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Language policies and realities in Dutch classrooms

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Abstract
This study examines the gap between the multilingual realities of today's classrooms and the continued dominance of monolingual norms in national education systems. The situation in the Netherlands is used as a case study to show a broader point. Although classrooms are becoming more linguistically diverse, immigrant and heritage languages remain marginalised, which contributes to unequal opportunities and exclusion. The purpose of this literature-based study is to show how national language policies shape classroom practices and teacher attitudes, and to assess whether these policies support inclusion or reinforce linguistic marginalisation. The material used consists mainly of international and Dutch peer-reviewed academic publications on multilingualism, language policy, and (multilingual) education, including empirical and comparative research across different national and international contexts. In addition, it includes key theoretical works as well as policy- and practice-oriented publications from governmental and international organizations, together providing a solid academic and policy foundation for research on multilingualism, education, and social justice. Special attention is given to how the ideas behind Dutch language policy influence fairness in education. The main findings show that Dutch education policy strongly prioritises Dutch as the only legitimate language of schooling. Immigrant languages such as Turkish, Arabic and Polish are largely absent from curricula, assessment, in-class communication and teacher training. Many teachers still view students' home languages as obstacles to learning. Although translanguaging and other inclusive strategies have been shown to improve participation, understanding, and students' sense of belonging, their use remains limited and inconsistent because of institutional barriers and dominant language ideologies. Overall, the study demonstrates that linguistic inequality is reproduced by policy choices and their underlying ideologies and prejudices. The study suggests that meaningful inclusion requires coordinated reforms in teacher education, curriculum design, assessment practices, and language ideology. When linguistic diversity is treated as a resource, national policies can help create more equitable classrooms that value all students' linguistic backgrounds.
Keywords: *multilingual education, language policy, linguistic inequality, monolingual ideology, educational equity, translanguaging*

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Языковая политика и реалии в нидерландском образовании

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Аннотация
В данном исследовании рассматривается разрыв между многоязычной реальностью современной школы и сохраняющимся доминированием моноязычных норм в национальных системах образования. Ситуация в Нидерландах используется в качестве тематического исследования для демонстрации более общих вопросов. Несмотря на то, что студенческая аудитория становится все более многоязычной, языки иммигрантов остаются маргинализированными, что приводит к неравным возможностям. Цель статьи — показать, как национальная языковая политика формирует практику в образовании и отношение к ней преподавателей, а также оценить, способствует ли эта политика инклюзии или усиливает языковую маргинализацию. Исследование основано на анализе литературы по многоязычию, языковой политике и (многоязычному) образованию, включая эмпирические и сравнительные исследования в различных национальных и международных контекстах. Кроме того, материалом послужили ключевые теоретические работы, а также документы правительственных и международных организаций, что в совокупности обеспечивает прочную научную и политическую основу для исследований в области многоязычия, образования и социальной справедливости. Особое внимание уделяется тому, как идеи, лежащие в основе нидерландской языковой политики, влияют на справедливость и равенство в образовании. Основные выводы исследования показывают, что голландская образовательная политика в значительной степени отдает приоритет голландскому языку как единственному легитимному языку обучения. Языки иммигрантов, такие как турецкий, арабский и польский, в значительной степени отсутствуют в учебных программах, оценке знаний, общении в аудитории и подготовке преподавателей. Многие преподаватели по-прежнему рассматривают родные языки учащихся как препятствие для обучения. Хотя, как показывают исследования, транслингвизм и другие инклюзивные стратегии улучшают участие, понимание и чувство принадлежности учащихся, их использование остается ограниченным и непоследовательным из-за институциональных барьеров и доминирующих языковых идеологий. В целом исследование демонстрирует, что языковое неравенство воспроизводится политическими решениями и лежащими в их основе идеологиями и предрассудками. В исследовании отмечается, что для эффективной инклюзии необходимы скоординированные реформы в подготовке учителей и преподавателей, разработке учебных программ, практике оценки знаний и языковой идеологии. Когда языковое разнообразие рассматривается как ресурс, национальная политика может помочь создать более справедливые образовательные учреждения, которые ценят языковое наследие всех учащихся.

Ключевые слова: *многоязычное образование, языковая политика, языковое неравенство, моноязычная идеология, равенство в образовании, транслингвизм*

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1. Introduction

Managing multilingualism in the classroom presents clear challenges, but evolving language policies also create opportunities to promote greater equity and inclusion in education. Research has shown that multilingual education supports cognitive flexibility, empathy, and academic achievement, particularly when minority and heritage languages are meaningfully incorporated into the curriculum. In such contexts, students are better able to develop strong identities and sustained connections to their communities. These benefits are increasingly recognised by governments, municipalities, schools, and educators through national policy initiatives, although the degree to which these policies translate into inclusive classroom practices varies considerably across contexts. In today's globally mobile and culturally diverse societies, multilingualism is therefore best understood not as an exception, but as a defining educational condition.

