Abstract

‘Literacy’ in terms of reading and understanding texts is essential for success at school. The increasing linguistic diversity in Dutch schools confronts teachers with many challenges. How do they perceive, manage, and evaluate this situation with respect to the teaching of literacy?

In order to answer that question, semi-structured interviews have been conducted with 230 secondary school teachers in North Brabant, a province in the South of the Netherlands. The participants were differentiated equally by three criteria: (1) type of education (vocational or preparatory scientific education), (2) school subject (Dutch, modern languages or other text-based subjects) and (3) teaching experience (<12.5 or >12.5 years). Questions concerned the perception of multilingualism in class, the background of students and practical issues for the lesson.

Results are organized along three topics. In each section, special attention is given to the moderating role of the three criteria mentioned above. The first topic is a descriptive one, the latter two are didactical. (1) How many children do actually have a multilingual background, and which home languages are represented within the classroom? (2) Which challenges do arise from multilingualism in class, and is there a connection between problems with literacy and the multilingual context? (3) Do teachers feel well prepared through (preliminary) schooling and institutional support? Which types of additional support do they consider as necessary?

In the conclusion, consequences are discussed for the development of teachers’ education, training and external support.
1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose
Multilingualism in the classroom confronts teachers with many challenges. A recurrent observation is that teachers of multilingual classes have more problems than teachers of mainly monolingual classes. In order to respond adequately to the challenges encountered in teaching multilingual classrooms, teachers should be prepared for these challenges in teacher training (or receive remedial training on the subject if they are already teaching), and be given adequate supporting facilities. Therefore, knowledge on the origins of the perceived problems is needed. What is the nature of the challenges and problems teachers are confronted with?

The present study investigates the teachers’ perception and evaluation of multilingual classrooms at secondary schools. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 230 secondary school teachers from two different school types in North Brabant, a province in the South of the Netherlands. They were asked about their students’ linguistic backgrounds, about their perception of challenges and problems encountered in teaching multilingual classrooms, about the preparation and support and other facilities that would be needed to handle these challenges.

1.2 Secondary schooling in the Netherlands
In the Netherlands, children enter one of three types of secondary education at the age of 12: pre-vocational education (VMBO), senior general secondary education (HAVO) or pre-university education (VWO). These types differ with respect to the content and complexity of their curricula and offer different possibilities for further education: these are senior secondary vocational education (MBO) for VMBO, higher professional education (HBO) for HAVO, and university (WO) for VWO. (For terminology, see Broekhof, 1995; Ministry of Education, 2007). The majority of children attend pre-vocational schools (about 54%); the others more or less evenly enter senior general secondary education (about 25%) or pre-university schools (about 22%). The present study focuses on the school types at both ends of the spectrum (VMBO and VWO).

1.3 Research Questions
Three research questions were formulated with respect to the teaching of multilingual classrooms.

Question 1: How many children in your classes do actually have a multilingual background, and which home languages are represented within the classroom?
Question 2: What are the challenges arising from multilingualism in the classroom?
Question 3: Have teachers been properly prepared for these challenges during their studies? Which types of additional support do they consider necessary?
2 Methods

2.1 Questionnaire
Interviews were conducted on the basis of a semi-structured questionnaire. Four topics were addressed.

Background information. Informants were asked about their age, gender, work experience, and affiliation (school type and school subject taught).

Multilingualism in class. Informants reported on their experiences teaching multilingual classes. Teachers were asked to estimate the degree of multilingualism in their classes in two ways: first, to give an estimation of the percentage of students that speak languages other than Dutch at home; second, to name up to three languages their multilingual students speak at home. Besides this, the teachers were asked to report on the general home situation of their students. They were free in their interpretation of the home situation.

Challenges and problems. Informants were asked about the biggest challenges and problems they experience when teaching in a multilingual setting.

Preparation and support. Informants indicated any preliminary preparation they might have had for teaching in multilingual classes. Besides this, they reflected on different types of support that they would consider necessary and helpful.

