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THEMENSCHWERPUNKT:

Unterricht in der Herkunftssprache

# Teaching Greek as a heritage language in Switzerland – Teachers’ perspectives and lived experiences of language and education

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**Abstract:** Switzerland has traditionally been a multilingual country with four national languages and has a plethora of regional dialects. It has also been home to many migrants who, as heritage speakers, enrich the heterogeneous linguistic landscape, yet rarely receive (sufficient) official or institutional recognition. This text investigates teachers’ lived experiences of language and education in a Greek school in Switzerland founded by parents on a voluntary basis to transmit Greek language and culture. It presents data from six in-depth teacher interviews and aims at a better understanding of educational practices and experiences of teachers who are often excluded from local educational institutions. It argues for a greater awareness and recognition of heritage languages, their teachers and learners as well as for a more inclusive and cooperative approach to multilingual education. This can be achieved by integrating heritage language education into mainstream schooling and thus providing legitimacy, a sense of belonging, and equity to all educational sphere actors.



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### **Griechisch als Herkunftssprache in der Schweiz unterrichten - Perspektiven von Lehrpersonen und ihre gelebten Erfahrungen mit Sprache und Bildung**

Die Schweiz ist traditionell ein mehrsprachiges Land mit vier Landessprachen und zahlreichen regionalen Dialekten. Weiterhin existieren viele Herkunftssprachen, die die heterogene Sprachlandschaft zusätzlich bereichern, jedoch selten (ausreichend) offizielle oder institutionelle Anerkennung erhalten. Dieser Beitrag untersucht die gelebten Erfahrungen von Lehrpersonen bzgl. Sprache und Bildung an einer griechischen Schule in der Schweiz, die von Eltern auf freiwilliger Basis gegründet wurde, um die griechische Sprache und Kultur zu vermitteln. Er präsentiert Daten aus sechs Interviews, die mit Lehrpersonen geführt wurden, und zielt auf ein besseres Verständnis der schulischen Handlungspraktiken und Erfahrungen der Akteurinnen und Akteure ab, die oft von lokalen Bildungseinrichtungen ausgeschlossen werden. Der Beitrag plädiert für ein größeres Bewusstsein und eine stärkere Anerkennung der Herkunftssprachen, Lehrpersonen und Lernenden sowie für einen inklusiveren und kooperativeren Ansatz für die mehrsprachige Bildung durch die Integration des herkunftssprachlichen Unterrichts in die Regelschule und damit für Legitimität, Zugehörigkeit und Gleichberechtigung aller im Bildungsbereich.

### **Η διδασκαλία της ελληνικής γλώσσας ως γλώσσας πολιτιστικής κληρονομιάς στην Ελβετία - Οι προοπτικές και οι εμπειρίες των εκπαιδευτικών σχετικά με τη γλώσσα και την εκπαίδευση**

Η Ελβετία είναι παραδοσιακά μια πολύγλωσση χώρα με τέσσερις εθνικές γλώσσες και πληθώρα τοπικών διαλέκτων. Έχει υπάρξει επίσης το σπίτι πολλών μεταναστών, οι οποίοι, ως ομιλητές της γλώσσας κληρονομιάς, εμπλουτίζουν το ετερογενές γλωσσικό τοπίο, αλλά σπάνια τυγχάνουν (επαρκούς) επίσημης ή θεσμικής αναγνώρισης. Το παρόν άρθρο διερευνά τα βιώματα των εκπαιδευτικών σχετικά με τη γλώσσα και την εκπαίδευση σε ένα ελληνικό σχολείο στην Ελβετία, το οποίο ιδρύθηκε από γονείς με σκοπό τη μετάδοση της ελληνικής γλώσσας και του ελληνικού πολιτισμού. Παρουσιάζει δεδομένα από έξι εις βάθος συνεντεύξεις εκπαιδευτικών και στοχεύει στην καλύτερη κατανόηση των εκπαιδευτικών πρακτικών και εμπειριών των εκπαιδευτικών, οι οποίοι συχνά αποκλείονται από τα τοπικά εκπαιδευτικά ιδρύματα. Υποστηρίζει τη μεγαλύτερη ευαισθητοποίηση και αναγνώριση των γλωσσών κληρονομιάς, των εκπαιδευτικών και των μαθητών τους και μια πιο συνεργατική προσέγγιση της πολυγλωσσικής εκπαίδευσης, με την ενσωμάτωση της εκπαίδευσης των γλωσσών κληρονομιάς στην κανονική σχολική εκπαίδευση και κατ' αυτό τον τρόπο την παροχή νομιμότητας, συμμετοχής και ισότητας σε όλους τους φορείς του εκπαιδευτικού χώρου.