1.1. What the literature says

Several studies highlight the importance of aligning language policies, institutional practices, and individual beliefs to support multilingual education. Putjata (2021) demonstrates that teachers' language beliefs operate across policy, institutional, and personal levels and are subject to change, suggesting that challenging monolingual norms requires coordinated action at all three levels. Similarly, Yelenevskaya and Protassova (2021) show that despite curricular reforms, teaching practices often continue to prioritise an idealised mastery of a single target language, overlooking students' linguistic backgrounds, local sociolinguistic realities, and labour market needs. Focusing on English and Russian, they argue that social, cultural, and educational factors are equally relevant across different pedagogical traditions. At the family level, Ivanova and Zabrodskaja (2021) find that generally positive attitudes toward Russian as a heritage language strongly shape family language policies and children's proficiency, but also that long-term language maintenance depends on broader societal and institutional support beyond the family domain.

Educational language policy determines which languages are valued, taught, and permitted, reflecting broader societal ideologies and power structures. In multilingual classrooms, such policies can either foster inclusion or reinforce marginalisation (Groff et al. 2023). In the Netherlands, Dutch has long been prioritised as the sole language of instruction. Frisian receives limited legal protection in Fryslân, but other minority and heritage languages are largely overlooked or play a marginal role in classrooms. Even Frisian's status suffers from weak implementation and diminished curricular goals (Bayat et al. 2023). Teacher

discourses further shape classroom practices. Interviews with Dutch secondary school teachers reveal a prevailing "language-as-problem" mindset, where home languages are viewed as hindrances. Nonetheless, some educators acknowledge the pedagogical value of students' mother tongues, suggesting a gradual shift toward more inclusive approaches (Groff et al. 2023).

Recent studies highlight the advantages of multilingual pedagogies in primary education. A systematic review of 34 studies by Veerman, Doolaard, & Van der Veen (2025) revealed that techniques such as translanguaging and cross-linguistic scaffolding improve vocabulary development, metalinguistic awareness, and student wellbeing. Despite these findings, Dutch classrooms show limited uptake due to insufficient training, resources, and institutional backing. Teachers often prioritise exam standards that implicitly favour dominant-language proficiency. International comparisons expose the limitations of the Dutch approach. Countries with robust multilingual policies — such as bilingual education and heritage language support — achieve better outcomes for minority students (Lekhala 2024). These successful models demonstrate that inclusive language policies can bridge linguistic divides, promote global citizenship, and preserve cultural heritage. For the Netherlands, this entails moving beyond assimilationist frameworks and embracing students' full linguistic repertoires through coordinated efforts among policymakers, educators, and communities.

1.2. Research questions and operationalisation

This text examines how different countries respond to the realities of multilingualism in education, with a particular focus on how national language policies shape practices at the school level. It aims to examine how national language policies influence classroom practices and teacher attitudes, and to determine whether these policies promote inclusion or perpetuate linguistic marginalisation. The analysis in this article draws on peer-reviewed research, key theory, and policy publications on multilingualism and education, focusing on the role of language policy in educational fairness.

Special attention is given to the Netherlands as a case study, exploring how Dutch schools address the linguistic diversity of their pupils.

The study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do monolingual ideologies in Dutch language policy conflict with multilingual classroom realities?
2. What are the effects of excluding immigrant and heritage languages from formal education in the Netherlands?
3. How do teacher beliefs about students' home languages shape educational inequality?
4. Why is translanguaging not sustainably implemented in Dutch schools?
5. Why do Dutch language policies often fail to translate inclusive aims into classroom practice?

To address these questions, the study uses a qualitative synthesis of existing research, including policy analyses, classroom studies, and international comparative work. It brings together findings from teacher interviews, case studies, and earlier research on multilingual approaches such as translanguaging, as well as analyses of legal and curricular documents.

The paper is structured as follows. This introduction (Section 1) is followed by key definitions and presents two influential models that conceptualize language policy (section 2). This is followed by a brief overview of selected countries to illustrate how national policies are implemented in classrooms (Section 3). The next part (Section 4) focuses on the Dutch context, analysing how language policy is translated into practice in linguistically diverse classrooms. In the conclusion (Section 5), the research questions are repeated and answered.

2. Key definitions and language policy models

This section outlines key definitions, conceptual frameworks, and models that inform the study of language policy, with particular attention to linguistic rights, language ideologies, and educational equity.