2.2 Informants
In all, 230 teachers participated; 122 men and 108 women. One half worked at schools for pre-vocational education (VMBO), the other half at schools for pre-university education (VWO). Half of them taught Dutch (49%), 20 percent taught a modern language (such as English, French or German) or a classical language (Latin or Greek) and 32 percent taught non-language subjects (such as history, mathematics or sports). Their ages ranged from 19 to 64 with an average of 44.1 (SD=12.46) and did not differ for gender, school type, or the school subject the teachers taught (all F’s<1.63, p>.20).

The work experience of the teachers ranged from six months to 42 years with an average of 16.6 years (SD=11.91). Teachers were split into two groups: those whose experience was 12.5 years or less (n=112), and those whose experience was 13 years or more (n=118). Work experience differed by gender ($F(1,218)=12.91, p<.001, \eta^2=.056$) and school subject ($F(2,218)=6.41, p<.005, \eta^2=.056$). The women had over six years less experience than the men (14.1 versus 20.1). Teachers of a non-language subject had about six years less experience than their language colleagues (12.9 versus 18.5). The school type did not show any differences ($F(1,218)=.61, p =.44$).

2.3 Procedure
The teachers were interviewed by university students. Each student acting as interviewer recruited two teachers: one from a pre-vocational school (VMBO) and one from a pre-university school (VWO). The interviews were recorded on tape and transcribed literally. Subsequently, the transcripts of the interviews were coded for further analysis. During the analysis, special attention was given to the moderating
role of the school type. Besides this, the teacher’s school subject, their work experience and gender were taken into consideration.

3 Results

3.1 Multilingualism in class
Experience with teaching multilingual classes was reported by 69 percent of the teachers. There was no association with school type ($\chi^2(1)=0.89$, $p=.35$). On average, teachers estimated that one in six students has a multilingual background (16.8%; $SD=22.12$). Their estimates ranged from 0 to 100 percent. Estimates differed between school types ($F(1,155)=11.58$, $p<.001$, $\eta^2=.070$). Pre-vocational school teachers reported a much higher estimate of multilingualism than pre-university education teachers (22.5% versus 9.3%).

Home language background
The teachers were also asked to name up to three languages their students speak at home in addition to Dutch. In all, 45 different languages were reported. Table 1 gives an overview of the 10 most frequently mentioned languages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Languages</th>
<th>Absolute number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moroccan-Arabic/Berber</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkish</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghan</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurdish</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papiamento</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The languages most used at home in addition to Dutch were (Moroccan)-Arabic or Berber (together making up 27%) and Turkish (21%). Of the other 52 percent, the most reported home languages were English (5%), Chinese (5%), and Afghan (4%). Only six percent of the teachers reported that among their students no other languages were spoken at home instead of or in addition to Dutch. Five percent named one foreign language, 22 percent named two, and 67 percent three languages. An association with school type was found ($\chi^2(3)=8.65$, $p<.05$). At pre-university schools, more teachers named three languages than at pre-vocational schools (70% versus 65%), whereas at pre-vocational schools more teachers named two languages than at pre-university schools (28% versus 15%).

The languages reported by the teachers were classified as either Western (Germanic, Romance and Slavic languages) or non-western (Creole, Afro-Asiatic, Sino-Tibetan, Iranian languages, and other language families). Based on this classification, the sample was divided into four groups of teachers: Teachers that reported having only Dutch-speaking students in their classes, Dutch speaking students and students
speaking other western languages, Dutch speaking students and students speaking non-western languages, and students speaking Dutch plus students speaking both western and non-western languages. Table 2 presents the distribution over these four teachers’ groups. There was some difference between school types ($\chi^2(3)=6.90$, $p=.08$). However, in both cases the vast majority (>85%) reported having students speaking non-western languages at home.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-vocational (n=116)</th>
<th>Pre-university (n=114)</th>
<th>Over all (n=230)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Only Dutch</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch + western</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch + non-western</td>
<td>62.9</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td>55.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch + western and non-western</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>35.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A first idea about the home situation of students was given by 181 teachers. They interpreted the home situation in three different ways: in terms of ethnic background, socio-economic background and of family background. No difference was found for school type ($\chi^2(1)=3.60$, $p=.17$). Table 3 presents the distribution over these aspects in relation to school type.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-vocational (n=92)</th>
<th>Pre-university (n=89)</th>
<th>Over all (n=181)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic background</td>
<td>62.0</td>
<td>55.1</td>
<td>58.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economic background</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>29.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family background</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ethnic background**

