and role of home languages when learning other languages (see e.g. de Jong, 2011). However, according to the principles of additive multilingualism, the languages should support each other, and not result in the attrition of either (Lucas & Villegas, 2011). Thus, the use and development of home languages should be emphasized, as the home might be the only environment in which the first language can be developed.

Only 3.2% of the teachers believed parents should speak only Finnish at home:

5. *Yes, only Finnish. It would be extremely beneficial for the children's future if they desire to live in Finland.*

This reflects Cummins' (2001, p. vii) idea of "coercive relations of power" and has serious implications with regard to these families' identities (de Jong, 2011). Moreover, if students do not use and develop their home languages, they might not reach their full academic potential (see e.g. Thomas & Collier, 1997), as fostering home languages has been found to have a significant positive effect on learning in general (Cummins, 1979, 2007; Eunjung Relyea & Amendum, 2019; Ganuza & Hedman, 2018; Goldenberg, 2008; Ovando & Combs, 2011; Slavin & Cheung, 2005).

#### 3.2. Teachers' Justifications for their Responses

Next, we will examine the teachers' justifications for their responses to the language choices at their students' homes and present the categories of these justifications as they reflect Ruiz's (1984) language orientations (Table 1).

**Language-as-right.** Two sub-categories of responses (Table 1) reflected the language-as-right orientation. Almost half of the responses emphasized the significance of maintaining and learning

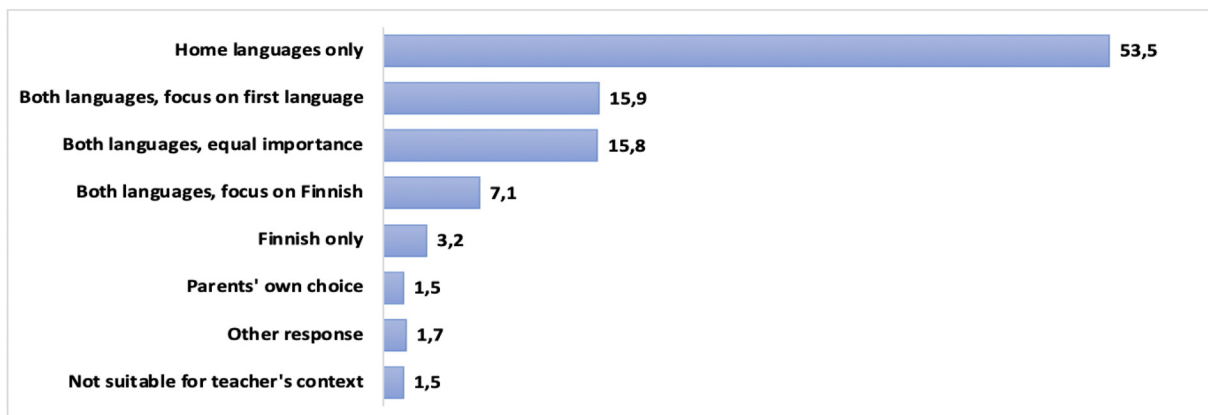


Fig. 1. The categorization of teachers' responses regarding language choice in immigrant families' homes.

**Table 1**  
Teachers' reasoning for their responses to Q1.

Category	% (of all mentions)
<b>Language-as-right</b>	
Right to speak and maintain one's home language	47
To speak one's home language is only natural	2
<b>Language-as-resource</b>	
Home language as the foundation for learning a new language and learning in general	23
Identity, understanding, and valuing one's roots and cultural heritage	22
Home language as an instrument of thought and a means for conceptual thinking, cognition, and self-expression	17
Home language is the language of emotion	16
Multilingualism as a special asset or richness	7
Maintaining the home language is linked to family dynamics	3
Maintaining the home language in order to communicate with other native speakers	1
<b>Language-as-problem</b>	
Language of instruction is learned only through usage	20
Neither the home language nor the language of instruction will develop	9
Learning the language of instruction is a prerequisite for socializing/integrating into society	6
Parents are bad examples of the Finnish language	3
<b>Other</b>	
Other reasons	5
Referring to research	3
Family's own decision	3
No direct response to the question that was asked	2
No response	2

Note. Some teachers' responses covered several categories; thus the overall percentages exceed 100%.

the home language (see Ex. 6) or an individual's right to speak their home language (see Ex. 7), while 2% of the responses reflected the belief that it is natural to speak one's home language (Ex. 8).