2.1. Key concepts in language policy and education

Language policy refers to the explicit or implicit decisions made by governments, institutions, or communities to regulate language use, status, and acquisition within a society (Spolsky 2004). These decisions manifest in formal legislation, educational frameworks, and informal practices that shape linguistic hierarchies and access to language resources. Within this context, *minority languages* are those spoken by numerically smaller groups that often lack institutional support or official recognition. These include both *indigenous languages*, such as Frisian in the Netherlands, and immigrant languages like Turkish and Arabic. A specific subset of minority languages, *heritage languages*, are typically acquired at home by children of immigrant families and are not dominant in the wider society (May 2015).

Closely related are *linguistic rights*, which refer to the entitlements of individuals and communities to use, maintain, and develop their languages in both private and public spheres. These rights are often divided into *tolerance-oriented* rights — permitting private use of minority languages — and *promotion-oriented* rights, which actively support their public use, particularly in education (May 2015). The latter is crucial for fostering equitable access to learning.

Another central concept is *language ideology*, which encompasses the beliefs and assumptions about language that influence policy and practice. In many European contexts, including the Netherlands, dominant ideologies tend to privilege monolingualism and standard language norms, thereby marginalising linguistic diversity (Aldeeb 2023).

Finally, *educational equity* refers to the fair distribution of linguistic/educational opportunities and resources. It involves addressing systemic

disadvantages faced by students who speak minority or heritage languages. Language policy plays a pivotal role in either mitigating or perpetuating these inequalities (May 2015).

2.2. Language policy models

Two rather traditional models are discussed below, which contemporary sociolinguists still draw ideas from: the models by Einar Haugen (1966) and Bernard Spolsky (2004). These theories are usually indirectly relevant for policies within a classroom or school context. They are at the basis of the treatment of multilingualism amongst learners in classroom settings.

One of the foundational models in language policy research is Haugen's (1966) model of language planning, which distinguishes between four stages: selection, codification, elaboration, and implementation. This model provides a framework for understanding how languages are standardised and institutionalised.

- *Selection* involves choosing which language or variety will be used in official domains.
- *Codification* refers to the development of norms for spelling, grammar, and usage.
- *Elaboration* expands the language's functions to new domains, such as education or science.
- *Implementation* ensures that the planned changes are adopted through policy and practice.

In the Dutch classroom, this model helps explain why Frisian has a more established presence than immigrant languages: it has undergone all four stages of planning, supported by regional and national institutions. In contrast, immigrant heritage languages often remain at the margins, lacking codification and institutional support (Wang 2024).

Spolsky (2004) offers a more sociolinguistically grounded model, emphasizing the interplay between three components: language practices, language beliefs (ideologies), and language management (explicit policy). This framework is particularly useful for analysing the gap between policy and practice in multilingual classrooms.

In this theoretical framework, *language practices* refer to the actual language use in schools and communities, *language beliefs* encompass the ideologies held by teachers, parents, and policymakers, and *language management* includes formal policies and regulations. In Dutch classrooms, for example, language practices may include students using Turkish or Arabic among themselves, while language beliefs among teachers may discourage such use. Meanwhile, language management often remains silent or restrictive regarding these languages. Spolsky's model thus highlights the need to align policy with both practice and ideology to achieve meaningful change (Spolsky 2004).

2.3. Haugen and Spolsky's models in the classroom

In light of Haugen's and Spolsky's frameworks, effective language policy in schools must move beyond monolingual norms and embrace linguistic diversity. Embracing varieties as positive entities, or welcome guests, can be seen as a tool towards unification in countries, and may be used to emphasise the special role of the national language without denigrating or ignoring smaller languages. This requires not only formal recognition of minority and heritage languages but also active support in classroom practices. Policies should encourage multilingual pedagogies, provide resources for codification and elaboration of underrepresented languages, and challenge deficit ideologies. Without alignment between beliefs, practices, and management, immigrant languages remain excluded, reinforcing social inequities. A responsive policy acknowledges students' linguistic repertoires as assets, fostering inclusion and identity affirmation. Such an approach transforms schools into spaces of linguistic justice and educational equity.

In multilingual and multiethnic societies, the integration of minority and heritage languages into mainstream education presents both significant challenges and transformative opportunities. These dynamics are particularly visible in the classroom, where institutional structures, ideological orientations, teacher preparedness, and community involvement collectively shape the educational landscape.

3. Language policy in multi-ethnic societies

This section examines how language policy in education influences the treatment of linguistic diversity in classrooms. It explores the tension between inclusive ideals and monolingual practices, with a focus on the Netherlands. Drawing on international frameworks and comparative examples, it highlights the challenges of translating policy into equitable educational practice.

3.1. Global frameworks and national realities

Language policy in education is crucial for managing linguistic diversity, yet inclusive approaches often face institutional and ideological resistance. In the Netherlands, Dutch remains the dominant language of instruction, sidelining home languages such as Turkish and Arabic. This reflects broader monolingual norms embedded in curricula and assessment, which limit the recognition of students' linguistic repertoires. Linguistic human rights offer a critical lens to assess such exclusion, highlighting the educational and emotional costs of language deprivation. Although international frameworks like UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage promote linguistic inclusion, their impact is often constrained by national priorities and political will.

