



Teachers' Beliefs as Resources for Inclusive Teaching: Insights into a Long-Term University Study

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Abstract. Teachers play a key role in Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). They equip learners with the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, foster a culture of respect and belonging, and ensure equitable and quality education for all. Their beliefs also influence the way and the content they teach in a postmigrant and inclusive society. As well as imparting expert and didactic knowledge, teacher training in higher education needs practical application phases and needs to encourage students to reflect on their own beliefs. Using long-term observations from a pilot study, this article reflects how diversity-sensitising intervention seminars with an intersectional focus and practical school experience in university teaching have an impact on the beliefs of prospective German teachers at Master's level for grammar schools. In particular, non-religious or less religious students with multilingual experiences have positive attitudes towards multilingualism, intercultural education, and sexual diversity even at the beginning of the study. Within one year, we see a tendency in changing beliefs in the positive sense. However, the data also indicate that, in the short term, university seminars do not lead to students becoming better at recognising everyday racism, though this does not hinder their attitudes towards cosmopolitanism, tolerance, and acceptance.

Keywords: teachers' beliefs, inclusive teaching, ESD, teacher training.

1 Introduction

The United Nations agreed on 17 sustainable development goals as Agenda 2030, where the fourth goal aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities” (UN, 2015, p. 21). Goal 4.7 states that “all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for [...] human rights, gender equality, [...], global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity” (UN, 2015, p. 21).

Teachers are key actors both to equip learners with knowledge and skills to engage for sustainable development and to ensure equitable and quality education for all, while fostering a culture of respect and belonging. Therefore, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and the related principles of inclusion and diversity needs to be focused by teaching in school, but also by professionalizing future teachers in higher education.

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Following Krauss et al. (2020), teachers' professional competences include professional knowledge, motivational orientations, self-regulatory skills and professional beliefs. These competences are a central resource for action in the classroom (cf. Harms & Riese, 2018). Regarding teachers' beliefs, studies have shown that various factors influence the development of teachers' beliefs and values: influences from personal/social development, beliefs developed during one's own school years, and (formal) knowledge acquired during one's studies (see Calderhead, 1996, pp. 715-719). In addition to this, experiences gained in school practice as a (prospective) teacher should be mentioned, as we can see from current studies (cf. Leist-Villis, 2017). According to Calderhead, teachers' beliefs have an impact on the design of teaching in terms of the following five aspects: "Beliefs About Learners and Learning", "Beliefs About Teaching", "Beliefs About Subject", "Beliefs About Learning to Teach", "Beliefs About Self and the Teaching Role" (Calderhead, 1996, pp. 719-721). Following these results, we need to assume that teachers' beliefs about diversity and inclusion have an impact on the way they teach in a postmigrant and inclusive society. Therefore, it is necessary to train teachers in higher education concerning their competences and make them aware of their own beliefs on diversity and inclusion.

This article presents insights into a long-term pilot study. It is to reflect to what extent university seminars - designed to raise awareness of diversity and inclusion among prospective German teachers in Germany - have an impact on their diversity-related beliefs and which factors may influence their beliefs. We conclude with recommendations for diversity-orientated teacher training in higher education.

2 The impact of university seminars on teachers' beliefs

2.1 Objectives within the framework of sustainable education

The aim of the study was to find out (1) to what extent an intervention seminar that deals thematically with the intersectional intertwining of various dimensions of diversity and included many opportunities for reflection and practical components, an additional seminar on the topic of multilingual-sensitive teaching, and practical experiences in schools had an impact on the beliefs of prospective German teachers, and (2) which factors may influence their beliefs. The number of participants in the pilot study with which we are dealing here is small so that we rarely can speak about statistically relevant results. But the data from the pilot study - together with current findings in other studies - allows us to reflect how teacher training at universities could be structured in order to achieve the goal of inclusive teaching and thus sustainable education for all.

