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Teachers' perceptions and 'invisible' uses of plurilingual pedagogy in UAE K-12 schools

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ABSTRACT

Plurilingual pedagogies determine that the totality of the students' linguistic and cultural repertoires should be brought into the teaching and learning process. Despite the still prevailing monolingual norm in educational institutions of today, more and more reports on student and teacher recognition of plurilingual approaches as a valuable resource for learning start to emerge. As one of the most multicultural and multilingual countries in the world, the UAE offers a plethora of curricula where the languages of instruction vary, thus appearing as the ideal setting to explore affordances and challenges of plurilingual pedagogies. Therefore, the goal of this study was to understand UAE K-12 teachers' perceptions and potential uses of plurilingual instruction in their mostly bi- or multilingual classrooms. The results seem to indicate that the majority of the teachers surveyed acknowledged the value of other languages, apart from the language of instruction, as support for learning in diverse contexts, choosing to discretely challenge the monolingual stance preferred by their school policies by instinctively implementing plurilingual practices in their teaching.

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Introduction

With a population of about 10 million people (World Population Review, [n.d.](#)) of which 88.52% are expatriates (EdArabia, [n.d.](#)), the UAE boasts one of the most multicultural and multilingual populations in the world. Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Filipinos make up the largest proportion of the expatriate population. Given the high numbers of expatriates living in the country, the UAE strives to offer a variety of kindergarten, elementary and secondary educational institutions that cater to the diverse population it welcomes. In 2019, the UAE had 2670 schools of which only 36% were public and the remaining were private (UAEStat, [n.d.](#)). Public schools are free for all UAE nationals, UAE passports holders and GCC (Gulf Cooperation Countries) citizens, and expatriates are permitted to attend public schools for as much as they pay a specific fee upon approval (UAE, 2021). However, the enrolment of non-Arab expat students in public

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schools is rare because the language of instruction is Arabic (the country's official language) in all subjects, and English is taught as a Second Language or, in some cases, used to teach technical and scientific subjects only (UAE, 2021). This means that, from a language point of view, expat students are not very exposed to the official language of the country academically, although private non-local curriculum schools are mandated to offer a certain amount of Arabic as an Additional Language classes for non-Arabic speakers (Ministry of Education, n.d.).

The current country's 'linguistic dualism' (Findlow, 2006) allows for this state, where the official language is Arabic, to welcome foreign citizens to live and work in the country without speaking Arabic, so long as they are fluent in English, the *lingua franca* in the country. Therefore, in order to accommodate the approximately 200 nationalities of expats, the government approves a variety of paid private schools with diverse curricula, ranging from British, American, Emirati, IB (International Baccalaureate), French, German, Indian and Pakistani to Filipino or even Japanese (Department of Education and Knowledge, n.d.). These schools welcome both locals and expats, but serve mostly the expat student communities who do not possess the Arabic linguistic skills to attend public local schools, as explained before, or whose parents prefer their own country's curricula or more internationalised curricula, such as IB. This curriculum variety offers parents a multitude of choices which may result in an Emirati student attending an American Curriculum school, a Pakistani student attending a British Curriculum school or a Filipino student attending a Japanese Curriculum school.

While this curriculum multiplicity provides endless possibilities for UAE residents, it also presents some issues, namely the constraints of receiving instruction in a language that is not fully comprehended by many students, even though they may be fluent in a variety of other languages. This brings up the debate on what instructional approaches to apply in such cases in order to foster academic success. The monolingual stance, or the Direct Method Assumption (Cummins, 2007), that sees target-language-only instructional methods as the ones to insist on even in heterogeneous, multilingual classrooms, seems to still prevail in modern educational settings. However, calls for 'softening the boundaries' (Cenoz & Gorter, 2013) between the languages known by students have started to emerge. One of the ways to achieve this would be through plurilingual pedagogies. According to Piccardo et al. (2022), plurilingual approaches encourage learners to draw on their linguistic knowledge to reflect on strategies that 'contribute to the fluid and magmatic development of their repertoire' (p.6). These approaches are based on the following principles:

For multilinguals¹, languages are part of a repertoire that is accessed for their communicative purposes; languages are not discrete and separated, but form an integrated system for them; multilingual competence emerges out of local practices where multiple languages are negotiated for communication; competence does not consist of separate competencies for each language, but a multicompetence that functions symbiotically for the different languages in one's repertoire. (Ollerhead et al., 2018a, p. 5 based on Canagarajah's (2011) work)

In a nutshell, applying a plurilingual instruction means to welcome and encourage the activation of previous linguistic and cultural knowledge in teaching and learning in the classroom, allowing for 'instructional practices [that utilise] linguistic flexibility and fluidity as a resource' (Henderson & Ingram, 2018, p. 254). For example, students could be encouraged to write an essay outline in their home language or other language

they feel comfortable with and then submit the final essay in the language of instruction. Research studies have reported some benefits of this pedagogy, claiming it ‘supports academic achievement, affirms students’ identities, and promotes connections between home and school communities’ (Van Viegen, 2020, p. 163). Ellis (2013) goes even further stating that a student’s first language is ‘our most formidable cognitive resource’ (p. 450). Perhaps due to the results of these recent studies, the UAE has, for example, included in its *English as an International Language (EIL) National Unified K-12 Learning Standards Framework* (Ministry of Education, 2014) mentions to the possibility of resorting to Arabic in the process of learning English:

To master English, students will have to be able to make comparisons between Arabic and English languages and to accommodate them automatically. (...) As students start using English, they should be allowed—and even encouraged—to augment their speaking and writing with Arabic words and phrases because the goal is to communicate with others and get feedback on their efforts. (p. 19)

Nonetheless, despite the growing interest in such plurilingual practices in the last decades, ‘mainstream’ applied linguistics remains to this day largely untouched, uninterested, and unperturbed by such developments’ (May, 2014, p. 2). Even teachers start to recognise plurilingualism as a resource for learning, but sometimes in a ‘passive acceptance’ model (Davy & French, 2018). In other words, given the historically established presence of the monolingual bias, especially within the English language teaching field, many teachers feel inclined to continue applying monolingual pedagogies, following the educational authorities directives and the dominant practices in many ‘another-language medium of instruction’ schools, and regarding the presence of other languages in the learning process as a ‘problem’.

