It's all in the Mix: Exploring Predictors of Teachers' Multicultural Beliefs towards Teaching Refugee Students

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Abstract

Context: Despite the implementation of strategies aimed at equipping educators with cultural and linguistic responsiveness, as well as related competencies, the education sector continues to face significant challenges in addressing the needs of diverse learners. This is largely due to a mismatch between the demands of teaching students from diverse backgrounds and the training currently available to teachers. Furthermore, researchers have consistently highlighted the critical role of teachers' beliefs as a key component of their pedagogical professionalism and their ability to implement diversity-sensitive teaching. This study seeks to investigate the predictive role of teachers' characteristics (e.g., gender, perceptions of training), contact experiences, and classroom settings (such as special classes for refugees or mainstream classes) on their multicultural beliefs.
Methods: This study examined the influence of personal and contextual factors on teachers' multicultural beliefs, using data from the *Refugees in the German Educational System (ReGES)* study. Specifically, we analysed data from Refugee Cohort 2, collected in 2018, which included 320 secondary school teachers (68% female) instructing refugee students aged 14 to 16 years. Adopting a quantitative approach, the research utilised longitudinal and multi-informant data to explore the predictive role of these factors on teachers' multicultural perspectives.
Results: The findings reveal significant variations in teachers' perceptions of their training for integrating refugee students and their levels of multicultural beliefs across different classroom settings. Regression analyses indicate that gender and classroom setting are predictive factors for teachers' multicultural beliefs. Contrary to expectations, however, teachers' perceptions of in-service training and direct experiences with refugees explained only a small variance in their multicultural beliefs.
Conclusion: The results highlight the importance of considering contextual factors in understanding and fostering multicultural perspectives among educators working with refugee students. Moreover, the findings emphasise the multifaceted nature of teachers' multicultural beliefs and the need for further, more in-depth research into the formation of these beliefs and the factors that shape them. To address these findings, education systems should prioritise the implementation of tailored training programmes that equip educators to navigate the complexities of diverse classroom settings and effectively support the integration and success of refugee students though inclusive teaching practices.

Keywords: teachers' multicultural beliefs; teacher characteristics; contact experiences; classroom setting; refugee students

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Points of Interest

This study examines how teachers' beliefs about multiculturalism are shaped by various factors when working with refugee students in German schools. Despite efforts to enhance cultural awareness in education, significant challenges persist due to a gap between teacher training and the needs of diverse student groups. The research focused on 320 secondary school teachers who work with refugee students and found that teachers' views on multiculturalism varied depending on their classroom settings. Notably, teachers' gender and the type of classroom they taught in emerged as the primary factors influencing their multicultural beliefs. Surprisingly, training courses and direct experiences with refugees had only a limited impact on these beliefs. The study underscores the need for more research to better understand how these beliefs develop and what shapes them. Such insights could inform the design of more effective teacher training programmes and support strategies for educating refugee students.

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, there has been a significant rise in forced displacement driven by the escalating impacts of climate change, persecution, conflict, and violence (UNHCR, 2022a). According to the Global Trends Report 2024 published by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2024), children under the age of 18 make up 40% of all forcibly displaced people. This equates to approximately 43.3 million are children and youth who have been forced to flee their homes or places of habitual residence and are in need of protection (UNHCR, 2024).

Since 2012, the UNHCR has advocated for the structural inclusion of refugee students in host countries national education system, as schools are often among the first and most influential services that young refugees encounter upon arriving in their country of settlement (Bešic et al., 2020). A report by UNHCR (2023a) on refugee education reveals that, as of 2016, more than half of school-age refugees were not attending school. This is particularly alarming given that the sustainable inclusion of refugee children has been the subject of several major international policies (UNESCO, 1990; United Nations, 2006) and remains a critical focus of global development agendas, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which emphasise equitable access to quality education for all children, including those in vulnerable situations (United Nations, 2015). Moreover, while a significant number of refugee students have access to schooling, many countries continue to physically separate these students from mainstream education based on their language proficiency (Cooc & Kim, 2023). In some cases, refugee students are geographically segregated from the mainstream community (e.g., Burner & Carlsen, 2022, for Norway; Morrice & Salem, 2023, for Jordan). In other cases, refugee students attend mainstream classroom instruction but are withdrawn from mainstream education for several hours per week to receive separate support (e.g., Karsli-Calamak & Kilinc, 2021 for Turkey; Rodriguez-Izquierdo et al., 2020 for Spain). This approach of parallel schooling not only contradicts the principle of inclusion as a right—which asserts that all children, regardless of their diverse needs, should have the opportunity to learn together (United Nations, 2006)—but also has been widely criticised by linguists and education researchers (e.g., Cooc & Kim, 2023; Hedman & Fisher, 2025). Critics often highlight the challenges of achieving inclusive education, particularly the gap between the ideal of providing high-quality education for diverse learners and the preparedness of teachers to meet their needs effectively (Dotzel et al., 2021).