**Keywords:** Heritage languages, heritage language teaching, Swiss education system, teacher perspectives, equity | Herkunftssprachen, Herkunftssprachlicher Unterricht, Schweizer Bildungssystem, Perspektiven der Lehrpersonen, Equity | Γλώσσες κληρονομιάς, τάξεις γλώσσας και πολιτισμού καταγωγής, ελβετικό εκπαιδευτικό σύστημα, προοπτικές των εκπαιδευτικών, ισότητα.

# 1 Introduction

Switzerland is an officially quadrilingual<sup>1</sup> country, with 66.1% German speakers, 22.8% French speakers, 8% Italian speakers, and 0.5% Romansh speakers (Federal Statistical Office [FSO] 2021a), who typically live in geographically separated cantons based on the local language. Thus, there are 22 officially monolingual cantons, three bilingual (French and German) ones, one trilingual (French, German, and Romansh) and one Italian-speaking one. The national languages are protected by the Languages Act, a federal law seeking to guarantee linguistic equality and mutual respect for the four languages and their speakers. Since 1970, the number of speakers of other languages has increased from 3.7% to 22.7% in 2019, therefore making Switzerland's linguistic landscape continuously more diverse and complex due to globalization and migration processes. In addition to English, the most common language out of the non-national language speaker group with 6.5% (FSO 2021a), many other (minority) heritage languages (HLs) exist, such as Portuguese or Polish. Those, as well as the *de facto* majority language *Swiss German* (used here as an umbrella term for the plethora of local varieties), are not protected by law or taken into consideration in official contexts. The diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds are further mirrored in Switzerland's classrooms, which are made up of 27.3% non-Swiss students (FSO 2021b), whose languages and cultures are often excluded from institutional settings. Hutterli, Coste, Elmiger, Eriksson, Lenz, Stotz, Wokusch, and Zappatore (2012) claim that especially in urban areas, schools are characterized by a student population with a migration background of between 30% and 100%. They deduce that approximately 70% of non-Swiss and 30% of students with a migration background use their HL as their primary language. According to Giudici and Bühlmann (2014: 6), this heterogeneity has become “normality” and politicians and educational policy makers are in favor of “idealistic recognition and the institutional support” (Giudici/Bühlmann 2014: 13 [translation, AB]).

Despite the (limited) number of agreements and policies on heritage language classes<sup>2</sup> that exist throughout Switzerland for primary and secondary education, this text advocates a better integration of these into public-school structures and professional and standardized institutionalization. Greater awareness and recognition thereof will ameliorate teaching and learning conditions and ultimately make HL education more broadly accessible and equitable. This is considered urgently necessary, given the results of recent Swiss education reports, which have continuously detected (unchanged) unfair and inequitable learning conditions for students with a migration and/or linguistically and culturally diverse background and have called for a rethinking on how to maximize those students' potential in

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<sup>1</sup> Although Romansh is counted as a national language, it is only an official language in the canton of Grisons and in federal administrative contexts with Romansh speakers.

<sup>2</sup> According to Reich (2016: 224), 36 languages are taught as HLs in Switzerland. The most common ones are Albanian, Croatian, Serbian, Turkish, Tamil, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese.

the Swiss education system (cf. SKBF<sup>3</sup> 2010; 2014; 2018). Thus, despite efforts toward an inclusive policy framework and financial/organizational support on a cantonal and national level, the objective of promoting students' HLs has to date not been achieved satisfactorily.

This paper argues that HL teachers' voices are a crucial element in solving this systemic issue, as they are rightfully regarded as 'agents of social change' (Bourn 2015), yet often excluded from (policy) decision-making processes and deprived of a favorable working environment. It thus attempts to amplify their voices by asking the following questions:

- 1) What are teachers' perspectives on HL classes in Switzerland?
- 2) What are their lived experiences of language and education as HL teachers?

The following section (2) will go into more detail about HL teaching in Switzerland. The study's methodology is discussed in section 3. Section 4 will then present the findings and conclude by discussing them in section 5.