With this in mind, in order to have a better understanding of UAE teachers’ linguistic ideologies and practices, particularly regarding their perceptions and uses of plurilingual approaches in their own settings, we surveyed UAE K-12 teachers, regardless of their subject expertise or type of school (private or public). It is our belief that, as Van Viegen (2020) rightly stated,

educators working in classrooms that are richly multilingual and multicultural have much to gain from these understandings, to inform a culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy that both supports students who are in the process of learning the language of instruction while learning content curriculum, and that develops every student’s language awareness and intercultural abilities. (p. 163)

Therefore, our goal was to understand the plurilingual practices of UAE school teachers by finding answers to the following two research questions:

- What are the perceptions of UAE K-12 teachers on the use of plurilingual pedagogies?
- What are the current plurilingual practices of UAE teachers within their K-12 teaching settings?

‘Everyone is plurilingual’: understanding plurilingual pedagogies in teaching and learning

Plurilingualism is a term predominantly used within the European context, developed in the scope of the Council of Europe’s linguistic policies (see for example Beacco & Byram,

2007; Candelier et al., 2013), and setting itself apart from multilingualism. While multilingualism is understood as ‘the coexistence of different languages at the social or individual level’, plurilingualism is defined as ‘the dynamic and developing linguistic repertoire of an individual user/learner’ (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 30). In this sense, multilinguals possess knowledge in more than one or two languages, which are seen as separate entities, utilised in different contexts and which never interconnect. On the other hand, plurilinguals ‘have a single, inter-related, repertoire that they combine with their general competences and various strategies in order to accomplish tasks (CEFR Section 6.1.3.2)’. (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 30). Plurilingualism is, hence, seen as an uneven, developing and dynamic competence, in which the whole linguistic and even cultural repertoire of an individual is brought into play whenever a language-related task is at hand. Previous linguistic knowledge is, thus, valued.

Despite this clear distinction between plurilingualism and multilingualism presented by the Council of Europe (2020), these two concepts may at times be used interchangeably by some applied linguists in other parts of the world, namely in the English-medium literature (Piccardo et al., 2022). Nevertheless, in the scope of this article, the definitions provided in the previous paragraph were the ones underpinning our research study.

Piccardo (2013) stated that, given the current globalised world, monolingual speakers do not exist, rather ‘only unaware plurilinguals do’ (p. 606). This is because almost every individual is exposed to a variety of languages through different means and, in their daily lives, they move between different languages that impact their own linguistic repertoire (e.g. different varieties of their home language, language loans, language influenced by other languages², etc ...). This means that every individual is plurilingual and this has a clear impact in teaching and learning contexts. In educational settings, the recognition of an individual’s plurilingual profile means accepting the utilisation of a variety of skills and elements that enhance learning, namely their pre-existing linguistic competence, their previous experience in (language) learning, their cultural background and their metalinguistic and metacognitive skills (Piccardo, 2013). Within the scope of plurilingualism, these elements and skills are considered valuable resources for learning and students are encouraged to capitalise on these resources whenever involved in a learning moment (Ahooja & Ballinger, 2019).

In order to draw on students’ linguistic and cultural repertoires in a given learning setting, plurilingual approaches to teaching could be applied. Unlike monolingual approaches in which only the target-language or language of instruction is allowed to be used in the classroom, plurilingual approaches recognise the benefits of taking advantage of the students’ plurilingual and pluricultural repertoires in the learning process, validating the softening of boundaries between languages (Cenoz & Gorter, 2013), as mentioned previously. These approaches prioritise teaching and learning strategies that build on students’ varied learning and language practices to facilitate learning (Cenoz & Gorter, 2013). Some examples of these strategies could be: encouraging interaction in other languages, encouraging language comparisons, using translation, posing questions in another language, encouraging the use of other languages in research, stimulating the use of sources in other languages (Duarte & van der Ploeg, 2019), using another language while discussing with another student (Henderson & Ingram, 2018), allowing a selective use of other languages in some parts of a lesson (McMillan & Rivers, 2011), enabling peer-to-peer instruction in other languages (Abiria

et al., 2013), allowing the creation of dual language projects (Cummins, 2007), resorting to other languages to clarify a topic (Nambisan, 2014) or using other languages to generate ideas for a writing task or to develop vocabulary, for instance (Van Viegen, 2020). In other words, as Piccardo (2013) explains, applying such strategies can mean that educators 'delegate some of the learning power to the students and (...) accept and explore limits of comprehension linked to the different cultural perspectives that each language bears' (p. 609).

A body of research studies has presented some of the benefits of applying plurilingual instruction, namely the creation of a good classroom environment where students feel their linguistic and cultural backgrounds are welcome (Henderson & Ingram, 2018), the establishment of stronger relationships between teacher and student (e.g. for pastoral or advising purposes) (Ellis, 2016), a better accomplished school performance (Cenoz, 2017; Cummins, 2007; Van Viegen, 2020), the enhancement of the learners' identities in class (Ellis, 2013), the opportunity to re-utilise learning competencies and skills already known to students (Canagarajah, 2014), the promotion of deeper learning and understanding of a subject content and the facilitation of home-school connections (Lewis et al., 2012).