- 6. *It is best if parents speak their own language to their children. Children must be allowed to use either language (if the parents understand Finnish, too).*
- 7. *Of course not: According to the Finnish constitution, everyone has a right to their own language and culture, and a teacher cannot give this kind of instruction. By doing so, the teacher both violates the Finnish constitution and commits misconduct.*
- 8. *Because Finnish is a foreign language to the parents and it is not natural for them, many important aspects could be left out in communication.*

These beliefs reflect Ruiz's (1984) language-as-right orientation and the ideas of linguistic human rights that Skutnabb-Kangas (2008) defined as fundamental. These values are also specifically connected to Finland's Non-discrimination Act 21/2014, which states that nobody should be discriminated against based on language, and the Constitution of Finland, wherein everyone is given the right to maintain and develop their language (731/1999 chapter 2, 17§).

These responses used relatively strong expressions, such as "it is best" (Ex. 6) or "of course not" (Ex. 7) when referring to linguistic rights, indicating that the teachers see an individual's right to their language as self-evident. Furthermore, in the category *To speak one's home language is only natural*, the neutral tones reflect beliefs that using one's home language at home is natural and commonsensical (Ex. 8), which relates to Ruiz's (1984) idea of language as a "natural endowment" (p. 22).

**Language-as-resource.** Seven sub-categories (Table 1) of teachers' justifications reflected the language-as-resource orientation (Ruiz, 1984), with 22% of the responses stressing that language has intrinsic value (Ex. 9; see also Hult & Hornberger, 2016); many of the teachers felt that a home language has implications with regard to identity (Ex. 10; see also Cummins, 2001) and valuation of one's roots and cultural heritage (Ex. 11; see also Moustauou Srhir, 2020).

- 9. *[Home] language in itself is a valuable thing.*
- 10. *Language is a building block of human identity; if you take it away, the building can collapse.*
- 11. *One's roots are better maintained in one's home language.*

Teachers' expressions in this category were mainly matter-of-fact, with no strong emotions demonstrated. The responses emphasized the symbolic function of language as a way to express one's identity (Coulmas, 2017); when a home language is appreciated, a person's social, racial, cultural, political, economic, and intellectual self are also acknowledged (Delavan et al., 2017). In addition, because the Finnish core curricula (National Agency for Education, 2014, National Agency for Education, 2015) recognize the value of all languages, it could be interpreted that teachers whose beliefs align with these principles support the values of the curricula.

Some of the responses (Ex. 12) in this category revealed problems related to an ongoing discussion regarding the categorization of students in Finnish schools based on their languages: In the national registry, families can choose what language they register as a child's home language, which influences how instruction at school is organized, how the student is assessed, and how their language skills are evaluated when applying for further studies.

- 12. *Multilingualism is a wonderful thing, and these students can make use of their language skills in many situations. Home language, culture, and identity are intertwined. The concept of home language can be contemplated from, for example, the perspective of whether it would be fair to deny the student the right to Finnish as their home language if the students themselves regard Finnish as their home language.*

However, a child's registered home language may not necessarily reflect proficiency in that language, and if one of the national languages is registered as the student's home language, they will not have access to the various support mechanisms offered by the schools and the municipalities. At the time of writing this, a new language law is being drafted in Finland to allow more than one home language to be registered (Finnish Prime Minister's Office, 2017); how this will affect schools' language policies remains to

be seen.

Alongside its intrinsic value, the instrumental value of language was present in the rest of the categories within the language-as-resource orientation (Ruiz, 1984). For example, in the category *Home language as a foundation for learning*, 23% respondents emphasized that a strong home language can give students a foundation for learning other languages (Ex. 13, 14) and subjects (Ex. 15). The responses in this category were often thorough (Ex. 13), with versatile, metaphoric descriptions (Ex. 14).

13. *The stronger one's own language is, the faster a second language is acquired. [...] Valuing and examining one's own language helps in studying a new language. If a teacher appreciates students' home languages, [the students] will feel that school is a place also for them, not just for Finnish speakers.*
14. *According to my experience, children that have a rich home language also acquire Finnish. It's as if they have points in common with the new language. The structure of human memory can be compared to the card catalogs they used to have in libraries. At the end of the drawer, it says "music", and inside there are cards with words like "play" or "sing". The new language falls in there right next to the old one.*
15. *Knowing the home language strengthens learning new things. These beliefs align with research showing that a strong home language gives a solid foundation for learning new languages and other subjects (Cummins, 1979, 2007; Eunjung Relyea & Amendum, 2019; Ganuza & Hedman, 2018; Goldenberg, 2008; Krompæk, 2018; Ovando & Combs, 2011; Slavin & Cheung, 2005). Another 3% of the responses appealed to research to justify the use of home languages at home (Ex. 16):*
16. *I will say that it would be best if the parents always spoke their home language to their child. According to research, it is the most beneficial for the child's language development if the parents do this. In the best case scenario, the child will become multilingual at home if the parents/nannies' language backgrounds differ.*