Empirical studies have consistently demonstrated the predictive role of teachers' epistemological beliefs, as reflected in their attitudes towards cultural diversity, in shaping their willingness and actual behaviour to adapt their teaching to a culturally diverse student body (e.g., Becker et al., 2023; Civitillo et al., 2019; Hachfeld et al., 2015). Additionally, research has underscored the importance of teachers' training and experience in linguistically diverse classrooms in shaping

their beliefs about linguistic and cultural heterogeneity in schools (e.g., Civitillo et al., 2018; Schroedler & Fischer, 2020).

While these empirical studies offer valuable insights into the factors influencing teachers' willingness and behaviour in multilingual classrooms, the evidence remains limited, particularly regarding the teaching of teaching refugee students. Will and Homuth (2020) emphasise the need for quantitative analyses to better understand the teaching of refugee students within the German educational system. Although previous studies using data from Germany have explored various aspects teachers' multicultural beliefs (e.g., Hachfeld et al., 2015; Schotte et al., 2022), no research has investigated the predictive role of structural factors, such as the classroom setting in which the teacher works. This gap is particularly relevant to intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1954), which highlights how the context of interactions—such as the diversity in the classroom—can shape the quality of relationships between social groups.

Building on the considerations outlined above, this study investigates the predictive role of individual and contextual factors on teachers' beliefs about teaching in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms. The analysis is based on data from the large-scale *Refugees in the German Educational System (ReGES)* study, which examines the conditions necessary for the successful integration of refugees into the German education system. Recognising the critical influence of structural school and classroom settings on teachers' beliefs (Kiel et al., 2017), this research extends previous studies by addressing both pluralistic and non-pluralistic beliefs, while also by exploring differences among educators teaching in varied classroom environments.

The next section provides an overview of the study's context, focusing on Germany's education system, its approach to educating newly arrived learners, and the structural and institutional mechanisms of discrimination embedded within it. This is followed by a discussion of teachers' multicultural beliefs and the individual and contextual factors that influence them. The theoretical section concludes with the introduction of a model that guides the direction and argumentation for the data analyses.

2. Research Context

2.1 Structural Factors Contributing to the Disadvantaging of Refugee Students

Reports of high numbers of refugee students being out of school underscores the pervasive and long-standing disadvantages they face in host countries worldwide, leaving them at significant risk of poor educational and employment outcomes (Ziaian et al., 2018). These educational challenges are further compounded by the emotional burdens associated with disrupted schooling and separation from their home country and community, which often result in a profound loss of connection and belonging (UNHCR, 2023b).

Experiences of disadvantaging are shaped by a range of individual factors (e.g., gender, social and cultural capital, trauma, mental health challenges, and language barriers) and structural factors (e.g., discriminatory policies and practices, segregation, and parallel schooling), as well as the complex ways in which these factors intersect (Miller et al., 2024; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). Recently, researchers have increasingly focused on understanding the mechanisms of marginalisation or exclusion in education, with an emphasis on removing barriers to equitable education for all students (Miller et al., 2024). Building on this research, Li and Qin (2024) identified four key factors contributing to the multiple disadvantages refugees face upon arrival in the host countries: (a) deficit views from schools and society, (b) linguistic and cultural disconnections between home and school, (c) unequal access to resources, and (d) exposure to subtractive educational practice. Li and Quin (2024) particularly highlight the challenges young refugees encounter due to deficit perspectives, which frame student characteristics as problematic rather than addressing systemic issues within the education system (Li & Qin, 2024). These challenges are further compounded by insufficient school resources and educational practices that undermine learners' language, culture, and academic welfare in favour of assimilation (Li & Qin,

2024). This aligns with Arar (2021), who argues that the experiences and actions of refugees are profoundly shaped by the challenges they face upon arrival in a new host country. Arar further suggests that "education is a reflection of society" (Arar 2021, p. 2), indicating that the educational services provided to newly arrived individuals are deeply influenced by the prevailing societal orientations and values of the host country.

