

# The dynamics of teachers' beliefs about language, citizenship and social interaction

Echoes of monolingualism in Flemish classrooms

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# Research project

Part of the 'BET YOU!' Project

Consortium: Cemis, UA – HIVA & IMMRC, KU Leuven – CDL, UGent

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Research on teachers' beliefs in collaboration with prof. dr. Orhan Agirdag



- Research problem: *what have I researched and why?*
- Research questions: *what answers did I look for?*
- Methodology: *how did I conduct my research?*
- Main findings: *what answers did I find?*
- Conclusions and implications: *where do we go from here?*



# Research problem: What have I researched and why?

The past two decades

- Worldwide migration, economic crisis, globalization, terrorist threat
- Profound changes in Western European societies: loss of the illusion of a homogeneous, monocultural and monolingual society
- Leading to questions about social cohesion, social participation, identity and citizenship
- Answers were found – by policymakers and wider society – in a monolingual paradigm, underlying integration, citizenship and education policies



# Research problem: What have I researched and why?

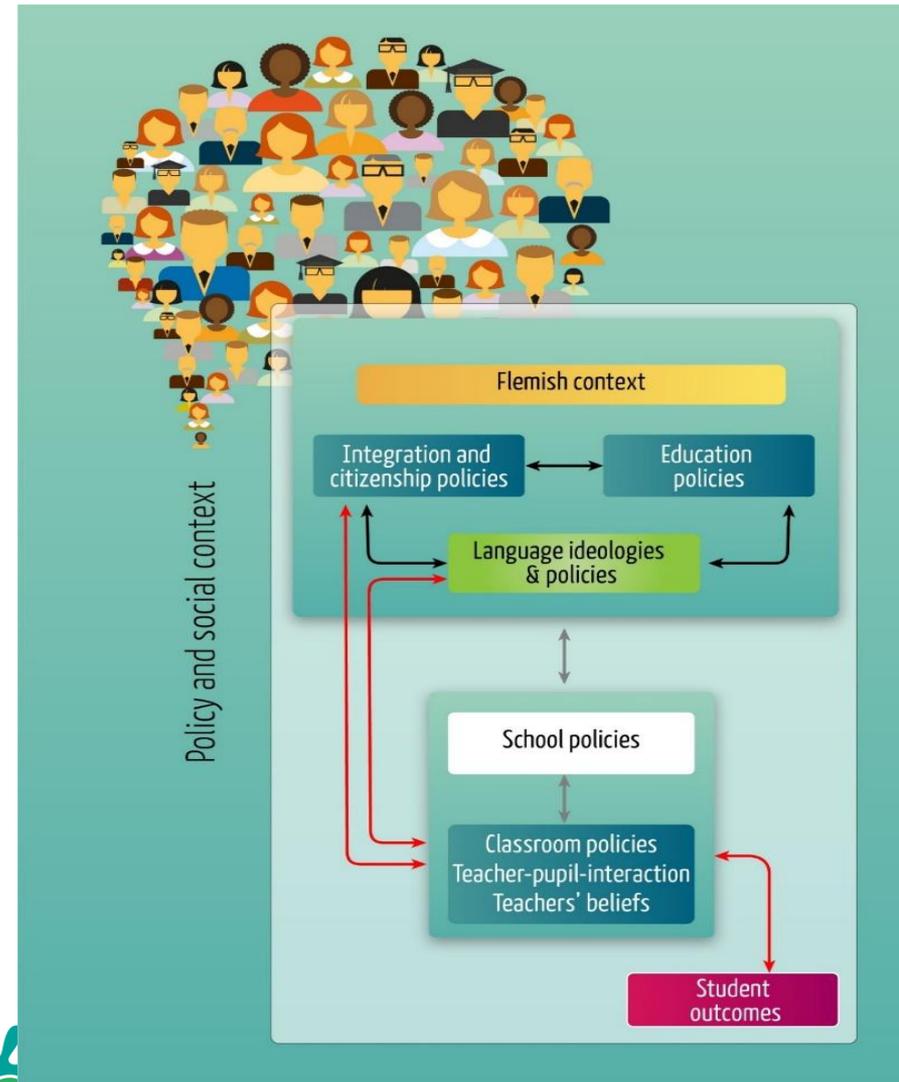
**Monolingual ideology**, as the basis for integration, citizenship and education policies:

1. The use of a common language is essential for social cohesion
2. Social cohesion can only be guaranteed by the Standard variety
3. Language proficiency in the dominant language is a condition for social participation
4. Language proficiency in the dominant language is a marker for the knowledge of the culture, norms and values
5. Insufficient knowledge of the common language is seen as a sign of disloyalty and a threat to social cohesion



# Research problem

- Aim to unravel the dynamic interaction between language, citizenship and education policies based on a monolingual ideology
- In the specific context of the Flemish education system
- With specific attention to the pivotal role teachers play in the socialization of school children



# Research questions (RQ)

Three main research questions

1. RQ1: What are the beliefs teachers in Flemish secondary schools have on language and citizenship education?
2. RQ2: Are teachers' beliefs regarding the role of language in education related to their beliefs on citizenship education?
3. RQ3: Is there a relationship between teachers' beliefs regarding the role of language in education and citizenship education on the one hand and teacher-student interaction on the other hand?



# Methodology: mixed-method approach

To answer the main research questions, I collected and analyzed three data sets:

1. A small-scale corpus of policy documents, outlining language policies in education by Flemish Ministers of Education and Integration during two consecutive legislatures.
2. Qualitative data collected during semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions in three schools in the city of Ghent (data I collected as part of the 'BET YOU!' project).
3. Quantitative data collected via an online survey among teachers (N = 774) in secondary schools (N = 48) in the cities of Antwerp, Genk and Ghent



# Main findings

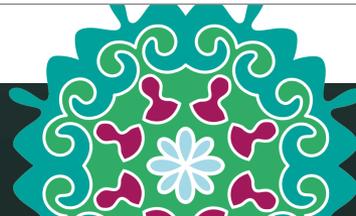
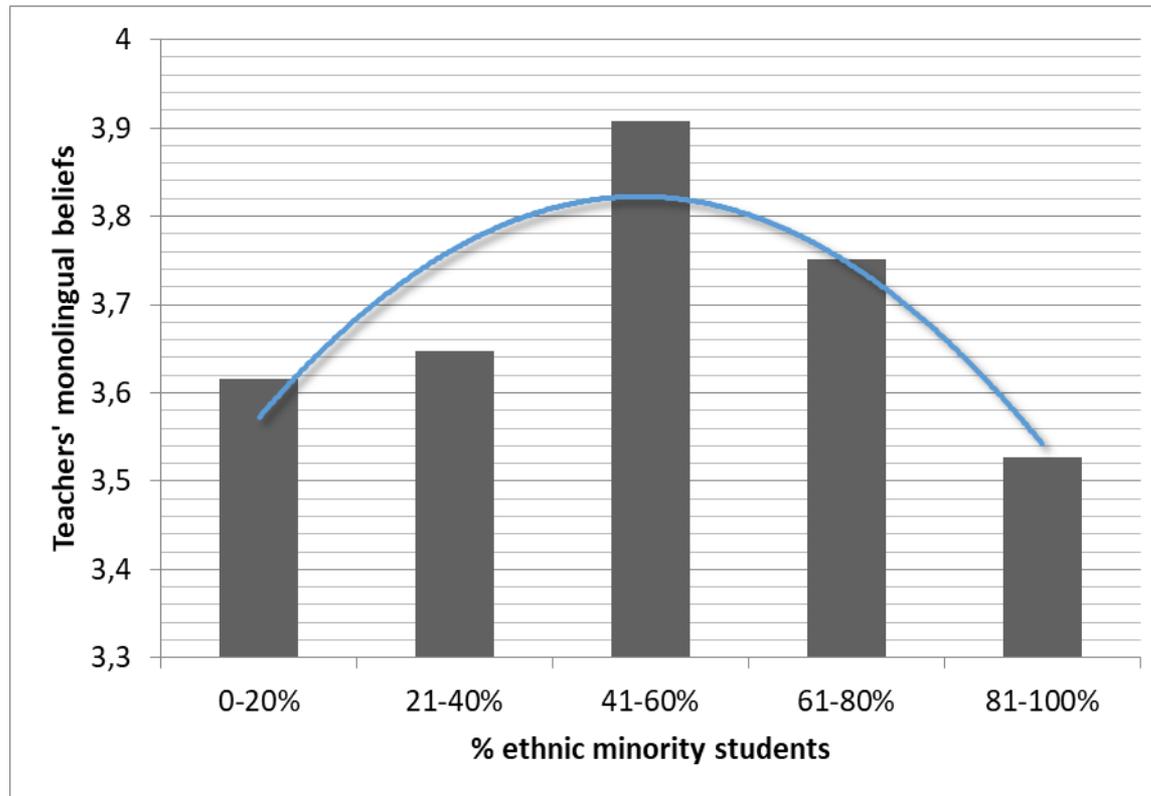


