



Exploring preschool teachers' perspectives on linguistic diversity: A Q study



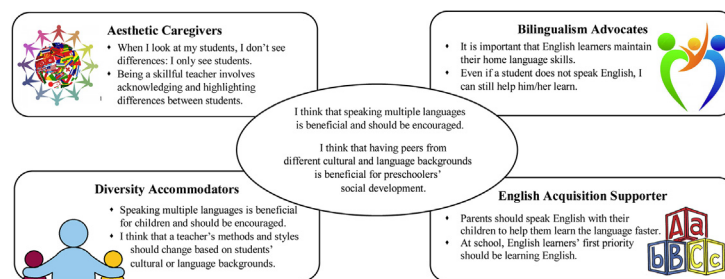
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HIGHLIGHTS

- Mixed-methods Q study describes four perspectives toward linguistic diversity.
- Aesthetic Caregivers: Acknowledge student differences and similarities.
- Bilingualism Advocates: Maintain bilingualism for family connection.
- Diversity Accommodators: Accommodate individual students' needs.
- English Acquisition Supporter: Need to learn English for success in U.S. society.

GRAPHICAL ABSTRACT



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ABSTRACT

Twenty-one preschool teachers in California participated in a Q methodology study exploring beliefs about linguistic diversity. Four perspectives emerged from the factor analysis: Aesthetic Caregivers emphasized the importance of effectively negotiating student differences, Bilingualism Advocates supported bilingualism to reinforce family ties, Diversity Accommodators focused on adapting teaching methods to meet English learners' individual needs, and an English Acquisition Supporter highlighted the need to learn English. All teachers agreed that linguistic diversity contributes positively to the classroom. Findings present a nuanced picture of these teachers' beliefs about linguistic diversity, illustrating the usefulness of Q methodology as a mixed-methods exploration of perspectives.

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1. Introduction

Linguistic diversity is a growing reality for teachers around the globe. In California, 46% of school-aged children live in households where English is not the primary language (Myers, 2013), and this figure is projected to increase (Ortman & Shin, 2011). Unfortunately, many teachers feel unprepared for linguistic diversity (Clair, 1995) and characterize it as problematic (Dooly, 2007; Gkaintartzi

& Tsokalidou, 2011). While they generally welcome English learners (ELs) (Reeves, 2006), teachers' attitudes toward linguistic diversity vary and are linked to their own personal background and training (Sanders & Downer, 2012). The current study explored perspectives on linguistic diversity in 21 northern California preschool teachers.

Until 2016,¹ California was one of only three states in the U.S. where bilingual education was formally limited. Under Proposition

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¹ Proposition 58, which passed in November 2016 and will be implemented in 2017, repealed Proposition 227, which prohibited the use of non-English languages in public educational instruction.

227, ELs in California public schools received only one year of structured immersion before entering mainstream classrooms. However, few mainstream classroom teachers are trained to teach ELs (McCloskey, 2002), and many lack the time and resources to meet the needs of linguistically diverse students (Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly, & Driscoll, 2005). Given this paucity of teacher training and resources, ELs are likely to be seen as burdens within English-only classrooms (Pettit, 2011). Although Proposition 227 was recently repealed, English-only ideologies may still shape teachers' language practices. As growing numbers of ELs enter California classrooms, it is increasingly important to examine teachers' views about linguistic diversity (Walker, Shafer, & Iiams, 2004).

1.1. Organization

We first outline our theoretical framework and rationale, including a description of the goals of Q methodology. The Method section describes the Q sample, participants, measures, and procedure. The Results section (see Graphical Abstract) presents perspectives that emerged from the Q factor analysis, focusing on: (1) characterizing each perspective, (2) highlighting differences between perspectives, and (3) describing areas of consensus. Throughout, quantitative data are supplemented by qualitative data. Finally, in the Discussion, we summarize teachers' perspectives, and discuss implications, limitations, and future directions.

1.2. Theoretical framework

1.2.1. Teachers' beliefs about linguistic diversity

Teachers' beliefs are a key construct in educational research (Pajares, 1992), and links between beliefs and instructional decisions and practices have been well documented (Fang, 1996; Rubie-Davies, Flint, & McDonald, 2012). Beliefs are "mental constructions of experience" (Sigel, 1985, p. 351) that are held to be true, and attitudes are "clusters of beliefs around a particular object or situation" (Pajares, 1992, p. 319). Beliefs and attitudes are interconnected, and differ in intensity and centrality (Rokeach, 1968). Taking a symbolic interactionist view, we use the term "perspective" to indicate a combination of beliefs and attitudes: a "reflective, socially derived interpretation ... which serves as a basis for actions [and is] continually modified by social interaction" (Janesick, 1979, p. 4).