Embracing plurilingualism in the classroom: to do it or not to do it?

Notwithstanding the acknowledgement of the affordances of plurilingual pedagogies, some issues still arise when these approaches are brought into the teaching and learning discourse. First of all, driven by pedagogical, social and political views, the structural monolingual tradition that prevails in educational institutions may impede the confident use of students' plurilingual and pluricultural backgrounds and may lead them to, subconsciously, favour a monolingual stance (Galante et al., 2019; Galante et al., 2020). The same applies to teachers who have historically been instructed to exclude other languages that are not the language of instruction or the target-language from the teaching and learning process (Cummins, 2007; Doiz & Lasagabaster, 2016), in the belief that the more exposure and utilisation of the target-language or language of instruction, the more students would develop proficiency in those languages. For these teachers, it becomes unnatural or even inappropriate to go against the language policy established by either a country's language education vision or a school's language pedagogy beliefs (Abiria et al., 2013; Carroll & van den Hoven, 2017; Ollerhead et al., 2018a). Regarding this, Ortega (2014) speculated that the reason for the still prevailing monolingual stance could be 'the unwillingness or inability of SLA [Second Language Acquisition] research communities to understand the ideological roots of the monolingual bias' (p. 34). Piccardo and Galante (2018) speak of a 'theoretical approval of linguistic diversity' (p. 151) contrasting with a rejection of support to teachers willing to apply plurilingual pedagogies.

Secondly, an approach so student-centred such as the plurilingual one may be rather challenging for educators to adopt. This is because some of them state that they do not possess proficiency in the other languages spoken by their students, therefore they would be unable to support and scaffold their learning (Nambisan, 2014). This is a concern that often arises within discussions about the use of plurilingual instruction, but which becomes less and less valid when studies on application of plurilingual approaches

report on how teachers allowed for the usage of languages that they, themselves, did not master without complications for the teacher, the students or the learning process (cf. Coelho (forthcoming)). Nambisan (2014) also noticed how teachers justify their reluctance in welcoming plurilingualism in the classroom by claiming that they have low proficiency in the languages spoken by their students, emphasising this as a hindrance for plurilingual classroom practices, and, nevertheless, these same teachers stand for a target-language-only or language-of-instruction-only model regardless of their students' level of proficiency in the language.

One other concern lies with the difficulties in 'bridging the gap between theory and practice' (Galante et al., 2020, p. 981) with teachers declaring lack of training on how to competently pursue plurilingual instruction. Kubota (2014 as cited in Ollerhead et al., 2018a) has cautioned us to not embrace the plurilingual turn with 'unqualified optimism' (p. 8). This leads us to reflect on how important it is to make a competent and confident transition from the monolingual approach to the plurilingual stance. In order for this to happen, it is urgent to implement more teacher training, especially for teachers working in linguistically and culturally diverse contexts (Ollerhead et al., 2018b). This has generated studies that aim to develop tools to support teachers in the task of incorporating plurilingual practices in their teaching, as are the examples of Lin's (2010) MEC (Multimodality - Entextualisation Cycle) model described in Lin et al. (2020), Galante et al.'s (2022) Plurilingual guide or Candelier et al.'s (2013) bank of resources for implementation of pluralistic approaches. Nevertheless, even though it is becoming more common to hear positive reactions to the use of plurilingual pedagogies, teachers still consider an issue their lack of 'familiarity with this type of instruction' (Galante et al., 2020) coupled with paucity of appropriate resources to support teachers in this journey (Galante et al., 2019).

Finally, in some research studies, teachers have pointed out the fact that using a language that they, themselves, speak in order to support learning in multilingual classes may exclude students who do not speak that language (Ellis, 2016). In a study conducted with UAE higher education students on their views regarding the use of plurilingual pedagogies in their classes, a few students expressed a feeling of exclusion whenever the most spoken language by their classmates was used in class and this was a language these students did not speak (Coelho (forthcoming)). While this can be a matter of concern, it is important to mention that plurilingual approaches should not be understood as synonymous to 'teacher utilising the students' home language as a support language'. A pedagogy of plurilingualism goes beyond that; it envisages learning as a process in which students are free to, themselves, build upon their own previous linguistic and cultural repertoire to engage in the learning episode if/when/how they want to.

Despite the issues and concerns expressed by teachers regarding the application of plurilingual pedagogies in their educational settings, reports of openness to such approaches and desire to implement them have, in fact, started to emerge more and more in recent studies. Nambisan (2014) surveyed teachers of English Language Learners in the US and concluded that even though teachers did not utilise plurilingual strategies in their own classes, the majority stated that welcoming the first/home language of the students throughout the learning process was important and valuable. McMillan and Rivers (2011) found out in their study carried out with 29 English teachers at a Japanese University that many teachers believed that a selective use of students' first/home

languages could have a positive impact in the learning of another language, specifically when a communicative approach is used.

In a study conducted with English as a Second Language teachers by Ellis (2016), it was clear that teachers used other languages with their students inside and outside class notwithstanding the general criticism awarded to such practice in the profession. French (2015 as cited in Ollerhead et al., 2018a) reported on a study that surveyed teachers of several different subjects on the use of first/home languages in school. Although many teachers expressed their lack of knowledge on instructional methods that embrace plurilingualism, it was evident that they regarded their students' plurilinguality as a useful resource for learning.

Davy and French (2018) encountered a multitude of answers from the teachers with some expressing complete rejection of, others showing passive acceptance of and others actively engaging in plurilingual pedagogy practices despite teaching in education systems that sustain a monolingual stance.