## 2 The teaching of heritage languages in Switzerland

In increasingly 'super-diverse' societies (cf. Vertovec 2007), there are more and more HL speakers whose language biographies are often non-linear, complex, and constantly re-shaped due to ongoing globalization and migration processes. Polinsky (2018: 9) defines a HL speaker as "a simultaneous or sequential (successive) bilingual whose weaker language corresponds to the minority language of their society and whose stronger language is the dominant language of that society". Although this differentiation is important, especially in an educational context, this article expands on this definition by integrating the notion of linguistic repertoire. According to Blommaert (2008: 16), these speakers can be said to have a polyglot repertoire, which "is not tied to any form of 'national' space, and neither to a national, stable regime of language. It is tied to an individual's life and it follows the peculiar biographical trajectory of the speaker". Also, the notion of repertoire captures better the non-linguistic elements often associated with HLs, such as culture, experiences of migration, etc., which can impact speakers' identity, biography, and their attitudes toward their HL (cf. Becker, accepted; Valdés 2017). As Hutterli et al. (2012: 99), drawing on Cummins' interdependence hypothesis, argues, "for individuals to be able to develop themselves fully in [the cognitive and sociocultural] dimensions they must be able to develop their first language and culture". If there is a positive transfer among linguistic resources, individuals can "increase their chances of educational success and which, consequently, will have positive repercussions for society" (ibid.). This contrasts sharply with primarily

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<sup>3</sup> Schweizerische Koordinationsstelle für Bildungsforschung (Swiss Coordination Office for Educational Research).

economic arguments, sometimes also put forth by HL-speaking parents, that students' language learning should exclusively aim at improving (academic) linguistic competences in the school language of the new country context (cf. Hopf 2005).

Over the last decade, emerging studies, and an increase in scholarly interest in HL acquisition, migration, and education have not only contributed to a better (empirical) understanding of HLs, but also to greater recognition and a reassessment of HL speakers within society (cf. Becker-Mrotzek/Höfler/Woerfel 2021; Dirim/Mecheril 2018; Caprez-Krompák 2010; Carreira/Kagan 2017; for a critical response see Esser 2011). That is, while HLs were originally acknowledged as important competences for children to have when returning to their country of origin after their parents' employment had ended in the 'host' country, they are now more recognized as a legitimate part of children's plurilingual and pluricultural biographies (cf. Polinsky 2018). In fact, from a psychological viewpoint, they are seen as crucially important for children's well-being, identity development, and integration (cf. Carreira/Chik 2014). However, while research has made important advances regarding the understanding of bi-/multilingual education, academic language education, and students' achievements, a crucial literature gap remains regarding individual (minoritized) languages, teachers as transmitters of cultural and linguistic knowledge, and HL working/teaching conditions.

It is this study's aim to contribute to this literature gap by examining an under-researched HL context, to wit: Greek HL teachers' perspectives and lived experiences of language and education and their working/teaching conditions.

In Switzerland, according to Reich (2017), HL teaching and the associated educational and organizational structures are generally the responsibility of each migrant community. Yet, from a national/cantonal policy perspective, certain efforts have been made to acknowledge and address the increasing number of HL speakers in Swiss schools and the society at large. More than twenty years ago, the cantonal Ministers of Education assigned a group of experts to determine important languages to be learned by students during compulsory education. In their report, the General Language Concept (Schweizerische Konferenz der kantonalen Erziehungsdirektoren [EDK]<sup>4</sup> 1998), the experts call for the respect and promotion of students' HLs and their integration into the curricula. They acknowledge Switzerland's *multilingual* landscape and justify the importance of HL classes as follows:

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<sup>4</sup> EDK is the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education, responsible for the national coordination of education policy.

- HLs contribute to identity formation processes.
- HLs are not only perceived as inherently positive, but also as a burden, depending on the prestige and ‘market-value’ attributed to the languages within society. The institutionalization of HL classes can increase HL recognition and mutual language competencies among speakers of the local language and the HL.
- HLs can prove economically important for Switzerland, but only if their speakers reach a certain proficiency level. Specific academic language skills are therefore encouraged, especially at the secondary education level.
- Subsidizing HLs is linked to better professional qualifications and lower expenditures in the welfare sector (e.g., unemployment).