2.2 Literature Review

Studies have identified that attending university seminars on the topic of inclusion, make a significant difference to the positive attitudes of teachers and students towards inclusion in schools (cf. Bosse & Spörer, 2014; Seifried, 2015; Simon, 2024). In addition, Junker et al. (2020) show that gender, study level, and desired teaching profession correlate: seminars that sensitive to heterogeneity had more additive positive influence

on the attitudes of bachelor's students (than on master's students) and male students, but significantly improved the self-efficacy beliefs of all students surveyed.

Several studies have demonstrated that there is a significant correlation between professional beliefs about multilingualism and learning opportunities: both female teachers and teachers who grew up multilingual are more willing to create appropriate learning opportunities (cf. Fischer/Lahmann, 2020; Leist-Villis, 2017). Borowski (2021) and Born et al. (2019) also show that teachers tend to have more positive beliefs about linguistic and cultural diversity if they had more opportunities to learn how to teach foreign language learners during their studies. The fact that students feel poorly prepared for teaching in multilingual classrooms also influences their beliefs about multilingualism, as Kaplan's (2023) study shows.

Teachers' attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity depend on their teaching profession, their personality and their experiences. Studies have shown that close contact with LGBTIQIA* people (cf. Gegenfurtner, 2021; Klocke et al., 2019) and regular interaction with a diverse student body leads to fewer prejudices against minorities (cf. Meyer & Leonardi, 2018). Küpper et al. (2017) show that a high level of education contributes to fewer prejudices, and younger people and women have significantly more positive attitudes towards gender diversity (cf. cf. Morgan et al., 2020). Additionally we can see that people who identify as politically left-wing tend to have a more positive attitude towards LGBTIQIA* people (cf. Küpper et al., 2017; Klocke et al., 2019). Finally, people who say they are less religious have more positive attitudes, as several studies show (cf. Gegenfurtner, 2021; Yendell, 2016; Betz, 2018).

In their meta-analysis, Campbell et al. state that "religion is typically a predictor of intergroup anti-sociality, or in other words religion tends to predict most forms of prejudice" (Campbell et al., 2019, p. 22). Studies in Germany that specifically looked at racist attitudes among people in Germany show that teachers discriminate against children with a migrant background in schools and that racist knowledge and ideas are deeply rooted in society in some cases (cf. Deutsches Zentrum für Integrations- und Migrationsforschung, 2020, 2022, p. 3).

In particular, the studies by Simon (2024) and Junker (2020) on inclusion and the studies by Borowski (2021), Born et al. (2019), and Kaplan (2023) on multilingualism and interculturality show that university seminars can, indeed, sensitise students to diversity-related teaching and have positive effects, especially on male students. Based on these results, we can also assume that less religious and, in particular, female students with a multilingual and sexually diverse background have strong positive attitudes towards diversity. We wanted to know whether this effect lasts for over a year, particularly given the real-life situations that students encounter in schools when they first start teaching.

2.3 Methodology and Research Design

Over two semesters, master's students were studied, who spent the academic year 2022/2023 together as a fixed cohort. The number of participating students was small, but remained steady (n at t1=13 | n at t2=11 | n at t3=12). In the first semester of their master's programme, they attended a diversity awareness seminar, and in the second

semester, they attended a seminar on multilingual-sensitive teaching. In the second semester, the students also completed their first teaching trials at schools. To test the hypothesis that seminars and teaching-experience in schools lead to more positive attitudes towards multiculturalism, interculturality, sexual diversity, and to less racist attitudes, a mixed-methods research design was used for evaluation: A questionnaire with proven scales that measure beliefs about individual dimensions of diversity was used three times within a year with the student cohort: at the beginning (t1) and end (t2) of the first master's semester, and after the second master's semester (t3). Validated scales were used to record beliefs (see table 1). The data was statistically analysed with regard to mean values (M) and standard deviations (SD): Reflection tasks were designed to help students critically reflect on their own beliefs. The texts were evaluated using qualitative content analysis. The results can be found in Becker (2025).

Table 1. Used scales for questionnaire.