It has also been noticed that plurilingual teachers display a stronger awareness of language learning strategies (Galante et al., 2020) and teachers who have been language learners themselves may possess a different kind of knowledge base as far as language teaching/learning is concerned, though more investigation is required to pinpoint what this 'different knowledge' may be (Ellis, 2016). Therefore, in the UAE, one of the many multilingual countries in the world, where teachers and students present diverse (pluri)linguistic and (pluri)cultural backgrounds, how do teachers perceive plurilingualism and plurilingual pedagogies? Carroll and van den Hoven (2017) have described the UAE as a country ripe for translanguaging/plurilingual practices, but their use is often not 'openly discussed'. It is high time teachers' voices were heard. The operationalisation of plurilingual instruction and identification of its true value within specific contexts requires an attentive auscultation of teachers' linguistic ideologies and teaching/learning views (Ollerhead et al., 2018b) as well as a recognition of their in-class practices and choices that originate from their *real* experiences in the classroom and their deep knowledge of their *real* students.

Methodology

In order to gather teachers' perspectives on the use of plurilingual approaches in their teaching/learning contexts, a quantitative research method was applied, resorting to a survey especially designed for this study (Creswell, 2012). The questions were all closed-ended, including mostly multiple-choice questions and some Likert-scale-type of questions (five levels of agreement scale from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*), and were designed keeping in mind the different types of plurilingual practices stated in the literature reviewed in the previous sections (see Appendix 1). The idea was to provide respondents with a variety of plurilingual practices used in other contexts or countries and invite them to state whether they used or agreed with their use in their classes or not. Besides the usual introduction and consent form sections, the survey had two main sections:

- Section 1 – demographic information for teacher profiling
- Section 2 – teachers' perspectives and uses of plurilingual pedagogies in their current educational settings.

Given that the survey was to be administered in a country where Arabic is the official language, but English is the *lingua franca*, the survey was made available in both languages. It was first piloted with four teachers who provided important feedback on areas that needed improvement, namely question clarity or question order. After this and upon approval from the Institutional Review Board, the survey was made available in different channels, such as social media (e.g. WhatsApp local teacher groups), local teacher communities of practice (e.g. Teams groups in teacher education institution) or personal school contact lists owned by the researchers who regularly supervise teachers in local schools. A total of 91 responses from UAE K-12 teachers was collected.

The data analysis section was divided into two parts: participants profiles and results. The participants profiles were gathered after an analysis of the responses in section 1. This section provides information on the age of the participants, school curricula they taught, grades and subjects they taught, language of instruction in their schools, as well as their students' linguistic backgrounds and their own linguistic repertoires. The results section discusses the participants' current plurilingual practices in their classrooms and their level of support for such practices.

Participants' profiles

The participants in the study had a mixed profile in terms of their ages (see Appendix 1 – question 1.1). Almost a quarter of the participants were between 40 and 44 years old, whereas only two teachers were above 60 years old (Figure 1).

Regarding the curriculum used in the schools where the participants taught (see Appendix 1 – question 1.2), the analysis showed that the most common curricula were the UAE/Ministry of Education Curriculum (42%) and then the British Curriculum (36%), whereas the other curricula (e.g. the American Curriculum, IB, SABIS, the Indian Curriculum or other) were being used by relatively fewer participants (Figure 2).

When it comes to the type of schools the participants worked at (see Appendix 1 – question 1.4), secondary schools were the most commonly present level in the study

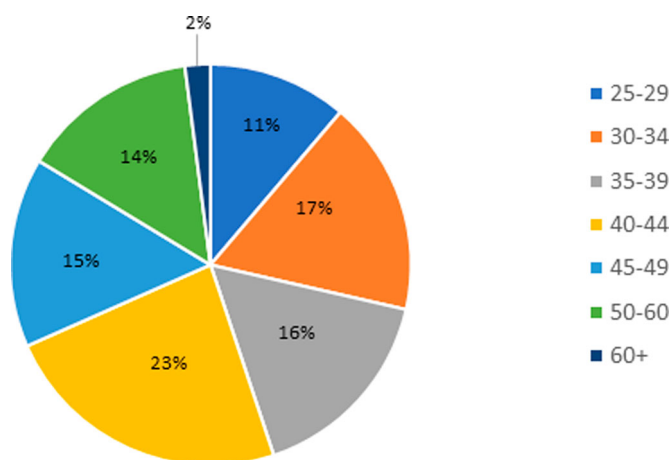


Figure 1. The distribution of the participants across age groups.

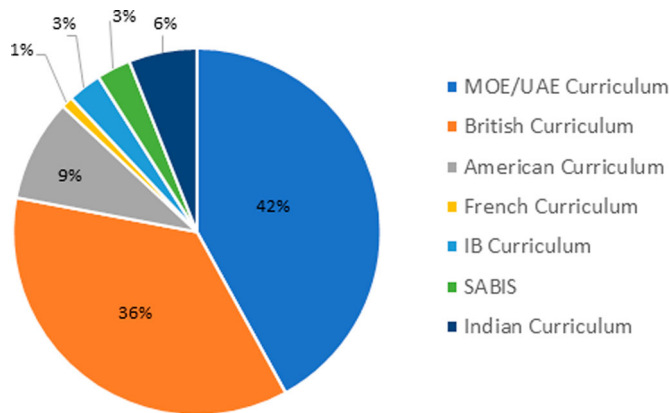


Figure 2. The distribution of the participants across school curriculum.

(59%), with kindergarten being the level of education least taught by the respondents (Figure 3).