Based on these arguments, the expert group places five requirements on schools:

- 1) Integration of HL classes into regular curricula and HL teachers into the teaching body
- 2) Content coordination
- 3) Integrated learning among all language subjects and thereby valorizing HLs
- 4) Educational scaffolding/promotion measures in the local language
- 5) HL classes at primary and secondary level

Drawing on the General Language Concept and other sources, the EDK published the Strategy of Language Teaching, which was adopted by all cantons in 2004. This is considered a crucial success, given each canton’s autonomy in educational matters. In the strategy, the need to further promote children’s HLs was identified and several improvement measures were suggested:

- HLs are to be integrated into the classrooms through language awareness approaches using teaching material such as the CEFR language portfolio to showcase every student’s potential and linguistic resources.
- HLs are to be further promoted through HL classes and should take place at the children’s regular schools: “The cantons allow the HL classes in public schools and invite local schools to cooperate with those responsible for these classes” (EDK 2004: 4 [translation, AB]).

Depending on the HL, its promotion within the classroom can however be problematic. For instance, as Hutterli et al. (2012) point out, Albanian and Kurdish HL classes depend on local (Swiss) organizations, since they are financially not supported by the countries of origin, as is often the case with other HLs. In fact, according to Calderón, Fibbi, and Truong (2013), the budget has been cut for HL classes by many consular posts, thus impacting hundreds of students and teachers across Switzerland. Importantly, as Giudici and Bühlmann (2014) point out, students’ attendance often also depends on parents’ financial situation, since extra-curricular HL offers through associations, as is the case in the present

study, depend on tuition fees. Generally, these different conditions and dependencies render the coordination with and integration into public schools and their curricula more difficult. Again, depending on the language, certain objectives and materials can be imposed by the country of origin, which may be incompatible with local educational policies, practices, and values. This puts HL teachers in a difficult position, since they are legally obliged to act as transmitters of Switzerland's local and social knowledge to their students, as Hutterli et al. (2012) report, drawing on the Ordinance on the integration of foreigners. Smit (2005) argues that teachers are crucially important in the construction and transmission of local knowledge, which is based on their understanding of the policy framework. She raises concerns that the success of policy implementation heavily depends on teachers' interpretation and implementation thereof, despite their exclusion from the decision-making processes. In order to improve integration of HL teachers into the teaching body, Hutterli et al. (2012: 101–102) suggest the following:

The school management should, for instance, invite the HL teachers who teach in their establishment to participate in at least one staff meeting per semester, as well as in the school's continuing education courses in the area of language competence promotion. More opportunity for cooperation should also be encouraged between the teachers of mainstream classes and those of HL classes, particularly for assessment of students' level of learning, use of the European Language Portfolio (ELP), intercultural and multilingual learning projects, and cooperation with the parents.

Both the recognition of HL teachers and the cooperation among those and 'teachers of mainstream classes' are needed to overcome institutional barriers to integrate HLs into regular classes. They are also needed to alleviate the general challenging working conditions which HL teachers face (compared to their public-school colleagues), as summarized by Mehlhorn (2020: 26 [translation, AB]):

- Low number of lessons
- Inter-grade learning groups
- Classes in off-peak hours in the afternoon or on weekends
- Longer commutes
- Low salary for teachers
- High fluctuation of learners

The first study focusing on HL teachers in Switzerland, their qualifications, and working conditions in particular was conducted by Calderón, Fibbi, and Truong in 2013. In an intercantonal survey-based study with 231 participants, they found that on average HL teachers have comparable qualifications to their colleagues at Swiss public schools. Importantly, there is a difference between those HL teachers employed by consular posts or embassies and those by private associations sponsored by parents, for instance. While the former tend to have higher degrees as well as more stable, full-time positions with higher salaries, the

opposite is true for the latter. One of the biggest issues the authors determined was the lacking integration of HL teachers into the public-school infrastructure. Although they used the same premises (with certain restrictions), there was rarely any interaction or collaboration. As Calderón, Fibbi, and Truong (2013: 9 [translation, AB]) put it, arguing for the amelioration of the situation for HL teachers:

Improvements are certainly needed here if the HL schools and their teachers are to be freed from their status as tolerated but unwelcome guests in public schools, a status that stands in clear contrast to the educational policy strategy of promoting multilingualism.

They conclude that HL classes are indispensable for the promotion of HLs in Switzerland, yet they found them to have been neglected on a societal, educational, and financial basis. More institutionalized collaboration and support is needed to maximize the actors' potentials and utilize existing resources for the benefit of the greater society.