Topic	Used Scale
Attitudes towards multilingualism in schools	Leist-Villis (2019)
Dealing with multilingualism in the classroom	Fürstenau et al. (2020)
Attitudes and practices towards intercultural education	Grimminger (2012)
Attitudes towards sexual diversity	Klocke (2012)
Attitudes towards discrimination and racism	Aschpurwis + Behrens GmbH [NaDiRa] (2021)

Current research findings on teachers' beliefs regarding diversity categories served as the basis for decisions on the structure of the intervention seminars. The aim of the university teaching concept of the first seminar was to familiarise students with the concept of diversity-sensitive teaching and with methods relating to the individual facets of heterogeneity, which were then tested and critically reflected upon in application-oriented sessions using concrete teaching materials. The seminar was organised in double blocks: first, the theoretical foundations on the topics of racism, anti-Semitism, interculturality, multilingualism, gender, and sexual diversity were laid, every time followed by application-oriented implementation and reflection. The second seminar introduced the theory, history, and concepts of multilingual-sensitive teaching and included the creation of a corresponding lesson plan with materials and exercises.

2.4 Results

The gender ratio of the student cohort is unbalanced: All students have identified themselves as either male or female; only three students are male. All participants speak at least one foreign language, four respondents have no experience with multilingualism in their family circle or living environment, while three students speak a family lan-

guage other than German. The majority of students (75%), we can conclude, has experience with or insight into the challenges of multilingualism in Germany. All students rarely practise religious rituals and do not hold any religious ideological beliefs. For evaluation of the results, only gender and multilingual environment were selected as variables.

Even before the first seminar, the students show very high levels of agreement to all diversity dimensions. Compared with the data of Leist-Villis (2017) about beliefs on multilingualism for example, the students in Magdeburg have higher scores in their beliefs on multilingualism (see table 2). But we see that the scores of students who grew up multilingual (MuS) are lower than those who grew up monolingual (MoS), which may be due to their own experiences as pupils in school and in the classroom, e.g. little involvement and appreciation of their multilingualism. While monolingual students seem to be more skeptical about multilingualism in school after the first seminar and more positive after attending the multilingual-sensitive teaching seminar, students who grew up multilingually show increasing levels of agreement. Students without multilingual background (WMLB) become more skeptically during the year, in contrast to students with a multilingual background (MLB).

Table 2. Attitudes towards multilingualism in school. Four-point response scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*.

	t1			t2			t3			Leist-Villis
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	M
all	13	3.00	0.52	11	3.16	0.48	11	3.27	0.43	2.04
MoS	10	3.00	0.20	8	2.69	0.09	10	3.24	0.15	2.00
MuS	3	2.84	0.26	3	3.06	0.35	1	3.47	0	2.26
male	3	2.98	0.20	3	2.64	0.29	3	3.30	0.16	
female	10	2.97	0.23	8	2.79	0.20	8	3.25	0.15	
WMLB	4	2.58	0.08	4	2.22	0.07	3	2.04	0.04	
MLB	9	2.98	0.26	7	2.87	0.26	8	3.31	0.14	

In the available data we see a tendency that the students/prospective German teachers surveyed at the university of Magdeburg are also more willing or feel more capable of integrating and using multilingual resources in their teaching (see table 3).

Table 3. Dealing with multilingualism in the classroom. Five-point response scale from 1 = *does not apply* to 5 = *applies completely*.