In terms of the subjects that the participants taught (see Appendix 1 – question 1.5), the majority of the participants (43%) were teaching subject-matter subjects, such as Mathematics and Science. There were also 19 teachers who were teaching English and five teachers teaching languages other than English (i.e. French, Arabic or Hindi). It can also be seen a clear presence of subjects such as Information Technology, Social Studies, Biology, Physics and Islamic Studies, among others less represented as is the case of Psychology or History (Figure 4).

As for the language(s) of instruction at the participants' schools (see Appendix 1 – question 1.3), the majority of the participants (52%) reported that they work in schools where the language of instruction is only English, while 34% of the respondents teach in bilingual schools where English and Arabic are the languages of instruction. There were also five participants who were teaching in schools that use English, Arabic and other languages (such as Hindi, Urdu and French) as their official languages of instruction.

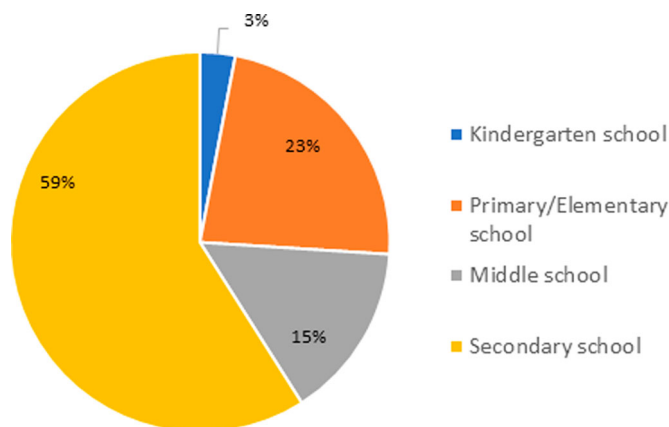


Figure 3. The distribution of the participants across school types.

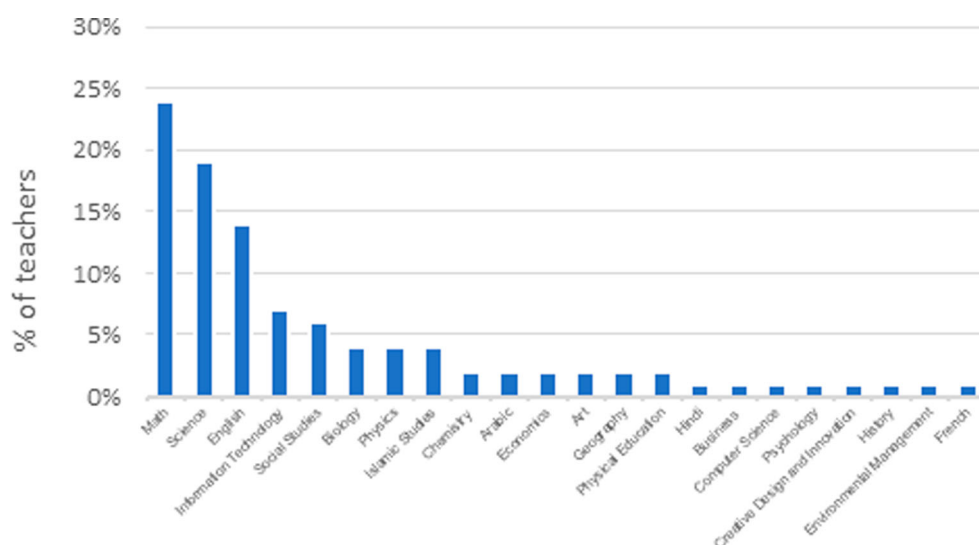


Figure 4. Subjects taught by participants.

One participant reported that English and Hindi are the languages of instruction in his/her school (Figure 5).

Finally, regarding the teachers' and the students' linguistic repertoires (see Appendix 1 – questions 1.6 & 1.7), considering the participants' responses about the students they teach and themselves, bilinguals were the majority among both students and teachers (Table 1). Six teachers reported being monolingual with Arabic as their only known language.

According to the results (see Appendix 1 – questions 1.8), English is the most spoken language among teachers (37%) followed by Arabic (24%), with Hindi, Urdu and Malayalam also present in these participants' linguistic repertoires (Figure 6). Among the

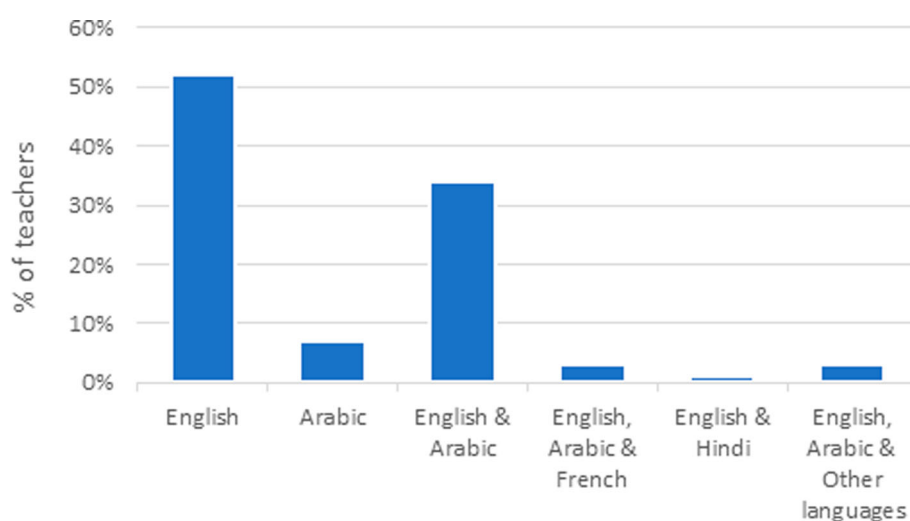


Figure 5. Languages of instruction/teaching at participants' schools.