Supranational organisations such as the EU and UNESCO advocate for multilingual education and mother tongue instruction as tools for equity and inclusion. Their frameworks encourage member states to support minority

languages and integrate multilingual pedagogies. However, the success of these frameworks depends on national adaptation. Many education systems continue to operate under monolingual norms, especially in centralized contexts where top-down decisions fail to reflect local linguistic realities. Bridging the gap between policy and practice requires integrating planning models with rights-based and ideological perspectives, alongside investment in teacher training and curriculum reform to support the linguistic diversity present in today's classrooms.

Globally, multilingual education is gaining recognition for its cognitive, social, and emotional benefits. Research shows that multilingualism enhances executive control, metalinguistic awareness, and resilience to cognitive conflict. It also fosters empathy, cultural understanding, and identity development among students from diverse backgrounds. These benefits are especially relevant in multiethnic societies, where inclusive language education can serve as a tool for integration and empowerment. However, the implementation of multilingual pedagogies remains uneven. Teachers often lack the training, resources, and institutional support needed to apply inclusive strategies effectively. Many educators perceive linguistic diversity as a challenge rather than a resource, and classroom practices frequently default to monolingual instruction. Bridging this gap requires not only policy reform but also investment in teacher education, curriculum development, and community engagement.

In sum, while supranational organisations provide valuable frameworks for inclusive language policy, their impact is contingent on national commitment and local implementation. The Netherlands, like many other countries, faces the challenge of translating these principles into meaningful classroom practices that reflect and respect the linguistic diversity of its pupils.

To better understand how national governments respond to these supranational frameworks — and how language policy is enacted in practice — it is instructive to examine a range of country-specific approaches. The following section offers comparative insights into how multilingual education is implemented across five different national contexts.

3.2. Comparative perspectives

Five countries illustrate diverse approaches to multilingualism in education, each shaped by distinct historical, political, and sociolinguistic contexts. These cases reveal how national language policies influence the inclusion — or exclusion — of linguistic diversity in classrooms, and how these policies affect the treatment of pupils with different language backgrounds: Canada, Belgium, Sweden, Russia, and South Africa.

Canada officially supports English and French, but the inclusion of Indigenous languages remains uneven. While the Indigenous Languages Act (2019) affirms the right to language revitalisation, implementation varies by province. Some schools offer immersion programs in Indigenous languages, but many treat them as symbolic or extracurricular, limiting their educational impact (Dagenais 2013). The

gap between policy and practice reflects broader tensions between multicultural ideals and institutional inertia (Cummins & Early 2011). Belgium recognizes Dutch, French and German as official languages, but immigrant languages receive little formal support. In Flemish schools, Dutch dominates, and multilingual pedagogies are rare. Although pilot projects in Brussels promote plurilingualism, mainstream education often maintains monolingual norms, reinforcing assimilationist tendencies (Lochtman 2018). Teachers frequently lack training to engage with students' home languages, which are often perceived as obstacles rather than assets (Leman 1999). Sweden has a long-standing policy of mother tongue instruction (MTI), introduced in 1977. Today, MTI is offered in over 160 languages across most municipalities. The policy is grounded in a "language-as-resource" orientation, promoting additive bilingualism (Aktürk-Drake 2024). However, implementation challenges persist, including teacher shortages, limited curricular integration, and varying local commitment (Oral & Lund 2021). These limitations affect how effectively students' linguistic backgrounds are supported in practice. Russia presents a contrasting case of linguistic centralisation. Although over 180 languages are spoken, recent reforms have reduced regional autonomy in language education. The 2018 amendment to the Federal Law on Education made minority language instruction optional, accelerating language shift (Bitkeeva & Kaplunova 2021). Russian is promoted as the sole unifying language, and minority languages are increasingly marginalised in schools (Suleymanova 2018), leading to a classroom culture that discourages linguistic diversity. South Africa officially recognises 11 languages and promotes mother tongue instruction in early education. However, English dominates from Grade 4 onward, and implementation of multilingual policy is hindered by resource constraints and societal preferences (Heugh 2013). Despite constitutional support, the gap between policy and practice remains wide, particularly in under-resourced schools (Ogbonnaya & Els 2024).

Together, these cases demonstrate the varied ways in which national language policies respond to supranational ideals and local linguistic realities. They underscore that while linguistic diversity is increasingly valued in principle, its realisation in classroom practice is uneven. Political will, institutional capacity, teacher training, and societal attitudes all shape how language policy is enacted. Comparative studies show that successful multilingual education requires not only inclusive policy frameworks but also sustained investment in implementation, monitoring, and community engagement (Mouboua et al. 2024, Gempeso & Mendez 2021).