Furthermore, 17% of responses emphasized the role of the home language as an instrument of thought, conceptual thinking, cognition (Ex. 17), and self-expression (Ex. 17, 18), while 16% opined that the home language is the language of emotion (Ex. 18). Indeed, language proficiency and age of acquisition may affect cognitive processes, such as processing language and expressing emotions. Moreover, in the early phases of language acquisition, the home language is used for inner speech; however, with increased proficiency, the new language may become the language of inner speech and affect conceptual thinking (for a review, see Pavlenko, 2011). There is also neural evidence that second-language processing becomes more native-like with higher proficiency (e.g., Chang & Wang, 2016).

Proficiency is also related to recalling learned topics; recall is faster and more accurate when happening in the language that was used for learning, especially if learners have high proficiency in that language (Marian & Fausey, 2006). Furthermore, although emotional reactions may be stronger in one's home language, (Caldwell-Harris, 2014), higher proficiency of another language equates to fewer difficulties in expressing emotions in that language (Dewaele, 2018; Dewaele & Salomidou, 2017). Moreover, the use of a language other than a home language may decrease stress levels when expressing negative emotions (Dylman & Bjärtå, 2019).

Seven percent of the responses suggested multilingualism is an asset; multilingual skills were seen as having instrumental value (see also de Jong et al., 2016; Kroll & Dussias, 2017). However, these respondents did not explicitly state how different languages could be beneficial (Ex. 19). Another 3% of the respondents stated that

maintaining one's home language is linked to family dynamics (Ex. 20, see also Tseng, 2020), which can be interpreted as reflecting the instrumental value of the language, while 1% stressed the need to maintain home languages in order to communicate with others, such as relatives (Ex. 21), which is also supported by previous research (see Pauwels, 2005).

17. *One's own language is an instrument of thought, conceptual development, cognitive aspects, and self-expression.*
18. *Home language is the language of emotion. Immigration is filled with instability, fear, and learning and acquiring new things, so it's good if there is something stable and familiar. You speak your own language in order to be able to express your feelings and thoughts on a deeper level.*
19. *I think it is important to maintain the home language; knowing many languages is an asset.*
20. *Another, maybe even more important, reason is the relationship between the parents and the child! Finnish families in Sweden in the 60s and 70s are a good example. The parents wanted to give their children a good start in the new society and spoke Swedish at home. However, they spoke a language that was foreign to them, so it was superficial, and instilling values was not done. In the end, the children could not really communicate with their parents. They had no connection to their own roots and culture.<sup>2</sup>*
21. *So the student has opportunities to use their home language with people that speak the same language.*

Overall, responses reflecting language-as-resource orientation were positive, both in content and vocabulary; expressions like "able", "possibility", "support", "beneficial", and "important" were used. Interestingly, in the teachers' responses, the stance that language is a resource for individuals was emphasized even more strongly than in Ruiz's (1984) original language-as-resource orientation which stresses the value of language also for society (see also de Jong, Li, Zafar, & Wu, 2016; Hult & Hornberger, 2016). Thus, it can be argued that many of the responses reflected the teachers' stance towards affirming students' identities by highlighting the importance of home languages (Ex. 14, 17, 18, 19; see also Cummins, 2001, thereby aligning with the national core curricula for basic and upper-secondary education (National Agency for Education, 2014, National Agency for Education, 2015).

**Language-as-problem.** Five sub-categories (Table 1) reflected the language-as-problem orientation (Ruiz, 1984), showing that some teachers do not support students' identities as required by the core curricula (National Agency for Education, 2014, National Agency for Education, 2015). These responses often used rigid language (Ex. 22, 23, 24) and portrayed non-national home languages as problematic, reflecting bias and prejudice (Ex. 22); this was also reported in a recent study about Finnish teachers' attitudes toward teaching immigrant students (Repo, 2020). Some responses even reflected racism (Ex. 22, 23, 24), echoing the recent finding that out of 12 European countries, Finland reported the highest incidents of racism towards people of African descent (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2019). As one in four ninth graders in Finland has experienced racially motivated bullying or discrimination at school (Zacheus et al., 2019), it is especially worrying that teachers may present racist views.