More than half of the informants (59%) associated home situation with the ethnic background of students. Answers that referred to ethnic background included all references to language, birth place, cultural diversity or nationality, immigrant status and the distinction “black/white” or “autochthonous/allochthonous” students. In all cases, these subcategories were used in order to make a distinction into two groups.

Most of the teachers made a distinction on the basis of autochthonous/ allochthonous students. About half of this group reported that most of their students are of autochthonous Dutch origin. The other half reported mixed classes (autochthonous and allochthonous students). In some cases, the estimates included an either negative or positive evaluation of the students.

Teacher van Veen, for example, (male Dutch teacher, pre-university school, and 56 years old) related the allochthonous background of the students to a lower social class.

Approximately 60 percent have an allochthonous background and are increasingly from lower social classes.

*Ongeveer 60 percent [zijn] van allochtone afkomst, in toenemende mate uit lage sociale klassen.*

Teacher Jong (male Dutch teacher, pre-vocational school, and 58 years old) pointed to language problems of non-western students:
Many students have a non-western background and consequently have language difficulties.

With regard to the positive evaluations, teachers emphasized the high level of education, the higher social class and the stability of many immigrant families. Teacher Dijk (female Dutch teacher, pre-university school, and 56 years old) reported on the high motivation of certain groups of students.

Students with an Afghan background are strongly motivated by their parents and score high grades. The Turkish children are always highly motivated too and do their best to get good grades.

De kinderen van Afghaanse afkomst worden erg gestimuleerd van thuis uit en halen graag een hoog diploma. De Turkse kinderen zijn ook altijd erg gemotiveerd en doen hun best om een goede opleiding te halen.

**Socio-economic background**

About 30 percent of the teachers referred to the socio-economic background of the students’ families. Socio-economic background was frequently mentioned in connection with profession, income, social background, or educational status of the family. Teachers mentioned students’ backgrounds in terms of lower, middle or higher socio-economic status. With regard to the profession of the parents, teachers named a variety of parents’ professions being represented in class, ranging from farming families all the way up to managing directors. When teachers referred to the income of the parents, their estimates were quite high. The estimates with regard to the social background were more diverse. Most of the teachers that referred to the social milieu referred to a mix of higher and lower social milieus in class. The answers that included information on the educational status of the students’ parents ranged from classes with mainly lower or mainly higher educational backgrounds to classes with a mix of educational backgrounds.

**Family background**

Twelve percent of the informants associated students’ home situation with family background. It was addressed in terms of the parent’s marital status and the number of sisters and brothers. Most of the teachers emphasized that many of their students’ parents are separated without specifying the backgrounds of these students. By contrast, teachers often emphasized the stability of the home situation and the high number of sisters and brothers in the case of multilingual students.

### 3.2 Challenges and problems

Four out of five teachers reported challenges encountered in teaching multilingual classes. These challenges were classified as challenges for students, challenges for teachers and challenges for both. There was a difference between the two school types ($\chi^2(2)=7.93$, $p<.05$). Table 4 shows the distribution of the challenges in relation to school type.
Table 4. Distribution of challenges in relation to school type (in percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges for students:</th>
<th>Pre-vocational (n=100)</th>
<th>Pre-university (n=92)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mastering functional language skills</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>39.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>understanding texts</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>passing final exam</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mastering adequate vocabulary</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges for teachers:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>being comprehensible to student</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>motivating students</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>being aware of differences</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges for both students + teachers:</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mutual understanding</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Challenges for students**