Previous empirical findings suggest that stakeholders in education continue to uphold deficit-oriented beliefs, which place blame on students for the challenges they face, rather than addressing the structural and institutional constraints that create these obstacles (e.g., Akin-Sabuncu & Kasapoglu, 2023; Ladson-Billings, 2021). Furthermore, several studies have highlighted the presence of assimilation mechanisms in educational settings, which assume that newly arrived learners must conform to the norms and values of the dominant student population (e.g., Becker et al., 2023; Ringrose et al., 2023). As a result of these assimilative tendencies, educational systems worldwide have adopted coercive segregation policies that legitimise practices of 'linguistic isolation' (Valdés, 2001) under the guise of concern for students' welfare (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019; OECD, 2021). The placement of newly arrived students in segregated settings for language learning and cultural assimilation is often justified as being essential for their future integration into society (Ringrose et al., 2023). This is evident in Germany, where, despite variations in regulations across federal states, top-level policies permit learners of the language of instruction to be either placed in mainstream settings for all lessons or enrolled in separate classes for some or all lessons (Kultusministerkonferenz, 2016). Most of these separate lessons are primarily focused on teaching the language of instruction as a second language (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019). Consequently, such practices reflect political strategies aimed at assimilation, rooted in deeply entrenched societal ideals and collective perceptions of citizenship and identity within the dominant group (Lundberg, 2020).

2.2 Germany's Approach to Educating Refugee Students

Since 2015, Germany's political agenda has embraced a welcoming policy, making it the only Western industrialised nation among the top ten refugee-hosting countries (Arar, 2021). According to the Global Trends Report published by the UNHCR (2022b), Germany hosted 2.1 million refugees by the end of 2022, accounting for 6% of all refugees worldwide. The population in need of assistance and protection is notably young. As reported by Statista (2025), 18.2% of this population consisted of school-age children and youth under the age of 18 in 2025. The influx of school-aged children and adolescents into Germany, combined with the obligation to ensure the right to education for asylum seekers under international and European law, has prompted calls for the development of high-quality educational programmes for these individuals (Spanner & Maué, 2022).

As a positive outcome of these efforts, the integration of young refugees into German educational institutions has been largely successful, with 95% of individuals aged 10 to 17 attending formal schooling (De Paiva Lareiro, 2019). Since responsibility for education lies with the federal state and is not subject to centralised control, educational provisions for refugee children, including the incorporation of teacher training on topics such as multilingualism and linguistic heterogeneity, vary significantly across states (Korntheuer & Damm, 2020). A closer look at schools reveals considerable variation in regulations regarding compulsory schooling for refugee students, which is often cited as the primary determinant of their access to education (Korntheuer & Damm, 2020). For instance, only three federal states (e.g., Hamburg) require that students be admitted to compulsory schools immediately upon their arrival in Germany (Vogel & Stock, 2017). In contrast, other states have implemented compulsory education for refugees only after a period of three to six months following their arrival (e.g., Bavaria) or once refugees have moved from a temporary reception centre to a municipality (e.g., North Rhine-Westphalia [NRW], Rhineland-Palatinate [RP] and Saxony) (Vogel & Stock, 2017).

Although the organisational models employed by educational institutions across different states may vary, students are typically placed in segregated classrooms before being granted access to mainstream classrooms upon entering school (Vogel & Stock, 2017). These classrooms are referred to by different names depending on the state, including German *language support classes* in Bavaria, *International preparatory classes* in Hamburg, *Preparatory classes* in NRW and Saxony, and *Language preparation courses* in RP (Massumi et al., 2015). The approaches to educating refugee students differ in the extent to which learners are segregated. As outlined by Massumi et al. (2015), segregated language support measures implemented in German schools can be placed on a continuum ranging from the *integrative model*, which involves participation in mainstream classrooms with supplementary language support, to parallel classrooms, which (temporarily) exclude students from interaction with their peers in mainstream classrooms.