Teachers' perspectives on linguistic diversity predict language-minority students' outcomes (Cummins, 2000a). For example, a teacher with negative beliefs about linguistic diversity may communicate lower expectations of academic achievement to language-minority students (August & Hakuta, 1997). Through classroom seating arrangements and differential praising and questioning behaviors, teachers communicate implicit assumptions of lower intelligence or ability, which may negatively impact these students' self-efficacy beliefs and lead to diminished performance (Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2010). Identifying specific negative beliefs and attitudes about linguistic diversity is a first step towards transforming teachers' perspectives and improving educational access for ELs.

Teachers' perspectives on ELs are also shaped by their perceptions of the impact of inclusion on themselves and the learning environment (Reeves, 2006). Some teachers are concerned that having ELs in their classroom increases their workload (Youngs & Youngs, 1999), slows down classroom discourse (Verplaetse, 1998), and is detrimental to other students' learning (Vázquez-Montilla, Just, & Triscari, 2014). Other teachers believe that the responsibility for ELs' language development and academic achievement lies with English as a Second Language (ESL), not

mainstream, teachers (Polat & Mahalingappa, 2013). Given these beliefs, it is unsurprising that some teachers prefer not to have ELs in their classrooms (Walker et al., 2004).

Ruíz (1984) described three orientations towards minority languages: *language-as-problem*, *language-as-resource*, and *language-as-right*. According to the *language-as-problem* orientation, which parallels Lambert's (1980) "subtractive bilingualism" (p. 3) construct, home language use is an obstacle to English acquisition. In contrast, the *language-as-resource* orientation posits that multilingualism is intrinsically valuable and should be promoted. Finally, the *language-as-right* orientation argues for home language maintenance as a civil right.

Even within the group of teachers who support multilingual language practices, however, there are different types of caring for language-minority students associated with different outcomes (Valenzuela, 1999). Teachers who demonstrate *aesthetic caring* appreciate classroom diversity superficially, but only provide apolitical, colorblind instructional support to language-minority students. In contrast, teachers who demonstrate *authentic caring* take responsibility for the education of the whole child, and actively affirm and nurture students' linguistic and cultural identities alongside their academic development. While both types of caring explicitly support linguistic diversity, Valenzuela (1999) posited that over time, *aesthetic caring* deprives language-minority students of their linguistic and cultural resources and ultimately contributes to academic failure, whereas *authentic caring* promotes student success by validating their cultural values and bolstering their sense of belonging.

Similarly, Freire (1970) posits that critically conscious education and the humanization of students hinges upon teachers' willingness to engage with students on topics that are culturally relevant and important to students themselves. Instead of teaching students disconnected, piecemeal "facts," critically conscious teachers present situations as problems, and co-create knowledge with their students, learning both *with* and *from* them. According to Freire, it is only through this transformative, problem-posing pedagogy that historically oppressed people can liberate themselves, reclaim their culture, and experience "authentic education" (p. 93). Authentic caring and authentic educational experiences may therefore be key components in language-minority young children's sense of belonging and future academic success (Valenzuela, 1999).

1.2.2. Present study

California teachers' perspectives on linguistic diversity are linked to the norms and values of U.S. society (Horenczyk & Tatar, 2002). Therefore, our theoretical framework includes considerations of the obligations and purposes of educating language-minority students in the U.S., as well as broader questions surrounding how to best approach diversity. Specifically, the present study draws upon two existing frameworks for understanding teachers' beliefs toward linguistic diversity: Flores and Smith's (2009) four-construct model of teachers' beliefs about language-minority students, and Hachfeld and colleagues' (2011) distinction between egalitarian and multicultural beliefs.

Expanding upon Byrnes and Kiger's (1994) Language Attitudes of Teachers Scale (LATS), Flores and Smith (2009) proposed four constructs that shape teachers' negative attitudes toward language minority students: (a) Rights and Privileges, (b) Aesthetic Caring, (c) Exclusionary/Assimilationist, and (d) Responsibility/Culpability. The Rights and Privileges construct, which stems from Ruíz's (1984) *language-as-problem* orientation, characterizes the presence of ELs in mainstream classrooms as problematic because of the impact on other students' learning ("Having a non- or limited-English-proficient student in the classroom is detrimental to the learning of other students"). The Aesthetic Caring construct (Valenzuela,

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