Öndül (2010), in addition to promoting HL classes for HL-speaking students' linguistic (self-) awareness, biliteracy, and bicultural identity, considers a focus on HL teachers essential, especially regarding their position within the public-school structures. Only if HL teachers can adequately collaborate with other teachers and if both HL and 'regular' curricula and teaching objectives match and complement each other, can students benefit optimally. She recommends five ways of how to increase cooperation between HL and 'regular' teachers and the former's integration into public school teaching:

- 1) Parallel teaching (in different rooms) with common contents
- 2) Shared teaching time on specific topics
- 3) Team-teaching
- 4) Common general evaluation
- 5) Individual support for students in need

Öndül (2010) suggests that both HL and 'regular' teachers' willingness to cooperate and pedagogical and logistical adaptations are needed for a better institutional but also attitudinal integration of HL classes and in particular teachers and students. She concludes that institutional support is key, since HL promotion would otherwise entirely depend on students' families to decide whether they consider HL learning necessary or beneficial and, if they do, whether they can even afford extracurricular HL classes.

Zingg (2019), in a more recent pilot project entitled "More language(s) for everyone", which focuses on team-teaching and exchange among HL and 'regular' teachers, found that the presence of two or multiple teachers, each representing different languages and cultures, increases sensitivity to linguistic and cultural diversity. By advocating teaching strategies based on the concept of plurilingualism and interdisciplinarity, (still) existing



(artificial) barriers among HLs, foreign languages, school languages, dialects, and academic subjects can be reduced. Institutionalizing and attributing legitimacy to students' HLs through common reflective and awareness practices can ultimately lead to student and HL teacher empowerment.

### 3 Methodology

This study is situated at the intersection of qualitative applied linguistics and education research. It attempts to fill a gap in the literature by elucidating one of the main actors' perspectives on and experiences of language and education practices in HL settings. In order to do so, it adopts a phenomenological research design and zooms in on individuals' personal and professional lived experiences of HLs and their teaching through in-depth interviews. Drawing on Kvale (2007: 1), this study advocates that “the research interview is an interview where knowledge is constructed in the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee.” Through informed questions, answers, examples, and perspectives by those directly impacted by policies and practices of HL teaching, researchers can better understand the lifeworlds (cf. Husserl 1970) of the participants and attempt to ameliorate those. The study's data consist of six in-depth interviews conducted with in-service Greek HL teachers in a German-speaking canton in Switzerland.<sup>5</sup> The teachers (1 male and 5 female) were all Greek nationals, had lived in Switzerland for several years, spoke Greek as their first language and had advanced language skills in English and German. They were employed as HL teachers in a Greek school for children from kindergarten to secondary education, founded by an association of parents with the mission to transmit the Greek culture and language. The school and the teachers' salaries are funded through tuition fees paid by the parents. Infrastructure and transportation are subsidized by the canton.

The semi-structured interviews contained 14 questions and covered biographic aspects of becoming and being a HL teacher, teacher identity, pedagogical objectives and challenges, policies, the status of HL classes within the greater society, and general working conditions. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and two hours and were conducted online in English or German via *MS Teams*, *Zoom*, *Skype* or the cellphone, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Participation was voluntary and all names have been changed to guarantee participants' anonymity. The interviews were transcribed verbatim by the author based on Lamnek and Krell's (2016) transcription conventions. The data were analyzed inductively using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith/Flowers/Larkin 2009). For

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<sup>5</sup> I would like to thank the six teachers and especially one of our university students who initiated contact with her colleagues for me to talk to and learn from them. Ευχαριστώ πάρα πολύ!

detailed IPA, the transcripts were read at least three times and coded using MaxQDA. Out of the codes, the following three overarching themes emerged:

- 1) Reasons, motivation, and ways of being a HL teacher
- 2) Working conditions and infrastructure
- 3) Languages, cultures, and identities

Due to lack of space, only the findings retrieved on the first and second themes will be presented in this article.

## 4 Findings

### 4.1 Reasons, motivation, and ways of being a HL teacher

Generally, all participants were happy in their position as Greek HL teachers, with Maria describing it as “exciting, intriguing, challenging, AMAZING”. Alexandra also reported to “love it” and to be “really, really happy with what I’m doing” and Iris said to “really like it a lot. I feel like home.” This very positive attitude toward their profession simultaneously demonstrates their commitment to Greek HL classes. Chloe, for instance, sees it as “a big responsibility to transmit this knowledge and...to help them [the students] to get familiar with the history, the culture, and everything”. Thus, it is not only about teaching the HL, but about accompanying and enabling students to detect parts of their linguistic and cultural heritage and identities. As Maria put it succinctly:

It is not only to teach phenomena of grammar, syntax, vocabulary, blah, blah. My purpose, teaching purpose, is to make them LOVE the language, the culture behind the language, DISCOVER their identity, be PROUD of it, accept it, I mean, some of them do NOT accept it.