4. National policies playing out in the Dutch classrooms

The Netherlands is internationally recognised for its cultural and linguistic diversity, shaped by centuries of migration, regional variation, and evolving educational frameworks. In light of growing attention to minority and heritage languages in Dutch classrooms, a nuanced understanding of the national linguistic landscape is essential.

4.1. The current situation

Dutch society is characterised by significant demographic diversity. According to Statistics Netherlands (CBS), approximately one in four residents has a migration background, with substantial communities originating from Turkey, Morocco, Suriname, and the former Dutch Antilles. More recent migration has introduced speakers of Arabic, Polish, Kurdish, and Somali, contributing to the multilingual nature of Dutch classrooms.

Research by Bredtmann, Otten, and Vonnahme (2021) indicates that while linguistic diversity does not adversely affect academic performance in core subjects such as language and mathematics, it may complicate social integration, particularly in highly heterogeneous classroom settings. These findings highlight the need for inclusive language policies that acknowledge and support students' linguistic repertoires.

Beyond immigrant languages, the Netherlands also accommodates regional languages such as Frisian — officially recognised and supported in the province of Fryslân — and dialects like Limburgish and Low Saxon. Frisian benefits from curricular inclusion and limited institutional backing, whereas other regional and immigrant languages remain largely absent from formal educational planning.

4.2. Historical development of Dutch educational language policies

The trajectory of Dutch language policy is closely linked to nation-building efforts in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The standardisation of Dutch, through the work of Siegenbeek (1804) and Weiland (1805), laid the foundation for a centralised education system aimed at promoting linguistic unity and national identity (Rutten, Krogull & Schoemaker 2019). This monolingual orientation positioned Dutch as the exclusive medium of instruction, marginalising minority and regional languages.

Throughout the 20th century, this monolingual focus persisted, with limited exceptions for Frisian. The 1950s saw its introduction as a subject in primary education and, later, as a medium of instruction in select schools. In contrast, immigrant languages remained peripheral, despite increasing linguistic diversity resulting from post-war labour migration and decolonisation. Initiatives such as OALT (Onderwijs in Allochtone Levende Talen) in the 1980s and 1990s briefly supported instruction in immigrant languages, but were eventually discontinued due to shifting political priorities and concerns about integration (Yagmur 2004). These developments reinforced the dominance of Dutch and curtailed efforts to institutionalise linguistic pluralism in education.

4.3. Current legal and policy frameworks

Language policy in Dutch education is shaped by a combination of constitutional provisions, national legislation, and curricular guidelines. Article 23 of the Dutch Constitution guarantees freedom of education, allowing schools to

define their pedagogical and ideological orientation. However, this autonomy is bounded by national standards set by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW), which outline core objectives for all schools. Dutch is designated as the primary language of instruction, with limited legal provisions for minority languages. Frisian remains the only regional language with formal curricular status, supported through agreements between the national government and the province of Fryslân. Other minority and heritage languages are excluded from core objectives and are rarely integrated into school curricula.

Recent policy developments have introduced 'burgerschapsonderwijs' (citizenship education), aimed at fostering democratic values, social cohesion, and cultural awareness. While this framework acknowledges diversity, it does not explicitly promote linguistic inclusion. Critics argue that without concrete support for minority languages, citizenship education risks reinforcing assimilationist norms (Kuiken & Van der Linden 2013). Additionally, the rise of English-medium instruction in higher education has sparked debate over the status of Dutch and the accessibility of education for Dutch-speaking students. Legal discussions continue regarding the balance between internationalisation and the protection of the national language (Edwards 2020).

Despite these challenges, interest in multilingual pedagogies is growing. Pilot projects and research initiatives have explored translanguaging, mother tongue support, and culturally responsive teaching. However, these practices remain peripheral and are not yet embedded in national policy frameworks.

4.4. Minority and heritage languages in the Dutch classroom

The linguistic diversity present in Dutch classrooms reflects the country's multicultural composition, especially in the urban areas. Pupils speak a wide range of home languages, including Turkish, Arabic, Polish, Berber, and Sranan Tongo, alongside regional languages such as Frisian and Limburgish. Yet, the policies governing their recognition and use in education remain inconsistent and contested. While Frisian benefits from formal support and curricular integration, immigrant languages are largely excluded from official educational frameworks.

This disparity reveals a deeper ideological divide. Frisian, as a co-official language in Fryslân, is protected under national and European legislation and receives institutional support in teacher training, curriculum development, and assessment. In contrast, immigrant languages are often viewed through a deficit lens — as transitional or problematic — rather than as valuable resources for learning and identity development (Groff et al. 2023). This reflects a broader "language-as-problem" orientation in Dutch educational discourse, where linguistic diversity is seen as a challenge rather than an asset (Groff et al. 2023).