In summary, although Germany offers a variety of support measures, it is evident that young refugees are subjected to an ideological stance that frames German language deficits as the primary cause of educational disadvantage, leading to compensatory measures that prioritise second language learning (Becker et al., 2023). Furthermore, for organisational reasons, refugee students in Germany are often placed into separate classes and groups, a practice that contradicts the principles of non-discrimination and educational equality (Korntheuer & Damm, 2020). Finally, access to compulsory schooling is delayed for learners residing in municipal shelters or for those who have not yet lodged a formal asylum application, resulting in a significant number of children being deprived of access to education (Vogel & Stock, 2017).

2.3 Teachers' Beliefs as Drivers of Educational Practices in Multicultural Settings

In educational research, the term "beliefs" typically refers to attitudes, views, opinions, and ideologies that shape educators' perceptions and decision-making processes, which are closely linked to their teaching practices (Hachfeld et al., 2011; Yu et al., 2022). However, due to the ambiguous conceptual nature of this construct and its interchangeable use with other related terms, we draw on Pajares (1992), who defines "beliefs" as deeply personal mental constructs that integrate cognitive, affective, and behavioural components, thereby shaping an individual's thoughts and actions. Teacher beliefs are composed of both specific semantic representations (individual propositions about what is true or false) and broader evaluations organized into clusters known as attitudes, which guide behaviour and decision-making (Kurdi et al., 2019). Beliefs are typically shaped by a range of factors, including personal experiences, professional development, and interactions with colleagues and students (e.g., Abaciouglu et al., 2022; Glock et al., 2019).

In response to the growing cultural and linguistic diversity in schools, recent empirical studies have increasingly focused on teachers' beliefs regarding multiculturalism (e.g., Abaciouglu et al., 2022; Hachfeld et al., 2015; Knudsen et al., 2021). This focus is grounded in well-established frameworks within social-psychology, particularly Allport's (1954) intergroup contact theory, which posits that interactions between members of different social groups can reduce prejudice and foster improved intergroup relations. Within this context, teachers' beliefs about multicultural education have been examined through three ideological frameworks for understanding cultural diversity and intergroup processes: multicultural, egalitarian, and assimilationist beliefs (Hachfeld et al., 2015; Whitley & Webster, 2019).

According to Hachfeld et al. (2011; 2015), multicultural beliefs embrace students' cultural differences and view cultural diversity as a valuable resource in their teaching. This belief system recognises and respects the presence of all diverse groups in an organisation or society, acknowledges and values their socio-cultural differences, and encourages their continued contribution within an inclusive cultural context that empowers all members of the organisation or society (Hachfeld et al., 2015). Literature suggests that multicultural beliefs are associated with more positive attitudes and reduced bias between groups, which is likely due to meaningful engagement and positive contact with members of other groups (e.g., Schwarzenthal et al., 2018).

Scholars have also pointed to benefits of multicultural climates for social identification of their ethnic in-group which can protect them against experiences of devaluation and identity threats (e.g., Phalet & Baysu, 2020). Egalitarian beliefs, in contrast, focus on emphasising the commonalities shared by all students in a classroom. Socio-psychological literature research suggests that emphasising these similarities can help reduce intergroup bias and foster positive relationships between groups (Schwarzenthal et al., 2020). Lastly, assimilation beliefs regard the values and behaviours of students from ethnic minority groups as obstacles and expect them to adapt to those of the majority group.

Teachers who hold multicultural beliefs are aware of the cultural and linguistic diversities present in the classroom and are willing to incorporate these into their pedagogical practices (Schotte et al., 2022). Educators with egalitarian beliefs tend to downplay the distinctions between members of various minority and majority groups (Schotte et al., 2022). This can occur either by perceiving similarities among group members or by overlooking differences between groups (Whitley & Webster, 2019). Finally, teachers with strong assimilationist beliefs advocate for the integration of students from minority groups into the broader societal mainstream (Schotte et al. 2022).