# RQ1. What are the beliefs teachers in Flemish secondary schools have on **language** and citizenship education?

Item	Statement	Agree
1	Non-Dutch speaking pupils should not be allowed to speak their home language at school.	77.3%
2	The most important cause of academic failure of non-Dutch speaking pupils is their insufficient proficiency in Dutch	78.2%
3	The school library (classroom library, media library) should also include books in the different home languages of the pupils	12.8%
4	Non-Dutch speaking pupils should be offered the opportunity to learn their home language at school.	6.8%
5	By speaking their home language at school, non-Dutch speaking pupils do not learn Dutch sufficiently.	72.1%
6	Non-Dutch speaking pupils should not be offered regular subjects in their home language.	3.2%
7	It is more important that non-Dutch speaking pupils obtain a high level of proficiency in Dutch than in their home language.	44.7%
8	It is in the interest of the pupils when they are punished for speaking their home language at school.	29.1%



RQ1. What are the beliefs teachers in Flemish secondary schools have on **language** and citizenship education?



## RQ1. What are the beliefs teachers in Flemish secondary schools have on language and **citizenship education**?

### Teachers have different ideas about citizenship: 3 dimensions of citizenship

- Participatory dimension
  - Engage in political discussion and debate
  - Participate in activities promoting human rights
- Authoritarian-patriotic dimension
  - Obey the law
  - Work hard
- General, social dimension
  - Cooperate in groups with other students
  - Act to protect the environment



## RQ1. What are the beliefs teachers in Flemish secondary schools have on language and **citizenship education**?

Teachers do not address these dimensions to the same extent:

- Experienced teachers → focus on the participatory dimension
- Female teachers → focus on the authoritarian dimension
- In schools with a higher share of ethnic minority students → focus on the authoritarian dimension

⇒ The dimension of citizenship teachers focus on is related to the ethnic composition of the school and not the curriculum track.