<sup>2</sup> A mass immigration from Finland to Sweden occurred in the 1960s and 1970s; it led to large-scale language attrition and challenges in well-being and social integration (see also Skutnabb-Kangas, 1997).

22. *Because Finnish is the language spoken in Finland. Finnish is the home language of Finns, and Finns are the majority and the most important ethnic group in Finland.*
23. *This is Finland, not Iraq.*
24. *Of course a Finn must speak Finnish.*

Using the school language at home to learn it more efficiently was included in 20% of the responses (Ex. 25, 26); the tone of the responses in this sub-category was milder and less absolute than in the other categories within this orientation. However, these responses still reflected the belief that maintaining a home language interferes with learning the language of society. In addition, the responses indicated concern that multilingual speakers are more likely to struggle with academic achievements and that speaking a minority language is something that must be overcome, as it excludes students from significant aspects of society (see also Ruiz, 1984). This orientation may lead to subtractive language policies (see Hult & Hornberger, 2016), in which learning the majority language is the responsibility of every multilingual learner so they can integrate into society (Harrison, 2007; Horner, 2011; Hult & Hornberger, 2016).

25. *In the beginning, speak as much Finnish as possible in order to develop the language. Later, you can go back to speaking your own language.*
26. *One doesn't need to forget one's first language, but I recommend using Finnish as often as possible so that the family's Finnish language skills will develop.*

Arguments against using home languages revealed beliefs that maximum exposure to a target language leads to better outcomes and that exposure to the school language could help immigrant students learn it more quickly and survive independently afterwards (see also Alisaari, Heikkola, Acquah, & Cummins, 2019). However, research has indicated the opposite (Cummins, 2001; Ramírez, 1992; Thomas & Collier, 1997); many studies have found that using home languages does not prevent learning the language of instruction, rather strong home language skills support learning other languages as well as other subjects (Cummins, 1979, 2007; Eunjung Relyea & Amendum, 2019; Ganuza & Hedman, 2018; Goldenberg, 2008; Krompæk, 2018; Ovando & Combs, 2011; Ramírez, 1992; Slavin & Cheung, 2005).

Nine percent of the responses conveyed worry about students' language development; these were categorized to reflect language-as-problem orientation, as multilingualism was considered a threat or deficit (see also MacSwan, 2000). Half of these responses (5% of all responses) expressed the belief that neither home nor school language could develop fully if the home language is not used at home (Ex. 27). This reflects findings that the family is "the primary social and affective unit for the language-learning child" (Lanza and Lomeu Gomes, 2020, p. 155).

The other half of these responses (4% of all responses) expressed concern about possible semi-lingualism (Ex. 28, 29), a term that emerged in the 1970s (Cummins, 1979) and has since been deemed inappropriate, presenting a deficit view of multilingualism and linguistic minorities (MacSwan, 2000). Thus, while these responses can be interpreted as showing concern for the students' best interests and language development, they "reproduce linguistic discrimination and ascribe deficit identities to heritage speakers through misdiagnosis of bilinguals as linguistically or cognitively impaired" (Tseng, 2020, p. 117).

27. *Absolutely not just Finnish. Naturally, they can learn new words and sayings [in Finnish] together [as a family], sort of like a game. It is not good for the child to learn "bogus Finnish" [in*

*Finnish "kökkösuomea"]. It could then happen that the child doesn't know any language – not their own home language nor Finnish.*

28. *Because a child's balanced, functional bilingualism is vital, and so the child doesn't become semi-lingual.*
29. *It is important for everyone (among other things because of one's identity) to learn their first language well. If the parents speak a language they are still learning to their children, the children can easily become "semi-lingual".*

Interestingly, many of these responses used strong language ("vital", "important", "absolutely not"), indicating that the teachers think they know what is best for their students (Ex. 27, 28, 29), and the expressions that refer to learning Finnish outside of school are often derogatory (Ex. 27).

A further 6% of the responses emphasized that learning the language of instruction is necessary for integrating into society (Ex. 22, 30). These responses expressed genuine concern for students' futures, including sufficient language skills and opportunities for higher education and employment (see also Alisaari et al., forthcoming), which is justified; a lack of linguistic skills can hinder educational opportunities (Borgna, 2017). For example, immigrant students in Finland encounter more challenges entering and succeeding in upper secondary and higher education than native students (Jahnukainen et al., 2019), and language skills can prevent educational transitions (Niemi et al., 2020). Moreover, a recent report by Kuukka and Metsämuuronen (2016) showed that Finnish language learners' Finnish skills at the end of basic education are at level B1 (Council of Europe, 2001), which is not sufficient for higher education. To fully integrate into society, language skills are essential (Saukkonen, 2017).