This excerpt also shows how passionate Maria is about being a HL teacher and how much these classes are linked to the feeling of pride and identifying with the language and culture, instead of merely acquiring it in a school context. In fact, Maria ensures that her students understand the meaning behind the HL, to wit: that it “is not only to go swimming and visit as a tourist but it’s in them ... this makes them rich and they should know about this and...utilize it”. The shared understanding among the participants seems to be that Greek in this context is not only a communicative means but a precious identity marker connecting the students and their families, the students among themselves, and to the teachers. As Alexandra reported, “it’s a really good feeling” when students can express themselves and appropriate Greek as their language. Achieving this is an important reason for her to be a HL teacher. Similarly, Iris’s main goal is “to make children feel that Greek is not only the language of their parents, that it’s also THEIR language”. Chloe, for instance, found it difficult to even capture in words what her motives for being a HL teacher were and what

she taught her students in class: "...we in the classroom, we transmit something bigger than that [grammar rules]. Not only the culture but also the Greek attitude...more personality". Some participants felt that their HL classes were the only point of contact with Greek language and culture, so that they had to maximize the children's exposure to *authentic* Greek practices, values, and habits for them to internalize and live them. This is not always well-received by all students since, as Maria reported, "some of them are feeling a bit embarrassed that they are Greeks ... and they were pushed by their grandparents to learn the language not to lose it completely". Therefore, the enthusiasm expressed by the participating teachers is not always mirrored by all students. In addition to the sometimes-lacking student motivation, teaching conditions pose a great challenge for some teachers. According to Jonas, for instance: "I created my own curriculum in the class ... rituals and songs and activities ... I mainly improvised ... transposed things from their Swiss kindergarten and adopted it to the HL kindergarten". Similarly, Maria stated that she also adapted several topics covered in the Swiss curriculum to her teaching so that parallels between the two schools exist. However, she also said that at the beginning "There was no curriculum, there was nothing", indicating that no common HL curriculum existed and adapting classes to different age groups, backgrounds, and prior knowledge was up to the individual teacher. Another problem were the outdated teaching materials generated by the Greek Ministry of Education for all schools abroad, which were oblivious to the students' specific linguistic and cultural contexts. Yet, other responses show that the situation has improved in the meantime and different curricula and textbooks now exist to guide (particularly new) teachers. Chloe, for instance, reported using specific books on Greek history and culture with her students, apart from the official teaching material, to portray an authentic picture of Greek life, but also said that this requires much additional preparation time. Problematically, textbooks typically do not take into consideration the heterogeneity of students present in the HL classes. As Alexandra exemplified, "I was teaching the Greek ABC and then I had a kid who was 10 years old and had already attended four years the Greek school". The different competency levels (A1–B1) have to be addressed by teachers individually, which, as they all agreed, was "really, really difficult" (Iris), with one three-hour-class per week. Further, as Maria, for instance, lamented, students are not evaluated for their learning progress, which then automatically "loses significance ... it should be recognized as part of their formal education". She went on to say that

... there are a lot of [public school] teachers who don't really ... care ... the younger they [the children] are, the less interested are their teachers ... it's a lot of work for a kid of [primary school] to go to school on a 6<sup>th</sup> day, on a Saturday instead of sleeping at home and playing. I didn't see any recognition from part of their teachers to say well done, good for you ... I didn't have any sort of this feedback.

On the other hand, she is also cautious about a formal evaluation from her part, since they only meet once a week during the school year for a very limited time and she would prefer

also considering the children's evaluations from the Swiss school. Chloe reported writing evaluations for her students, which are collected as a portfolio, and Jonas witnessed a mentality change in acknowledging HL classes as actual educational experiences, which are captured in reports written by the teachers.