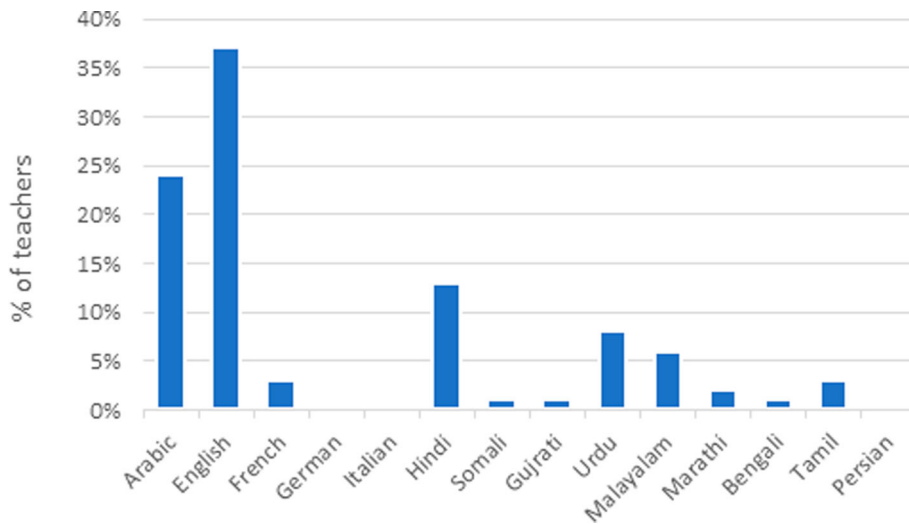
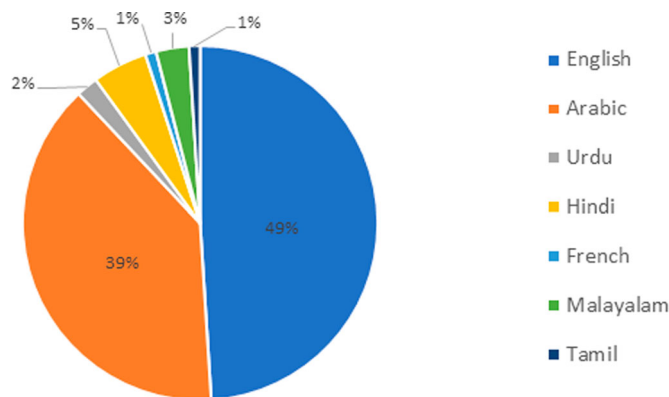
Table 1. The distribution of the participants and their students according to their linguistic profiles.

	Students' linguistic profiles according to their teachers are	Teachers' linguistic profiles are
Monolingual	8	6
Bilingual	64	50
Multilingual	19	35

bilingual teachers, English (49%) and Arabic (39%) were the most spoken languages (Figure 7), whereas multilingual participants pointed to English (32%), Hindi (21%) and Urdu (14%) as the languages most spoken by them (Figure 8).

Results

In this section, teachers' beliefs and practices regarding the use of plurilingual instruction will be presented. First, their language(s)-presence context as well as their 'covert'

**Figure 6.** Languages spoken by participants.**Figure 7.** Languages spoken by bilingual participants.

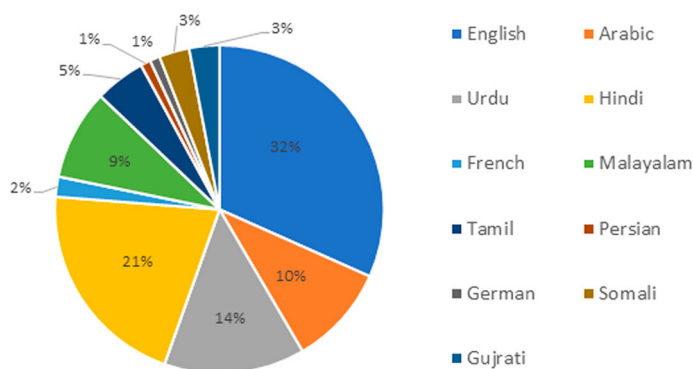


Figure 8. Languages spoken by multilingual participants.

plurilingual practices will be described, followed by an analysis of their support of and interest in plurilingual pedagogies.

Linguistic context and plurilingual practices in the participants' schools

When asked to describe their classroom context in terms of presence of other languages (see Appendix 1 – question 2.1), teachers could choose more than one scenario among five (Figure 9).

According to the results, 43% of the teachers stated that, as per their school policy, only one language as medium of instruction was allowed in their classrooms, so neither they nor their students used an additional language for learning purposes. However, despite the monolingual policy of their schools, 28% of the teachers claimed that they themselves sometimes used an additional language to support their students' learning, 18% of the participants stated that they heard their students using additional languages during classes and they didn't mind such practice, and 11% of the teachers encouraged their students themselves to use additional languages. Finally, 5% of participants reported that their school did not adopt a strict language-of-instruction-only policy, so everyone was free to resort to any language during the teaching/learning process (Figure 9).