In pre-university education, more challenges for students were perceived (62 versus 42%). Students’ challenges concerned functional linguistic skills, the mastery of adequate vocabulary, the understanding of texts, and passing the final exam. Most teachers mentioned challenges encountered by students in mastering functional linguistic skills. These skills comprise the language skills that are needed to be able to handle everyday situations. Thus, teachers mentioned difficulties students had filling out housing subsidy forms or understanding the package inserts that come with medicines. This category also included problems with Dutch grammar. One pre-university teacher (male Dutch teacher, 31 years old) illustrated this with the opaque gender distinction in the (fe)male article ‘de’ (*the*), the neuter article ‘het’ (*the*) and, the demonstrative ‘die’ (*that*). The frequent error ‘die meisje’ (*that girl*) which should be ‘het meisje’ in Dutch.

How to teach the difference between ‘de’ and ‘het’? There are no specific rules governing the use so you need a feel for the language in order to learn that properly and not say things like “Die meisje”.

Het verschil aanleren tussen ‘de’ en ‘het’. Er zijn geen duidelijke regels aan verbonden dus je moet een taalgevoel hebben om dat goed te kunnen leren: Die meisje.

With regard to the mastery of adequate vocabulary, many teachers emphasized problems multilingual students had understanding words. Van der Aeck (female history teacher, pre-university school, and 45 years old) reported that these children need more attention:

I help multilingual children a lot, help them understand words and sentences, because they can’t do that on their own.

Meertalige kinderen help ik veel met het leren begrijpen van woorden en zinnen, omdat hun dat zelf niet lukt.

Van Loo (male Biology teacher, pre-vocational school, and 20 years old) reported problems students had following her course:

The problem is that students have to focus on more than one language, and that they do not understand words that we consider normal. If in biology you’re talking about an oak for instance, they have no idea what that is.
Next to the understanding of words and the mastery of functional language skills, the understanding and interpretation of texts poses serious challenges for multilingual students. Teacher van de Borg (female Dutch teacher, pre-vocational school, and 24 years old) described the problems as follows:

Children of allochthonous origin tend to read past things, miss things when they are reading or interpret things in a different way.

Teacher Kerkhoff (male Dutch teacher, pre-university school, and 56 years old) explained the origin of these problems:

[The challenge is] to get them, non-native speakers in particular, to let go of their fear of texts, to learn to handle the machine that a text actually is.

Finally, passing the final exam also poses challenges for students. Teachers reported problems students have with specific types of questions or tasks formulated in exams.

Challenges for teachers
In pre-vocational education, more challenges for teachers were perceived (49% versus 34%). These included being comprehensible to students, motivating students or being aware of differences. Some teachers mentioned that they use visual or other non-verbal aids in order to make themselves understood. Another teacher emphasized that he repeats things that are important to make sure that everybody understands them. With regard to their own use of language, teachers are uncertain about whether they succeed in expressing themselves at an appropriate level, as teacher Snitjer (male Math teacher, pre-university school, and 49 years old) specified:

[The biggest challenge is] to use language in a way that does not impoverish it, but that is quite clear nevertheless.

Some informants reported difficulties keeping the students interested, motivated and concentrated. Some teachers report that many students are not interested in reading classical literature such as poems or that they are not motivated to do the tasks the teacher sets them. The last of the teachers’ challenges, being aware of differences, mainly concerned cultural differences, differences between students’ performance and social differences.

Challenges for students and teachers
Some teachers (9% pre-vocational and 4% pre-university) reported on challenges for both, for students and teachers alike. Such challenges mainly concerned mutual understanding and awareness of cultural differences. Several teachers reported problems with the power relationship between themselves as teachers and certain students. Thus, one female teacher explained that some students are not used to female authority and do not accept her as a teacher. Besides this, teachers perceived challenges with regard to the creation of a sense of group identity in class. The use of Dutch in class in order to include the whole class in a conversation was part of this category.
To sum it up, the challenges for students mainly concern language skills, whereas the challenges for teachers also comprise aspects of attitude and intercultural differences. The third category of mutual understanding comprises aspects of group dynamics and communication that are essential for the learning process in class.