	t1			t2			t3		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
acceptance of multilingualism in lessons									
all	13	3.46	0.71	11	3.58	0.78	12	3.88	0.58
male	3	3.47	0.36	3	3.58	0.54	3	3.65	0.10
female	10	3.47	0.41	8	3.58	0.37	9	3.91	0.41
WMLB	4	3.45	0.48	4	3.55	0.45	3	3.80	0.27
MLB	9	3.47	0.41	7	3.60	0.40	9	3.91	0.41
integration and consideration of multilingualism in lessons									
all	13	2.49	1.05	11	2.58	0.78	12	2.77	0.72
male	3	2.48	0.35	3	2.81	0.16	3	2.81	0.16
female	10	2.50	0.23	8	2.50	0.25	9	2.76	0.21
WMLB	4	2.61	0.39	4	2.62	0.32	3	2.86	0.19
MLB	9	2.44	0.20	7	2.57	0.20	9	2.75	0.19
using multilingual resources in lessons									
all	13	3.49	0.69	11	3.61	0.84	12	4.01	0.93
male	3	3.38	0.25	3	3.38	0.25	3	3.81	0.25
female	10	3.53	0.31	8	3.70	0.23	9	4.08	0.43
WMLB	4	3.50	0.29	4	3.39	0.25	3	3.81	0.25
MLB	9	3.49	0.31	7	3.73	0.19	9	4.08	0.43

Perhaps due to the small sample size available here, the available data shows (unlike Fischer & Lahmann, 2020) no big difference between female and male students in terms of attitudes towards multilingualism. Interestingly, students without a multilingual background (WMLB) show a willingness to incorporate multilingualism into their teaching from the outset. The data also show, similar to Kaplan (2023), that although students are more willing to accept multilingualism in the classroom and want to use it after one year - especially female students and those with a multilingual background -, they all remain uncertain about how or whether they can integrate multilingualism into their teaching, especially after attending the multilingual-sensitive teaching seminar and after school practice phase.

At the beginning, the majority of students, and especially male and WMLB students, are convinced that German lessons can contribute to intercultural education (see table 4). After one year, they are then unanimously of the opinion that intercultural education can be successful in the classroom.

Table 4. German lessons can contribute to intercultural education. Four-point response scale from 1 = *strongly agree* to 4 = *strongly disagree*.

	t1			t2			t3		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
all	13	1.54	0.66	11	1.36	0.60	12	1.00	0.00
male	3	1.33	0.44	3	1.16	0.41	3	1.00	0.00
female	10	1.60	0.72	8	1.28	0.51	9	1.00	0.00
WMLB	4	1.25	0.38	4	1.25	0.38	3	1.00	0.00
MLB	9	1.67	0.74	7	1.43	0.73	9	1.00	0.00

Unlike in Klocke's (2019) study, the respondents in this pilot study are very much of the opinion that sexual diversity should generally be addressed in school (see table 5). Students without a multilingual background getting more convinced after the first intervention seminar, while male students getting skeptically during the year. Similar to Klocke's (2019) study, all students (even after one year) have few uncertainties and fears about addressing gender diversity in the classroom. We cannot see greatly varying attitudes between all student groups.

Table 5. Attitudes towards sexual diversity. Five-point response scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*.

	t1			t2			t3		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Sexual diversity should be discussed in schools.									
all	13	4.27	0.66	11	4.42	0.49	12	4.23	0.66
male	3	4.48	0.54	3	4.38	0.38	3	4.19	0.60
female	10	4.21	0.64	8	4.43	0.44	9	4.24	0.65
WMLB	4	4.25	0.25	4	4.61	0.39	3	4.33	0.41
MLB	9	4.29	0.48	7	4.31	0.23	9	4.19	0.42
fears and obstacles to dealing with sexual diversity at school									
all	13	1.96	0.59	11	2.06	0.70	12	2.14	0.81
male	3	1.78	0.26	3	1.72	0.74	3	2.06	0.78
female	10	2.02	0.63	8	2.19	0.78	9	2.17	0.72
WMLB	4	2.04	0.38	4	1.83	0.50	3	2.22	0.41
MLB	9	1.93	0.47	7	2.19	0.35	9	2.11	0.46

A good third of students (33%), namely those from multilingual families, say they have experienced racism themselves. Almost all students reject the statement "There are different human races" and agree with pluralistic coexistence in society. The majority of students before and after the intervention do *rather not* believe that racist practices exist

in Germany or that there is a danger of increasing racism (t1: M: 2.41; SD: 0.68 | t2: M: 2.35; SD: 0.61 | t3: M: 2.40; SD: 0.65; scale: 1>4). On the one hand, the majority of students reject racist (culturalist) assumptions, on the other hand, when presented with racist situations for assessment and evaluation, they *rather* judge them as racist, even in the long term. A comparison with the statements of those surveyed in the NaDiRa study shows that students reject racism more strongly in principle. However, while a clear majority (88%) in the NaDiRa study identify racist situations as such, only 38% of students do so at the beginning, 60% after the first intervention seminar, and only 18% at the end.