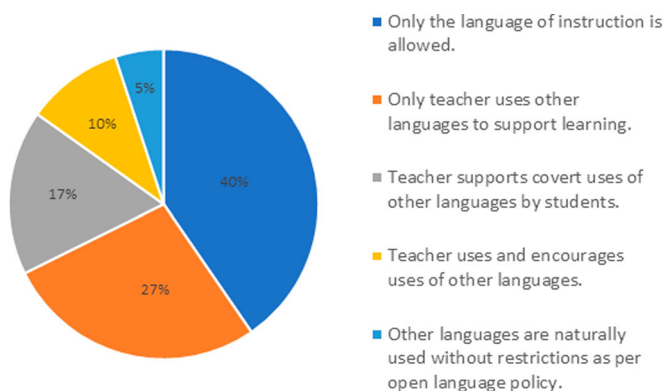


Figure 9. Plurilingual contexts in the participants' classrooms.

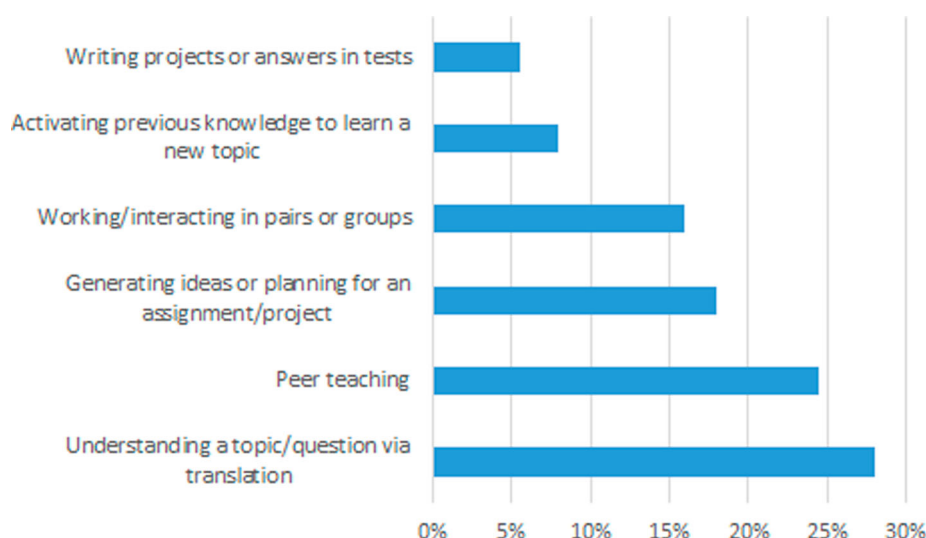


Figure 10. Cases of additional language use.

Therefore, more than half of the respondents welcomed other languages in their classrooms even in cases when the school policy supported a monolingual stance.

When asked to report on which situations they encouraged the use of students' linguistic repertoires as a learning resource, even if they resorted to a language different from the language of instruction (see Appendix 1 – question 2.2), teachers reported six different types of practices. They allowed other languages to be used in order for students to understand a topic or meaning of a question better (28%) or while students supported their peers (24.5%). Other participants stated that the use of other languages was welcomed to help students generate ideas or plan for projects or tasks (18%), while the use of other languages during work in pairs or groups appeared in 16% of the respondents' answers. Utilising other languages to activate prior knowledge was also present in 8% of the answers, with a few respondents (5.5%) claiming that other languages were accepted when writing answers in a test/assignment (Figure 10).

Clarifying a topic or a question and supporting their peers are the situations in which these teachers mostly encouraged the use of plurilingualism.

Support of plurilingual pedagogy

When asked about their views on whether plurilingual approaches should be applied in UAE K-12 schools (see Appendix 1 – question 2.3), 73% showed agreement, with 23% strongly agreeing and 50% agreeing. On the other hand, 12% of the teachers disagreed with the use of plurilingual instruction in K-12 schools in the UAE and the remaining participants were neutral when it came to the implementation of such pedagogies (Figure 11).

These answers indicate that the great majority of teachers surveyed support the implementation of plurilingual pedagogies in their educational settings.

Finally, a considerable majority of the participants (92.3%) indicated their willingness to learn more about how to implement the pedagogies of plurilingualism to support learning in their classes (see Annex 1 – question 2.4).

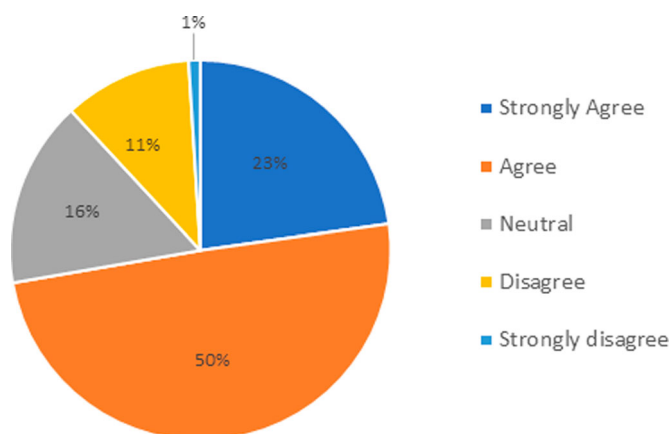


Figure 11. Participants' opinions on whether plurilingual pedagogy should be applied in UAE K-12 schools.

Discussion

This study aimed to investigate UAE K-12 teachers' views and uses of plurilingual instruction in their current educational settings. The teachers surveyed were mostly middle-aged, and working at secondary schools of national or British curriculum. The majority taught Math, Science or English and most teachers taught in schools where English was the language of instruction with some teachers also teaching in bilingual schools (English and Arabic). The participants described their students' linguistic repertoires as mostly bilingual (English and Arabic) as was the case for the teachers' own linguistic backgrounds, though there was a significant number of teachers who spoke three and more languages too.