## 4.2 Working conditions and infrastructure

Although all participating HL teachers were happy and enthusiastic about their jobs, they also expressed concerns regarding their working conditions. On a formal basis, all teachers advocated that HL classes should only be taught by qualified and certified teachers, as is the case for Swiss public schools. Their experience showed that qualifications sometimes tended to be neglected and the only employment criterion was the ('native-like') knowledge of the HL. As Maria put it sharply, for instance, she knows of HL classes where the teachers "are just mothers who just speak the language. This really lowers the quality of a lesson. No offense to the mothers". For Chloe, this is also a very sensitive issue she wishes to improve:

It's irresponsible for me because you know ... when you want to get better in your health, you go to the specialist. When you want to eat great food, you go to a good restaurant, when you have electrical problems in your house, you call the expert. It's the same thing. It doesn't mean because you speak the language that you can teach it in the way a teacher who studied for four years ... this is unfair ... it's not responsible for the teachers also and the parents and the community, for everyone.

At the same time, Chloe was relieved to start her teaching job at the Greek school fairly easily, without long recruitment and diploma recognition processes, because she "didn't know what is happening here with people who are immigrants". Alexandra also stated that she "was really happy that in a few months I found a job and started teaching". Staying in Switzerland would have otherwise been much more complicated, if not impossible.

That said, for the participating Greek school, all teachers had conducted teacher training and/or obtained diploma(s) and experience (often in Greece) prior to their recruitment although, not necessarily for the same age groups. HL teaching trainings are offered by the canton for all locally taught HLs and by an institution in Thessaloniki specifically for teaching Greek as a foreign language. While the latter is to be paid by the teachers themselves, the former is free of charge and greatly appreciated by all interviewed teachers.

In addition to the lacking recognition of the HL teaching profession attributed to the lack of stricter qualification requirements, Maria reported that "You cannot depend on this job ... it's nothing for Swiss standards, it's nothing at all". Maria here implies that the salary is very low or "symbolic", as she put it, so that they necessarily have to find work somewhere else, especially if they have a family. Also, they are not paid during school breaks and often have additional expenditures regarding extra teaching materials they purchase in

Greece. For Alexandra, for instance, “the salary ... is probably the reason I am thinking in the future to try to teach in the Swiss public schools” and Iris and Jonas compare their unfavorable situation to that of Swiss public-school teachers who, as they argue, have much better working conditions. Jonas views his commitment as “doing a favor ... [with] the double or triple times of hours that you work ... than what you are paid for ... it’s a bit volunteer work”. As Iris added, “Normally we’re not paid for our preparation. We’re only paid for these three hours that we’re at school”.

Although these are serious concerns, almost all of the six teachers agreed that the biggest issue was that of not having their own classrooms. They entirely depend on Swiss public schools to provide their premises for HL classes. This situation is further complicated when they receive more inscriptions than they can accommodate due to insufficient infrastructure. To Maria, this situation is irritating since she believes that these decisions are made non-transparently and sometimes even arbitrarily, and the HL teachers are excluded from these decision-making processes. According to Iris and Jonas, the inadequate infrastructure is especially problematic for kindergarten classes. As Iris explained: “they offered classes that they don’t use a lot or they are old or the chemistry laboratory”. Jonas’s lived experiences demonstrate this further:

I have to take every Saturday away the desks and the chairs and everything, to have the kids always on the floor, for example, in the winter [it’s] cold, then I have to find a carpet to bring it there to put it down and take it away always. Always the games, the toys ... if I came to a class where I know there are my scissors, there are my papers ... everything is just ready would make it a perfect lesson.

To Chloe, this also has an impact on how she feels and acts as a teacher and her well-being. She reported to be stressed about teaching in a classroom in which she feels unwanted:

... we have to be really, really careful about everything ... when I leave the classroom, I clean everything because ... I don’t want to leave traces like someone was in my classroom ... I don’t want to make a mess...that adds stress sometimes ... It would be better for the children to have a place where they can put on the walls some of their paintings, of their writings, it’s more personalized ...

Nevertheless, they are all very grateful for being allowed to use the public schools’ infrastructure for their classes, especially since they know of HL colleagues who teach in containers. Many teachers further suggested increasing awareness of the HL classes, their own and their students’ work, and improving communication among the different stakeholders, namely the cantonal HL coordinators, school leaders, teachers, parents, and students, as a first step toward changing the status quo.