30. *[... learning Finnish] is rewarding and prevents marginalization. In the beginning, [immersion] can be slow compared to the opposite method, but in the long run, it will allow for adjustment to the surrounding society. Clinging to one's own language leads to segregation, and the lack of a common language for different groups leads to misunderstanding, which plays a part of sowing the seeds of conflict. At the moment, Sweden is a tragic laboratory of human experiment when it comes to this topic.*

Responses categorized as *Parents are bad examples for Finnish language* (3%) were also interpreted as language-as-problem. In these responses, teachers emphasized that parents' insufficient Finnish language skills would distort children's language development (Ex. 27, 31). Exposure to language (also called *input*) is crucial for language development (Mueller Gathercole & Hoff, 2007), and it has been suggested that *motherese*, the clear, grammatically correct, exaggerated way parents speak to young children, enhances and supports the role of input. Input also functions as corrective feedback for children (see, e.g., Colunga & Smith, 2005), thus if parents do not speak their home languages to their child, the child's language input may not be as contextually, grammatically, and lexically varied.

31. *Parents need to speak the language they know best, and that is the language of emotions. It's not worth speaking Finnish to your children, [it sets a] bad example.*

**Other Responses.** In addition to the 13 sub-categories related to the three language orientations (Ruiz, 1984), another five sub-categories did not fit the trichotomy. In 5% of the responses, teachers gave other justifications, for example, "Because I think so", or the rationales were based on the respondents' experience or



ethics (Ex. 32, 33).

32. *On the basis of my values and ethical and moral standards.*  
 33. *I believe I am right.*

These responses often explicitly referred to teachers' beliefs (Example 33) with no concrete support for their arguments. It would be beneficial if teachers could justify their pedagogical rationales, including their language policies (see also Alisaari et al., 2019), in order to make more pedagogically sustainable decisions (see, e.g., Lucas & Villegas, 2013). However, these responses indicated an inability or unwillingness to justify language policies.

Three percent of the responses stated that language choice is solely the decision of the family (Ex. 34). Indeed, when outsiders attempt to influence, comment upon, or accept or reject immigrant families' language policies, it "calls into question the very notion of the family as a private space" (Lanza and Lomeu Gomes, 2020 p. 165). However, if teachers are asked to give recommendations regarding a family's language choices, their recommendations should be based on the values reflected in the core curricula.

34. *It depends on how the family views language. They need to think it through themselves.*

In addition, 2% of all responses were blank, and another 2% were unrelated to the question, for example, "*The parents need information about the Finnish educational system.*"

#### 4. Discussion

An important starting point for this study was a major change in the Finnish curricula (National Agency for Education, 2014, National Agency for Education, 2015) that emphasizes the significance of home languages as resources for learning. However, teachers' beliefs regarding multilingualism may be slow to change (Alisaari, Heikkola, Acquah, & Commins, 2019; Repo, 2020). The aim of this study was to investigate the beliefs Finnish teachers have about the language choices made in immigrant students' homes and how they justify these beliefs. Even though it is not the teachers' responsibility or role to make decisions regarding these families' language choices, they are often considered authority figures and might be asked for advice on a variety of out-of-school topics. Understanding teachers' beliefs, values, and attitudes could give an idea whether the values reflected in the national core curricula are being followed.

The results indicate that more than half of the teachers believed it best if parents speak their home languages at home; one-third believed that both languages should be used at home; and a small minority believed that parents should only speak Finnish at home, reflecting Ruiz's (1984) three language orientations. Many responses reflected more than one orientation, which is in line with previous studies on pre-service teachers (Iversen, 2019). Most responses expressed views of language-as-resource, and almost half reflected language-as-right. Thus, many teachers' views align with the current official educational policy in Finland, in which all languages are seen as valuable.