The gap between policy and practice is particularly evident in mainstream public schools. While some international and bilingual schools adopt inclusive approaches, most maintain a Dutch-only norm. Teachers report limited guidance and training on how to incorporate students' home languages into classroom

activities, and school-level policies rarely acknowledge linguistic diversity beyond Dutch and English (Op het Veld & Duarte 2025). As a result, students' linguistic repertoires are underutilised, and their cultural identities remain insufficiently recognised.

Nevertheless, case studies show that some educators are beginning to challenge these norms. In linguistically diverse classrooms, teachers who adopt resource-oriented approaches — such as translanguaging or multilingual scaffolding — report increased student engagement and improved learning outcomes (Op het Veld & Duarte 2025). However, these practices are still the exception and often rely on individual initiative rather than systemic support.

Supranational frameworks, such as those promoted by the EU and UNESCO, have influenced Dutch discourse on multilingualism. Yet, their impact on classroom-level implementation remains limited. As Kuiken and Van der Linden (2013) note, national autonomy in education often dilutes European ambitions for linguistic inclusion.

4.5. Regional languages vs. immigrant languages

The contrast between the treatment of Frisian and immigrant languages highlights the unequal status of minority languages in Dutch education. Frisian, spoken by approximately 61% of the population in Fryslân, enjoys legal protection under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and is included in the national curriculum for schools in the region (Riemersma et al. 2023). It is taught as a subject and may be used as a medium of instruction in both primary and secondary education. However, even within Fryslân, implementation is uneven: fewer than one-third of primary schools and 45% of secondary schools meet all attainment targets for Frisian education.

In contrast, immigrant languages such as Turkish, Arabic, and Berber are not formally recognised within the education system. These languages are often associated with integration challenges and rarely viewed as cultural assets. Teachers and policymakers frequently adopt a "language-as-problem" orientation, focusing on the perceived barriers posed by linguistic diversity rather than its potential to enrich learning environments (Groff et al. 2023).

This disparity reflects broader ideological and political dynamics. Frisian is considered part of the national heritage, while immigrant languages are framed as foreign and temporary. Consequently, students who speak immigrant languages are less likely to see their linguistic identities affirmed in school, which can negatively affect their academic engagement and self-esteem.

4.6. Multilingualism in Dutch education

The Netherlands is a linguistically diverse country with nearly 19 million inhabitants and a reputation as a liberal democracy. Despite its multicultural reality, Dutch education remains firmly rooted in monolingual norms. While national

discourse increasingly acknowledges diversity — including linguistic diversity — the practical implementation of inclusive language policies often lags behind. This tension between rhetoric and reality reveals an educational landscape in which multilingualism is both recognised and restricted. Frisian, the second official language of the Netherlands, enjoys legal protection under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and is taught in schools in the province of Fryslân. This institutional support reflects the country's official bilingual status, though it is geographically limited. In contrast, immigrant languages such as Turkish, Arabic, and Berber lack formal recognition and are excluded from the national curriculum. Their presence in classrooms is managed informally and inconsistently, depending largely on individual schools' attitudes and discretion (Bayat, Kircher & Van de Velde 2023). Historically, initiatives such as OALT (Onderwijs in Allochtone Levende Talen) provided instruction in immigrant languages, but these were phased out in the early 2000s due to political concerns about integration and national unity (Driessen 1996). Since then, policy has focused almost exclusively on Dutch language acquisition, with little institutional support for maintaining heritage languages. Although the Dutch Constitution guarantees freedom of education (Article 23), national curricular standards prioritise Dutch as the primary language of instruction. Frisian remains the only minority language with formal curricular inclusion, and even this is inconsistently implemented. Immigrant languages, despite their prevalence in urban areas, are largely absent from official educational frameworks. Recent studies show that while policy frameworks emphasise Dutch, classroom practices vary. Some teachers make informal accommodations for students' home languages, but these efforts are rarely supported by clear guidelines or resources (Duarte & Op het Veld 2025). Groff et al. (2023) found that many educators perceive students' home languages as barriers rather than assets. Although some experiment with translanguaging and inclusive strategies, these remain isolated efforts without systemic backing. Ultimately, the Netherlands provides formal recognition to some minority languages but prioritises Dutch in practice. Bridging the gap between policy and classroom reality requires not only legal reform but also ideological shifts and institutional support that empower educators to embrace the full linguistic repertoires of their students.