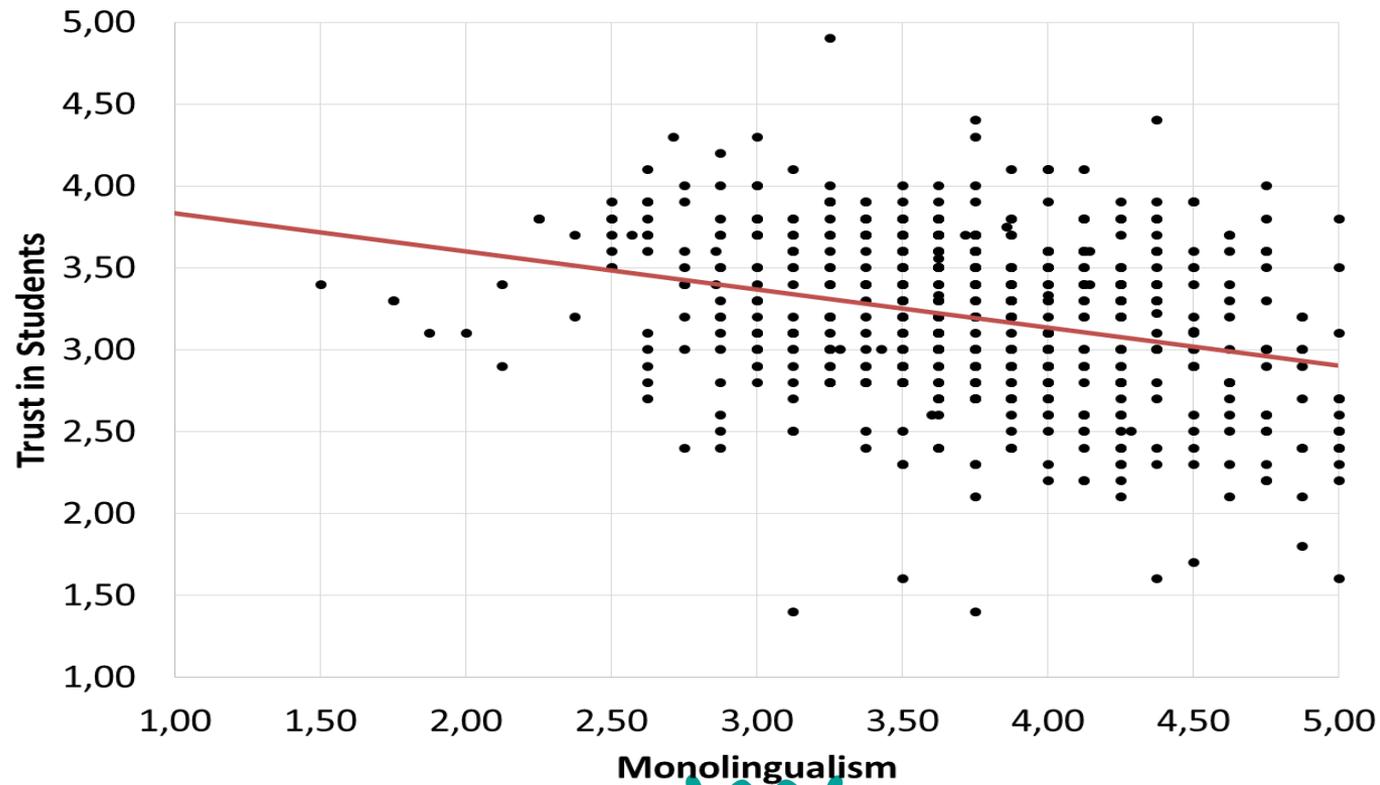


RQ2. Are teachers' beliefs about language related to their beliefs on citizenship education?

Teachers with strong monolingual beliefs, attach more attention to the authoritarian dimension of citizenship.



### RQ 3. Relationship between teachers' beliefs on language & citizenship education AND teacher-student interaction?



### RQ 3. Relationship between teachers' beliefs on language & **citizenship education AND teacher-student interaction?**

Students with an ethnic minority background are more likely to be taught the authoritarian dimension of citizenship and are less likely to be exposed to the participatory dimension.



# The monolingual paradox of integration and citizenship

The potentially negative effects of the interacting dynamics between ideology and policy – mediated by teachers' beliefs – on the academic achievement and social participation of students with a migrant background.

Not questioning the necessity of a common language, but questioning the conditionality of language proficiency in the dominant language for participation in society and education



# First layer: monolingual beliefs and student outcomes

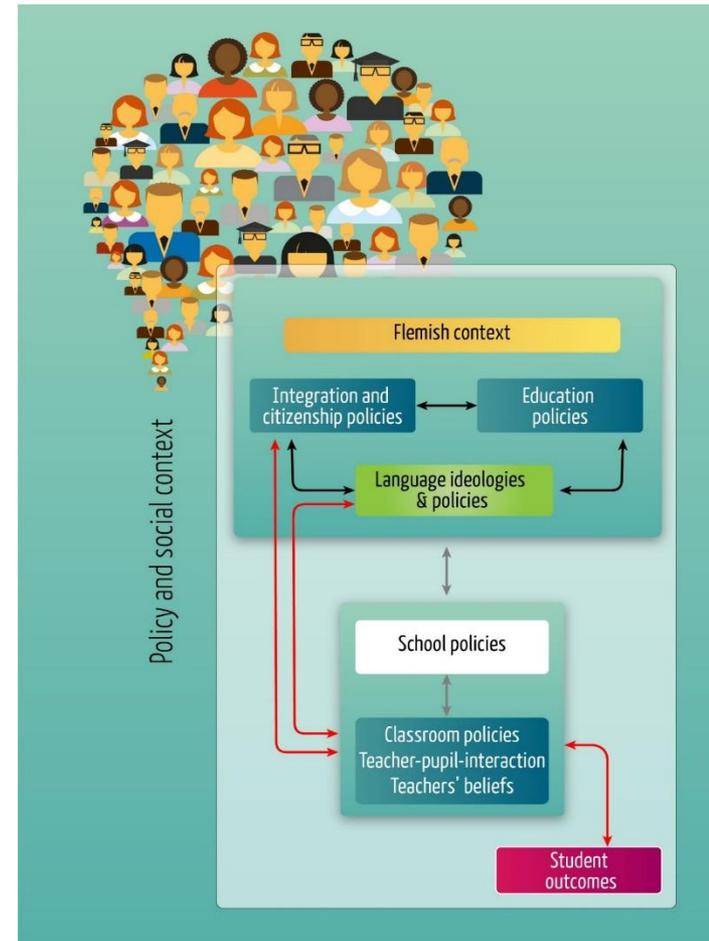
⇒ Strong monolingual beliefs have a negative impact on teachers' trust

The literature tells us:

Low levels of trust → low teachers' expectations

→ low student outcomes

**Paradox:** Monolingual education policies, aimed at equal opportunities, potentially lead to a decrease (↓) in academic outcomes.