2.3.1 Personal Factors Shaping Teachers' Multicultural Beliefs

Previous studies have identified several teacher-level variables as potential predictors of teachers' multicultural beliefs. Regarding gender, Civitillo et al. (2018) note that its impact on teachers' multicultural beliefs remains unclear. However, some empirical evidence suggests that female teachers tend to hold more positive multicultural beliefs (Kesici, 2008; Molina et al., 2022). Another significant factor is in-service teacher training. According to Cramer (2012), participation in teacher training or courses designed to address the needs of a multicultural student body can support the development of teachers' professionalisation. Consistent with this, international research has shown that teacher training fosters the development of more positive multicultural beliefs (Civitillo et al., 2018, Pohlmann-Rother et al., 2023; Vázquez-Montilla et al., 2014). Studies by Castro (2010) and Civitillo et al. (2018) emphasise the importance of concrete, field-based learning experiences as being particularly beneficial for the development of teachers' multicultural beliefs. Consequently, teachers' contact experiences in teaching are also considered potential factors influencing their multicultural beliefs (Pohlmann-Rother et al., 2023). For example, a study by Alisaari et al. (2019) provides evidence that teachers' contact experiences in teaching students with migration biographies positively influenced their multicultural beliefs. Similarly, studies by Lucas et al., (2014) in the United States and Mititis (2018) in Greece found that teachers' contact experiences with multilingual students were associated with more positive multicultural-related beliefs.

2.3.2 Contextual Factors that Shape Teachers' Multicultural Beliefs

In addition to personal factors that shape the nature and expression of multicultural beliefs among teachers, researchers have also explored the influence of contextual variables. Studies have highlighted various school-level factors that affect teachers' multicultural beliefs and their appreciation of cultural diversity. For example, findings by Abaciouglu et al. (2022) suggest that secondary school teachers hold less favourable views than primary school teachers regarding the effectiveness of multicultural strategies in fostering a culturally inclusive environment. The authors also reported that negative attitudes and beliefs towards multiculturalism were more prevalent among teachers in schools with a higher proportion of students whose linguistic background differed from the language of instruction, compared to schools with a smaller proportion of such students (Abaciouglu et al., 2022). Pohlmann-Rother et al. (2023) identified a negative correlation between the presence of specific language-sensitive school programmes designed to support multilingual students and teachers' beliefs towards multilingualism and cultural diversity. As a potential explanation for this counterintuitive finding, the authors suggest

that the mere existence of these programmes, coupled with insufficient tangible support for teachers, may lead to stress and professional dissatisfaction, ultimately undermining their effectiveness (Pohlmann-Rother et al., 2023).

3. The Present Study

The present study aims to explore teachers' multicultural beliefs and the factors that influence them. Firstly, the study investigates potential differences in teachers' multicultural beliefs across different classroom settings. Secondly, it seeks to identify the predictors of teachers' multicultural beliefs. As illustrated in Figure 1, it is hypothesised that teachers' personal characteristics (i.e., gender, perception of in-service teacher training to teach refugee students, and contact experiences with refugee students) and classroom settings predict teachers' multicultural beliefs.

Figure 1. Factors influencing teachers' multicultural beliefs (own representation)
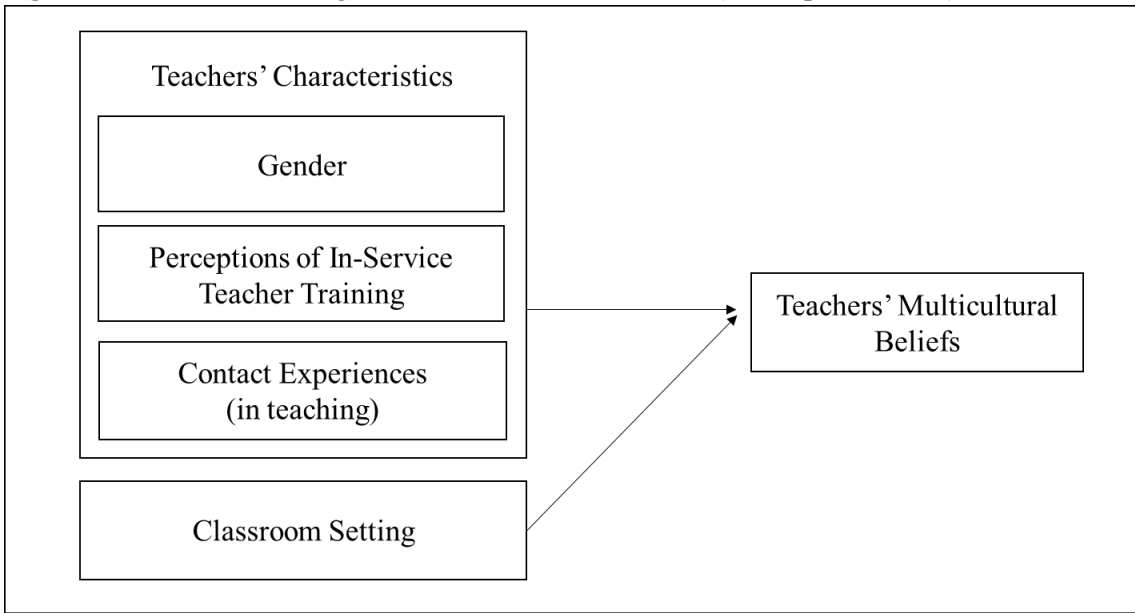
Based on the aforementioned research, it is hypothesised that teachers with more positive perceptions of their in-service teacher training, greater contact experiences and/or those who identify as female will hold more positive multicultural beliefs. Furthermore, it is also hypothesised that contextual factors, such as specific classroom settings, are significant predictors of teachers' multicultural beliefs. Specifically, it is expected that teachers working in regular classes, where refugee students are not separated from the class for additional language support, will hold more positive multicultural beliefs (Pohlmann-Rother et al., 2023).