4.7. Case studies and examples from Dutch schools

Empirical research provides valuable insights into how minority and heritage languages are treated in practice in the Netherlands. A recent study by Duarte and Op het Veld (2025) examined inclusive education in bilingual schools in the Netherlands. The researchers conducted interviews with teachers and surveys with students at culturally diverse secondary schools offering bilingual education (BE). While BE programs primarily focus on Dutch and English, some schools made efforts to include students' cultural backgrounds in classroom discussions. However, students reported that their home languages were rarely acknowledged or used in instruction. Another case study by Groff et al. (2023) analysed teacher discourses in Dutch high schools. Interviews with 55 teachers revealed a dominant

monolingual ideology, with most educators emphasizing Dutch proficiency and expressing discomfort with linguistic diversity. Nevertheless, some teachers recognised the pedagogical value of students' home languages and experimented with translanguaging strategies. These practices, though limited, suggest a potential shift toward more inclusive approaches. The Mercator Regional Dossier on Frisian education (Riemersma et al. 2023) offers a comprehensive overview of Frisian's status in Dutch schools. Despite legal frameworks and dedicated funding, many schools fail to meet Frisian attainment targets. The Taalplan Frysk 2030 aims to improve Frisian education by phasing out exemptions and promoting a continuous learning pathway. This initiative demonstrates how targeted policy can support minority language maintenance, though similar efforts are lacking for immigrant languages. These case studies highlight the complexity of implementing inclusive language policies. While some schools and educators are innovating, systemic barriers — such as lack of training, resources, and institutional support — limit the impact of these efforts. Moreover, the absence of formal recognition for immigrant languages perpetuates their marginalisation.

4.8. Language policy in the Dutch classroom

Language policy in the Netherlands is a strategic and structural effort to align educational practices with students' linguistic needs. Below are findings from empirical studies to explore how language policy is implemented and experienced in Dutch classrooms. Recent practice-oriented research into language policy in Dutch schools reveals a fragmented and inconsistent implementation. Bais, Faber, and Megens[1] found that only 18% of teachers at Krimpenerwaard College could correctly identify the national reference levels for language proficiency. While 62% acknowledged the importance of language skills, just 21% felt personally responsible for fostering language development. According to the SLO (2025), Dutch schools typically adopt either a narrow or broad approach to language policy. Broad language policy involves cross-curricular collaboration and shared responsibility among teachers. The SLO reports that 74% of schools with a broad policy have appointed a language coordinator, indicating a formal and institutional commitment to language development. In teacher education, the integration of language-oriented subject teaching ('Taalgericht Vakonderwijs', 'TVO') remains limited. Kuiper (2021) found that only three out of thirteen teacher education programs had structurally embedded TVO in their curricula. The main barriers to implementation included lack of time (35%), insufficient expertise (40%), and inadequate policy support (25%). Attitudes toward multilingualism in education also present challenges. Nederlof and Smit (2018) reported that 43% of teachers held negative views, while only 22% expressed positive attitudes. Despite this, multilingual students consistently outperformed their monolingual peers on tasks requiring creative thinking, although they tended to score lower on standardized

[1] Bais, S., L. Faber & M. Megens. 2013. *Taalbeleid in Het Voortgezet Onderwijs*. Universiteit Utrecht.

language assessments. Van der Borden and Lafleur (2022) examined pedagogical practices in multilingual classrooms and found that students who were allowed to use their home language felt 30% more recognized. Moreover, the combined use of TVO, NT2 (Dutch as a second language), and translanguaging strategies led to increased classroom participation and improved language skills. Together, these studies illustrate that language policy in the Netherlands is evolving but remains complex and unevenly implemented. Effective policy requires structural embedding in curricula, targeted professional development, and a shift in teacher attitudes toward multilingualism. Recognizing students' linguistic repertoires as valuable contributions to the learning process is essential for fostering inclusive and effective education.

4.9. A monolingual tradition with regional exceptions

The Netherlands is characterised by a strong tradition of Dutch monolingualism in education. While Frisian is recognised as a minority language and included in the curriculum in the province of Fryslân, immigrant languages such as Turkish, Arabic, and Berber are largely excluded from formal education. Historical programs like OALT (Onderwijs in Allochtone Levende Talen) once provided instruction in immigrant languages but were discontinued in the early 2000s due to political shifts and concerns about integration (Driessen 1996).

Recent studies show that while Dutch policy emphasises linguistic assimilation, classroom practices vary. Teachers occasionally accommodate students' home languages informally, but these efforts lack institutional support and are not part of a coherent national strategy (Bayat, Kircher & Van de Velde 2023). The result is a gap between policy and practice, with limited recognition of linguistic diversity beyond Frisian.

4.10. Language diversity as resource or problem

Groff, Zwaanswijk, Wilson, and Saab (2023) examine how Dutch high school teachers perceive and respond to linguistic diversity, and how these perceptions shape language policy implementation. In a context where nearly 25% of the population has a migration background (CBS 2020), classrooms are increasingly multilingual. The authors conducted semi-structured interviews with 55 teachers from various schools in a large Dutch city, analyzing discourse patterns related to students' backgrounds, home languages, and school policies.