3 Discussion & Reflection

Compared to other test groups using the same scales, students at the university of Magdeburg already had more positive attitudes towards all dimensions of diversity before the first seminar. This finding may be related to the fact that they are students on Master-level and have already acquired more knowledge that influences their attitudes, and/or they have a diverse circle of family and friends that changed their attitudes and/or are less religious what could have an impact on having prejudices or to be open-minded (cf. Campell, 2019).

Due to the small number of participants in this pilot study, we need to deal carefully with the available data. In the data, we see a tendency that the first seminar on diversity-sensitive teaching and then the second seminar on multilingual-sensitive teaching with practical school relevance have a positive influence on prospective German teachers in terms of their attitudes towards and their approach to multilingualism and interculturalism. These results are similar to the findings of Borowski (2021), Born et al. (2019), and Kaplan (2023), among others. The diversity-oriented seminar was especially convincing towards intercultural learning in German classes (all participants rated it highest). For further studies, we need to consider university teachers' knowledge and beliefs on the several diversity dimensions, too, since they may affect vice versa how convinced students may get with respect to these approaches. Trainings for university staff on diversity and inclusion may ensure a balance between groups. With caution, it can be concluded from the data that a multilingual background has a positive influence on attitudes towards multilingualism in the classroom, while gender influences attitudes towards whether sexual diversity should be addressed.

However, the data also show that limited awareness of structural racism remains ingrained among students. While students do not consistently succeed in recognising racism in everyday expressions, their beliefs do not hinder their positive attitudes towards cosmopolitanism, tolerance, and acceptance. We can also see, that university seminars, which put an eye on structural racism, have a short-term effect.

For university teaching in teacher training programs, it is, therefore, advisable to implement modules or seminars on how to teach foreign language learners and diversity awareness seminars that are also application-oriented and practice-oriented in order to (better) prepare students for teaching in multilingual and multicultural classes and to

encourage them to engage in critical self-reflection and diversity-sensitive lesson planning. Long-term anti-racism training can have an impact on deeply entrenched beliefs. Working on beliefs in higher education through the three-step process of building knowledge, applying it in practice, and engaging in critical self-reflection, as used in this study, may ensure that teachers can play a positive role in ESD.

Since we know, that both one's personal and social development and school experiences have an impact on beliefs, it is necessary to consider student's contexts when planning a seminar.

The aim of a next interventions study with control groups should consider the effect of university seminars with a larger cohort at different study locations, taking into account urbanity, migration history, religious affiliation, political attitudes, and gender. The connection between subject combinations, choice of school type, and beliefs towards the various dimensions of diversity should also be considered. Despite of this, university teachers' knowledge and beliefs should be included as a variable.

4 Conclusion

Similar to relevant studies, this small pilot study indicates that seminars that raise awareness of heterogeneity have an influence on the beliefs of prospective teachers, which might have an impact on the way teachers act in a postmigrant and inclusive school. To ensure sustainable education, teacher training in higher education needs to consider these six aspects:

1. Establish work on beliefs as an integral part of teacher training.
2. Work on beliefs using the three-step approach of knowledge, practice, and critical self-reflection.
3. Take into account the context-specific conditions of students and study locations to create tailor-made seminars.
4. Monitor the student body in order to be able to respond to changes.
5. Establish work on beliefs, especially on racism, as part of lifelong education and training.
6. Mandatory training for lecturers involved in teacher training.

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