# First layer: monolingual beliefs and student outcomes

- Cracks at the micro-level already exists (classroom policies)
  - Teachers expressed doubts about the effectiveness
  - Research has demonstrated the positive impact of exploring childrens' multilingual repertoires on teachers' beliefs and trust
- ⇒ Go beyond the binary thinking of monolingual vs bilingual/multilingual learning
- ⇒ Develop classroom practices and alternative frameworks regarding language learning and use the linguistic capital of students

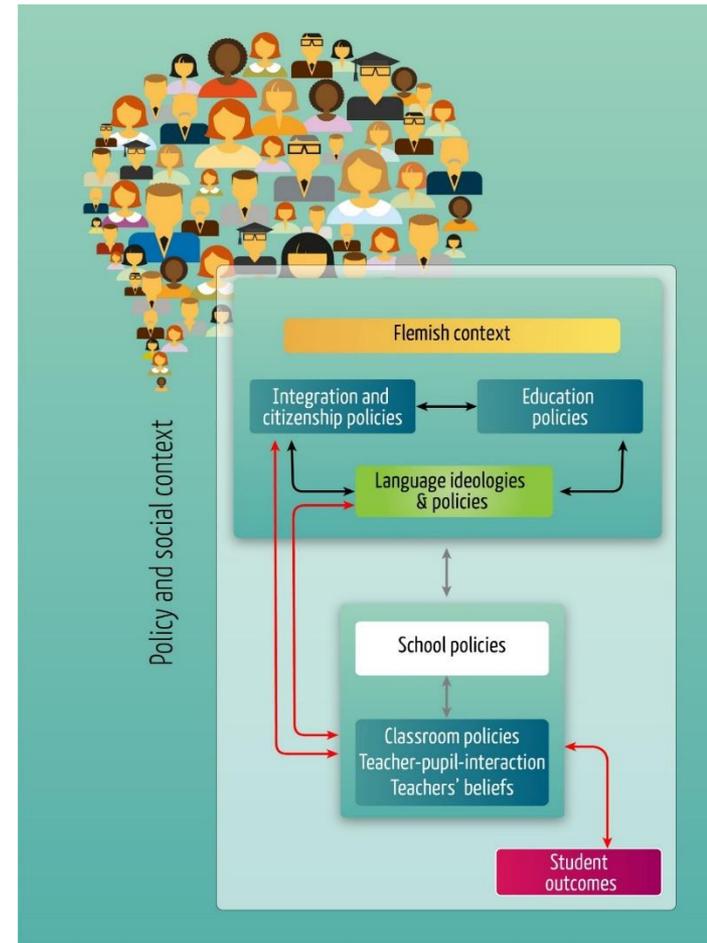


# Second layer: monolingual beliefs and citizenship education

⇒ Strong monolingual beliefs of teachers are related to focusing more on an authoritarian dimension of citizenship education.

⇒ Teachers in schools with a higher share of ethnic minority students focus more on the authoritarian dimension.

**Paradox: students with a migrant background are less likely to be taught the participatory dimension. This contradicts Flemish policies, i.e. to stimulate active citizenship and social participation.**



# Second layer: monolingual beliefs and citizenship education

- Relation between teachers' beliefs and the ethnic composition of the schools
- The influence of implicit, but tenacious stereotypical beliefs of teachers regarding 'race' and 'ethnicity'

⇒ Race and ethnicity need to be reintroduced as explanatory factors in educational research



# Cracking the monolingual paradox

- Given the socio-political context of Flanders, shift to a plurilingual approach on the macro-level not expected in the short term
- Teachers can be key actors in developing inclusive policies and practices.

Teachers are already aware of the limited effectiveness

- Bottom-up approach: collaborative initiatives, action research, experimental programmes and cooperation between teachers & schools, teacher training institutions and researchers.

Subsequently, the policy (macro) level can be influenced.



Thank you!  
Questions?