However, some responses reflected the language-as-problem orientation, which is worrying, as these beliefs contrast the values of the core curricula and may implicitly suppress the value of students' home languages, thus adversely affecting their school performance (Cummins, 2001). Furthermore, if these negative beliefs are presented by an educational authority, the language choices made by immigrant families may be influenced; if teachers promote the use of the majority language at home, it could result in some families abandoning the home language altogether (Mary &

Young, 2020). Ideologies supporting linguistic homogeneity reflect the political nationalism of 18th and 19th century Europe (May 2017) and should be critically considered. While parents' beliefs, which are influenced by their experiences and their knowledge of multilingualism, are crucial for home language maintenance (Curdts-Christiansen & Huang, 2020), societal factors, such as assimilation ideologies (see also Tseng, 2020), may influence them as well. Thus, parents may see the home language as an educational barrier and choose to not speak their home language with their children (Curdts-Christiansen & Huang, 2020). It is therefore of utmost importance that teachers, as representatives of the institution of education, inform parents about the importance of developing a strong home language and the benefits of active multilingualism (Eisenchlas & Schalley, 2019).

It is interesting that the responses where language was seen as a resource or right were presented from the point-of-view of the individual, while language-as-problem was often reflected upon from a broader, societal perspective. Home language maintenance is important for both individuals and communities (Kroll & Dussias, 2017): Individually, a multilingual learners' linguistic repertoire is a valuable resource for learning (Cummins et al., 2005), and language is vital for identity development (Tseng, 2020). In a wider context, the use of one's home language is important for generating cohesion within both the family and the larger community, and it is a way to connect to one's origins (Moustaoui Shrir, 2020). There is often a desire in families to maintain cultural loyalty and linguistic continuity across generations (Curdts-Christiansen & Huang, 2020), thus the individual and societal levels are interconnected.

The home plays a key role in fostering language development in multilingual children. Teachers and policy makers can support families' language policies by providing information about the importance of promoting and maintaining home languages; for example, teachers should inform parents about the importance of accepting children's use of different languages in different contexts and avoiding strict language policies that may cause negativity toward a language (Wilson, 2020). Children may be discouraged from maintaining their home language if their multilingual abilities are compared to monolingual norms (Tseng, 2020); family language practices should be based on bidirectional, reciprocal learning, where parents are the home language experts and children may help them learn the dominant language (Kenner et al., 2004; Schwartz, 2020). Indeed, it is essential for parents to "strike a balance between the necessity and desire to develop the [home language], and a children's unique sense of linguistic and cultural identity" (Wilson, 2020, p. 137). Furthermore, it is important to create space for all languages and not make "home languages to compete for space with school languages" (Curdts-Christiansen & Huang, 2020, p. 185).

#### 5. Conclusions

The Finnish curricula for basic and upper secondary education require teachers to value and deepen all of students' linguistic resources which has implications on the messages they communicate to immigrant parents. The results of our study indicate that teachers have variable views concerning the use of home languages at their immigrant background students' homes. Ruiz's (1984) orientations towards language policies or planning: language-as-right, language-as-resource, and language-as-problem provided a useful framework for the analysis of our data (see also Hult & Hornberger, 2016). Interestingly, teachers who participated in our study perceived language-as-right and language-as-resource mainly at the individual level, and language-as-problem at the societal level. In the language-as-resource orientation, the teachers seemed to emphasize the value that language has for individuals,

not for societies, which partially differs from Ruiz' (1984) original ideas that also emphasize the aspect that language is a resource for the whole society.

Using the orientations as a basis for our research has enabled us to bring to light aspects that need attention in planning future teacher training and professional learning opportunities. Based on the results of this study, professional development about linguistic responsiveness for Finnish teachers is still needed. The Finnish national core curricula (National Agency for Education, 2014, National Agency for Education, 2015) have idealistic goals to support multilingual learners, but the principles behind these goals were not reflected in all the responses of this study; not every teacher's beliefs are aligned with the curricula's intentions to support multilingualism. To guarantee educational equity, teacher education should include ways to support multilingual learners' language development and learning, and teachers should reflect on their own beliefs and attitudes towards racism (Repo, 2020). Without this reflection, teachers might be "unaware of the images they construct and communicate to children and parents" (Mary & Young, 2020, p. 449).

The results of this study show that policy changes require time and space for critical consideration. Changes in teachers' "learned predispositions" (Fishbein, 1967, p. 267) are necessary, but they are often slow (Repo, 2020), as teachers' identities must adjust. This is a challenge for teacher education: How can teacher educators motivate teachers to make these kinds of changes within both their beliefs that are reflected in their pedagogies, and their identities? Since the teachers in this study mainly saw language as a resource, we are hopeful that teachers will be able to respond positively to the future requirements of multilingual societies.

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