3.3 Preparation and support
Only one third of the teachers reported having received some form of preparation during their studies regarding challenges involved in multilingualism in class. For Dutch teachers, the percentage was higher than for their colleagues (43 versus 13%; $\chi^2(2)=24.56$, $p<.001$). Teachers with more extensive work experience reported less preparation (14 versus 42.9%; $\chi^2(1)=24.56$, $p<.001$). Women reported more preparation than men (39 versus 18%; $\chi^2(1)=12.41$, $p<.001$). School type did not show a significant difference ($\chi^2(1)=1.93$, $p=.17$). Among the informants that reported having had some form of preparation for teaching multilingual classes during their studies at University, most of them named preparatory courses for teaching Dutch as a second language. These teachers had been informed about second language acquisition and the difficulties involved in that, and on how to explain new words to second language learners. Besides this, informants mentioned traineeships in multilingual classes being required during their studies and a handbook for teaching multilingual classes being part of their required reading (Van de Laarschot, 1997). However, most of the teachers could not remember having received any preparation or reported not having had any preparation during their studies.

Support
Almost half of the teachers (49%) reported a need for support in order to handle the challenges involved in teaching multilingual classes. No differences were found with regard to gender, school type, subject, and experience (all $\chi^2<1.36$, $p>.24$). The support needed by the teachers covered the following three areas: working conditions, assistance, and materials. School type, school subject and work experience did not show any differences here (all $\chi^2<0.59$, $p>.74$), but an association with gender was found ($\chi^2(2)=6.29$, $p<.05$). Table 5 presents the distribution over the three areas of support in relation to gender.

Table 5. Support areas in relation to gender (in percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men (n=54)</th>
<th>Women (n=58)</th>
<th>Over all (n=112)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assistance</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>56.9</td>
<td>47.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working conditions</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Women more often indicated that they valued assistance (57% versus 37%), whereas men attached more importance to working conditions (32% versus 14%). Materials were valued equally by male and female teachers.

Assistance
On average, almost half (47%) of the teachers considered assistance necessary. Assistance was either related to the whole school setting, to the classroom or to the individual student. With regard to the school setting, what was considered important was having a contact person at school for advice on problems related to multicultural
and multilingual classes. The availability of interpreters and social support was also valued highly (such as the availability of a so-called “remedial teacher”). With regard to the classroom, teachers reported a need for the presence of an assistant or a second teacher. Another type of assistance that was also reported as desirable concerned teaching-methodological support. With regard to individual students, the importance of after-school extra Dutch languages lessons for second language learners was emphasized. Some also pleaded for offering students help with their homework. One teacher pointed out that the procedure for getting individual assistance is quite complicated and should be made easier.

**Working conditions**

In the area of working conditions, 22 percent of the informants would like to have more support. They expressed a need for more meetings, better communication with the parents and getting their support for the use of the Dutch language at home. Teacher Peters (male Dutch teacher, pre-vocational school, and 64 years old) puts the responsibility for support entirely in the hands of the parents:

Support should be offered at home rather than at school. At home, children often speak another language than Dutch. If parents would use more Dutch at home, they would notice that this benefits their children.

De ondersteuning moet niet op school, maar thuis zitten. Kinderen spreken thuis vaak een andere taal dan Nederlands. Als de ouders thuis wat meer Nederlands met hun kinderen gebruiken, zullen ze merken dat hun kinderen daar voordeel bij hebben.

Other claims with regard to working conditions concerned more time and smaller classes. Besides this, teachers would like to have more opportunities for professional exchange, especially between Dutch language teachers and teachers of other subjects.

**Materials**

One third of the teachers considered appropriate materials helpful and necessary. In general, the feeling was that more financial support is needed. Teachers emphasized a need for technical facilities (such as access to computers and the Internet, smart boards and beamers, more visual material, extra online practice, an online media center, audiovisual media such as films). Besides, teachers would like to have more background information on the pupils’ home situation, their cultural habits, and length of stay in the Netherlands. Finally, basic language skills in the students’ languages were considered helpful, even if this amounts to no more than just a few words. One teacher reported that it can be helpful to address students in their mother tongue to attract their attention.