When asked about the presence of other languages in their classrooms, 43% of the teachers claimed that they scrupulously followed their schools only-language-of-instruction policy, as has been reported in other studies (Abiria et al., 2013; Carroll & van den Hoven, 2017; Ollerhead et al., 2018a). Nevertheless, more than half of the teachers surveyed seemed to overlook the monolingual policy imposed by their schools and welcomed a variety of plurilingual practices. This corroborates, for example, Ellis's (2016) study results which stated that, despite the general disapproval of plurilingualism in second language classrooms, the teachers who participated in her study naturally used other languages inside and outside class.

Regarding the materialisation of plurilingual practices in these teachers' classrooms, from the six types of practices to choose from in the survey, the most applied one was translating or looking up the meaning of words in order to understand a topic or question. The practice of translation in multilingual classrooms appears as a popular plurilingual practice (Duarte & van der Ploeg, 2019; Nambisan, 2014), particularly for clarification purposes. According to Coelho's (forthcoming) study, from the point of view of students, translating emerged associated with academic success since it fostered understanding. Therefore, it is possible that the teachers surveyed in this study recognise the role of translation in student success, hence allowing it in their classrooms. Peer-teaching appeared as the second most utilised plurilingual technique and one that is quite present in the

literature as well (e.g. Abiria et al., 2013). This seems to indicate that these teachers acknowledge the importance of enabling peer-to-peer teaching in other languages as a means to support learning. Generating ideas and planning in additional languages (Van Viegen, 2020) was equally common among the plurilingual practices of the students of the participants, showing that they recognise the role of other languages in pre-task stages. Even though less present in these teachers' classrooms, other practices such as allowing interaction or group/pair work discussions in other languages (Duarte & van der Ploeg, 2019; Henderson & Ingram, 2018) or resorting to other languages to activate previous knowledge were reported to be used. Despite being encouraged by experts, allowing students to answer test questions or writing projects using other languages (or dual language project – Cummins, 2007) do not often appear as accepted plurilingual practices; however, it was surprisingly chosen by nine teachers in this study.

Finally, the great majority of the respondents stated that they believed in the potential of plurilingual approaches in the current UAE K-12 schools given its superdiverse student cohorts. This belief could be the reason behind these teachers' considerable 'unofficial' applications of plurilingual pedagogies in their educational settings as per their answers to previous questions. The same applies to the overwhelming 92.3% of teachers who showed interest in learning more on how to apply plurilingual strategies for learning purposes. This significant readiness to learn more about these approaches could be interpreted as a genuine interest coupled with a call for more training (Galante et al., 2020; Ollerhead et al., 2018b). It is clear that the participants are ready to embrace plurilingual practices but necessitate further guidance on appropriate plurilingual instructional methods and techniques. This genuine interest could also be attributed to the fact that the respondents are mostly bilingual, having thus more lived experiences in more than one language. As Galante et al. (2020) and Ellis (2016) stated, teachers who are themselves plurilingual or who have been involved in some kind of language learning context possess a stronger awareness of language learning strategies and, possibly, given the results of this study, are more open to non-monolingual practices.

Conclusion

In brief, this study in the UAE corroborates much of what is already in the literature, i.e. despite the monolingual school policy, the majority of the UAE teachers surveyed acknowledge the positive impact of capitalising on other languages for a successful learning process; therefore, they naturally adopt plurilingual practices in their classrooms and account for the disposition to receive more training on how to apply them consistently and ethically. This was a surprising result given the rigorous nature of the UAE-governed educational systems, meticulously regulated by professional bodies. Besides, as mentioned in the literature review section, the monolingual stance is still the prevalent one and broadly supported across levels of education in the UAE (Carroll & van den Hoven, 2017), thus seeing in the participants' responses clear evidence of openness to utilising approaches that go beyond the ones recommended in the policy was as startling as it was enlightening. Moreover, it is also important to mention that even though no information could be collected on the presence of plurilingual approaches as part of the participants' teacher education programmes, the first author works closely and regularly with pre-service and in-service UAE teachers, knowing about the nearly absolute absence of

this topic in teacher training at least locally and until the date of the writing of this article. This adds to the reasons why the acknowledgement of the potentialities of plurilingual practices by the respondents was a revelation to the authors.

Based on this conclusion, it seems urgent to concede more teacher agency in matters related to pedagogical choices, curriculum development and language policy in multilingual and multicultural contexts such as the UAE, even if starting at the micro level, i.e. internal school decisions (Galante et al., 2020) that could potentially lead to open discussions that would influence the macro level or even lead to policy reform, if deemed necessary. Teachers are in a privileged position in which they 'learn from their students, and from what works and what doesn't in particular contexts. They use this learning to adapt and modify their teaching approach' (Ellis, 2016, p. 214). It would be a disservice not to use this *learning* for curriculum enhancement practices which favour a more linguistically ecological, inclusive, flexible and equitable education (Putjata & Koster, 2021). To this end, more research in the field is recommended in which a larger sample of teachers are surveyed and/or interviewed, students are interviewed and focus group discussion with school principals, teachers, parents and policy makers are implemented.

Notes

1. Some applied linguists use the term 'multilinguals' as synonymous with 'plurilinguals', as is the case in this extract; however, our understanding is that these two terms are different. See next section for a clear understanding of the distinctions between the two terms which is an important underpinning of this research study. For more information on this topic, we recommend consulting Piccardo et al.'s (2022) introductory chapter.
2. For example, many expats residing in the UAE, while speaking English, incorporate many Arabic words in their speech, such as *inshallah*, *khallas* or *yalla*, given the exposure to and natural influence of this official language of the country.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Declaration

This research was conducted after Institutional Review Board approval (File # CAS – 21-01-002 – Abu Dhabi University).

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