Findings reveal that many teachers are uneasy with categorizing students by migration background, recognizing the problematic nature of insider-outsider distinctions. A dominant "language-as-problem" orientation emerged, with home languages often viewed as obstacles to learning. Teachers frequently promoted Dutch-only norms, even during informal moments such as breaks. Nevertheless, some educators acknowledged the pedagogical value of students' home languages, noting improved comprehension and engagement when translanguaging was permitted.

Quantitative data showed that 78% of teachers prioritized Dutch acquisition as the main goal of language policy, while only 22% valued the maintenance of home languages. Concerns were raised that allowing other languages might hinder Dutch learning or cause confusion. The study applies Ruiz's (1984) framework of language orientations — language-as-problem, language-as-right, and language-as-resource. Most teachers aligned with the first, though a minority embraced inclusive practices. Groff et al. advocate for teacher education programs to address language ideologies and promote additive multilingualism. They call for explicit policies that support linguistic diversity and challenge deficit discourses in Dutch secondary education.

5. Conclusion

Using the Netherlands as a case study, this study addresses the persistent gap between the didactic and sociolinguistic realities of contemporary classrooms and the continued dominance of certain national policies and unwritten cultural norms. The study draws on a qualitative synthesis of policy documents, classroom research, teacher interviews, and comparative studies. Five problems have surfaced as elaborations on each of the five research questions. These are discussed below, and corresponding solutions are presented.

The first research question was: 'How do monolingual ideologies in Dutch language policy conflict with multilingual classroom realities?'. Educational language policy in the Netherlands illustrates a fundamental problem, as it remains largely grounded in monolingual norms despite the multilingual realities of contemporary classrooms. Linguistic diversity is treated as exceptional rather than structural, resulting in a persistent mismatch between policy and practice. Research on language policy shows that such misalignment persists when ideological orientations are not brought into line with actual language use in institutions (Spolsky 2004). A key solution therefore lies in explicitly recognising multilingualism at policy level as a normal condition of schooling and in adopting pluralist language policies that reflect sociolinguistic realities rather than nationalist assumptions (May 2012). A more general attitudinal solution would be to present multilingualism as a bonus rather than as a problem (Smakman, Ansah & Anderson 2026).

The second research question, 'What are the effects of excluding immigrant and heritage languages from formal education in the Netherlands?', pointed to a closely related problem concerning the institutional exclusion of immigrant and heritage languages from formal education. Dutch education policy continues to position Dutch as the sole legitimate language of instruction, assessment, and teacher education, while widely spoken languages such as Turkish, Arabic, and Polish remain absent. Addressing this problem requires structural curricular and assessment reform that legitimises these languages within the education system. Extensive research demonstrates that additive multilingual models support both academic achievement and identity development (Cummins 2000), while education

systems that integrate minority languages into formal structures show stronger long-term equity outcomes (Heugh 2015).

The problem underlying the third research question, 'How do teacher beliefs about students' home languages shape educational inequality?', revolves around deficit-oriented teacher attitudes toward multilingual pupils. Many teachers have been socialised into viewing students' home languages as barriers to learning, which restricts pedagogical innovation and reinforces inequality. This problem can be addressed through teacher education that foregrounds language awareness, multilingual pedagogies, and critical reflection on language ideology. García and Kleifgen (2018) argue that reframing multilingualism as a pedagogical resource is central to inclusive education, while Hélot (2006) shows that shifts in teacher beliefs are closely linked to training and institutional discourse.

The fourth research question asked, 'why is translanguaging not sustainably implemented in Dutch schools?'. A key problem is that even when inclusive practices such as translanguaging are known and occasionally applied, they remain fragmented and unsustained. This is largely due to institutional constraints and monolingual structures in teacher preparation and curriculum design. Research on translanguaging stresses that such practices must be embedded system-wide rather than treated as individual classroom strategies (García & Wei 2014). When supported at policy, curriculum, and assessment levels, translanguaging becomes sustainable and enhances participation, comprehension, and learner belonging (Velasco & García 2014).

Finally, a broader structural issue is captured in the fifth and final research question: 'Why do Dutch language policies often fail to translate inclusive aims into classroom practice?'. Indeed, language policy frequently remains symbolic rather than effective. National frameworks articulate inclusive aims but lack concrete mechanisms for implementation, thereby placing responsibility on individual educators without sufficient institutional support. Studies of language policy implementation show that meaningful change depends on linking policy intent with classroom practice through clear guidelines, resources, and professional development (Hornberger 2005). Menken (2008) further demonstrates that without such support, top-down language policies fail to produce equitable outcomes, underscoring the need for coordinated institutional investment.

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