4 Conclusions and discussion

**Multilingualism**

The first aim of this paper was to get an idea of the actual degree of multilingualism in Dutch secondary schools. A first observation concerned differences between the two school types: Pre-vocational school teachers’ estimation of the degree of multilingualism in their classrooms was higher than that of pre-university teachers. Besides this, pre-vocational teachers mentioned more non-western languages as being the home language of their students than their pre-university colleagues. Regardless of the differences between the two school types, 69 percent of the teachers reported having experience teaching multilingual classes. In all, 45 different languages were
reported. According to the teacher’s estimations, one in six students in their classes had a multilingual background. However, the surprising fact that 94 percent of the teachers named at least one and most of them three foreign languages spoken by their students at home shows that teachers are aware of differences between their students, although these may be difficult to label. The estimations regarding the students’ home situation also showed that teachers are aware of differences between students: a large part of the teachers referred to the cultural, ethnic, or national background of their students, and a lesser number to the language backgrounds of their students. While multilingualism is a factor in Dutch schools, we can conclude that other factors such as cultural differences may play a bigger role in the perception of teachers.

Challenges and problems
The examination of the challenges and problems involved in multilingualism in the classroom was the second purpose of the study. It is remarkable that 80 percent of the teachers perceived problems and challenges in both school types. However, the types of challenges perceived differed: At pre-university schools, teachers tended to point to their students as being responsible for the challenges encountered, whereas pre-vocational teachers predominantly sought to improve their own behavior towards multilingual students. However, the biggest challenge that was perceived by both groups, pre-vocational and pre-university teachers alike, lies in multilingual students having problems with basic and functional language skills. Even if -in the first instance- teachers would focus on cultural differences, the challenges they perceive are primarily language-related.

Preparation and support
The third purpose of the study concerned the need for preparation in the course of teacher training and the need for more support. Considering the variety of challenges the teachers perceived in teaching multilingual classrooms, the small number of teachers that remember having had any preparation with regard to teaching such classes is striking. The only type of preparation that was mentioned was reported by teachers of Dutch and concerned things they had learned about teaching Dutch as a foreign language. The teachers felt a great need for adequate preparation, just as they did for more support, notably in the form of practical assistance in teaching multilingual classes, for better working conditions and more material aid.

5 Implications for research and policies
Both in research and in policies, an increasing call can be heard for the development of appropriate preparation in teacher training with regard to teaching multilingual and multicultural classes (McPake, et al., 2007, p.41). The fact that none of the 230 teachers in the study reported having had specific training aimed at preparing them for teaching multilingual classes is telling. The teachers themselves mentioned many aspects that could and should be paid attention to in teacher training. They pointed out that they wanted to know more about the cultural backgrounds of their students and about their languages, and that they need the right tools to be able to teach their classes appropriately. The support they felt was most badly needed was assistance, notably in the form of a contact person that teachers can consult on matters related to teaching multilingual and multicultural classes. Summarizing, we can conclude that there is a strong need for appropriate training courses and teaching materials, and also for more facilities, notably the presence of a contact person for consultation. Besides
this, teachers should be able to work more with audiovisual media and the size of the groups taught should be reduced. The outcome of the study shows that the problems encountered in teaching multilingual classes are considerable. Recent studies that investigated teachers’ perception of challenges and problems were focused on primary education. The PIRLS study conducted in 2011 reported that primary school teachers are generally quite satisfied with their working environment (Meelissen, et al., 2012, p.135). However, when it comes to teaching literacy, Broeder and Stokmans (2012) showed that teachers perceive serious problems, especially in multilingual classes. The diverging outcomes and the lack of studies on secondary education call for further research on the origins of problems and challenges in order to prepare and support teachers appropriately.

Acknowledgements
The study was conducted within the framework of the course Practical Interview and Survey, a required course in our first year Bachelor’s program. We would like to thank all 115 students for their assistance in collecting and processing the interview data.

References