## 5 Discussion

Although more than twenty years have passed since the need for a better HL promotion was formally recognized in Switzerland and other studies published almost a decade ago detected unsatisfactory implementation of those policies, this study's findings also indicate that further improvements are still needed. Generally, the interviewed teachers were happy to be part of the Greek community in Switzerland, it felt like "home" to them, which simultaneously increased their commitment to the school, students, and parents. Most of the participants considered it their responsibility to transmit important linguistic and cultural knowledge about Greece, since for some students, the Greek school was the only point of contact. For many teachers, it was in fact much more than a teaching job; they saw themselves actively constructing students' identities, helping them uncover parts of themselves, and connecting them to a common cultural and linguistic heritage, as described by Carreira and Chik (2014). As Carreira and Kagan (2017: 155) argue,

Beyond language, HL learners have aspirational and relational needs that stem from their bicultural and bilingual experience and set them apart from L2 learners ... some of the reasons why [adolescent/adult learners] study their HL are to find identity, communicate with family members ... and explore their cultural roots.

Supporting students in their appropriation process resulted in the feeling of pride for teachers and not only gave them a purpose for their work, but also confirmed their commitment. That said, the intermediary position teachers take on between parents and children can be challenging. That is, students are typically enrolled because parents (or grandparents) wish to pass on linguistic and cultural heritage, which creates complex positioning and identity questions for students with a migration background (cf. Lengyel/Neumann 2017; Rumbaut 2005). Some of them, as the data showed, feel rather embarrassed and rather out of place in a Greek HL environment. The participants rightfully criticized the lacking recognition from their public-school colleagues, which could increase students' interest and pride in learning their HL. Here, team-teaching or common activities could positively impact the recognition of HL and their speakers in institutional settings, as suggested by Öndül (2010) and Zingg (2019).

Also, not only the motivation but also the students' prior knowledge and linguistic skills differ greatly, which renders teaching more difficult, especially given the fact that teachers are typically not paid for class preparation. It should go without saying that it is virtually impossible to teach a class, particularly with such a high heterogeneity, without preparing objectives and materials beforehand. More research on teaching materials and textbooks on HLs is therefore needed, which takes into consideration the exceptional teaching conditions, and which can facilitate addressing differing linguistic levels through scaffolding measures and pedagogical adaptations (cf. Carreira/Hitchins Chik 2018; Polinsky 2018; Schader 2016).

These challenging conditions on a pedagogical level are exacerbated by non-standardized and unsystematic qualification requirements for teachers, for which the many teachers who do possess the same or similar teaching diplomas and higher education degrees as public school teachers, feel devalued. At the same time, the complex immigration, academic recognition, and employment regulations in Switzerland often force teachers, particularly immigrants, to accept positions with lower qualifications than what they have already obtained in their country of origin. As Alexandra and Cora, for instance, mentioned, the recognition process is one of the major obstacles for them to transfer to Swiss public schools. However, they also said to be willing to undergo the highly bureaucratic and expensive recognition process of their Greek diplomas, along with studying for near-native proficiency in German, because of the substantial salary difference in the HL and public schools. The “symbolic” salary, as Maria called it, is indeed problematic, but unlikely to change if it remains dependent on tuition fees paid by parents as part of a voluntary association and if qualification requirements are not elevated and standardized. Further, as pointed out by Mehlhorn (2017), HL teachers will remain disadvantaged if they are not trained to teach a second subject in addition to the HL. A viable solution would be the HL teachers’ integration into the public-school structures and further (in-service) training, given that the majority of them have comparable qualifications and the promotion of HLs is formally an important part of the public-school agenda.

Finally, in addition to HL teachers’ integration into public-school structures on a systemic, categorical level, this contribution also advocates their *physical* integration into the public-school premises to facilitate and foster exchange and cooperation among all teachers. This was not only expressed as a strong desire, but as the data showed, the lack of integration created the feeling of not being wanted, of not belonging in some teachers, which impacted their lived experiences of language and education very negatively.

That said, the process of fully integrating HLs, speakers, and teachers and providing adequate institutional space and recognition to them must not be done uncritically. It is not just a matter of ‘curricularizing’ HLs, but also about capturing the associated cultures, ideologies, migration experiences, literacies, and identities (cf. Valdés 2017). By doing so, “it is assumed that ‘language’ can be ‘taught’ and ‘learned’ in classroom settings, its ‘study’ awarded units of credit, and its ‘learning’ generally assessed by paper and pencil examinations” (ibid.: 89). As the data suggest, however, HL classes are about living the language, about learning self-expression, and about creating a sense of belonging –objectives and values difficult to grasp, let alone assess, in formal, institutional classroom settings.

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