4. Method

4.1 Sample and Sampling Processes

The analyses of this study were conducted using data from the Refugees in the German Educational System (ReGES) study, which aims to examine the integration process of refugee children and adolescents (as well as their parents) into the German educational system and society. The ReGES study is designed as "a multi-informant [children/adolescents, parents, educational and administrative staff], longitudinal study focused on two cohorts that were facing

key educational transitions" (Will et al., 2021, p. 6): a) Refugee Cohort 1, which focuses on refugee children aged 4 and older who were not enrolled in primary school at the time of the first measurement point and b) Refugee Cohort 2, which includes refugee adolescents aged 14 to 16 years who were attending lower secondary school in Germany at the start of the study.

For this study, cross-sectional teacher data from the Refugee Cohort 2 was selected. This data was collected in mid-2018 and focuses on teachers in lower secondary schools. The total sample consisted of 320 teachers (68% female) and was stratified according to school track within the German school system: general (lower) secondary school (n = 44%), comprehensive secondary school (n = 32%), and advanced (lower) secondary school (n = 24%). Additionally, teachers' provided information about the type of classroom setting in which they were currently teaching: a special class for refugees where they are taught separately in all subjects (n = 14%), a special class for refugees, however the refugees are taught together with regular students in one or more subjects (n = 8%), a regular class in which refugees are taught separately in one or more subjects (n = 9%), a regular class in which refugees are not taught separately in any subject but receive additional separate language support (n = 43%) and a regular class in which refugees are not taught separately in any subject and do not receive additional separate language support.

4.2 Instruments

4.2.1 Perceptions of In-service Teacher Training

Teachers' perceptions of in-service teacher training were measured by the item 'There is sufficient training provided to prepare teachers for the specific needs of refugee students' and is based on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = *I do not agree at all* to 6 = *I completely agree*).

4.2.2 Contact Experiences

Teachers' contact experiences with refugee students were using the single item 'How many students in your class are refugees?'. In response to this question, teachers reported the total number of refugee students participating in their class.

4.2.3 Multicultural Beliefs

Teachers' multicultural beliefs were measured using an adapted version of the Teacher Cultural Beliefs Scale by Hachfeld et al. (2011). The scale comprises seven items rated on a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*I do not agree at all*) to 6 (*I completely agree*) (e.g., 'It is important for students to learn that other cultures may have different values'; $\alpha = .85$).

4.3 Data Analysis

The analyses presented in this study were conducted using the statistical software package SPSS 27. The initial stage of the analysis involved calculating descriptive statistics for the variables under investigation. To address the first research objective, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed, with classroom setting as the independent variable and teachers' multicultural beliefs as the dependent variable. For the second research objective, a linear regression analysis was conducted. As outlined in the study model (see Figure 1), teachers' multicultural beliefs were included as the dependent variable, while gender, perceptions of their in-service teacher training, contact experiences, and classroom setting (dummy-coded) were entered as predictors. It is important to note that single-item measures were used for both predictors: perceptions of in-service teacher training and contact experiences. This decision was

dictated by the structure of the existing ReGES dataset, which served as the foundation for this study. Since the data were secondary in nature, it was not possible to modify or expand the measures to include multi-item scales.

5. Results

5.1 Descriptive Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and correlations of all variables. The results indicate that female teachers, as well as those with more contact experiences with refugee students, tend to hold more positive multicultural beliefs. Additionally, a positive correlation was observed between more positively oriented multicultural beliefs and the classroom setting of a special class for refugee students, where refugee students also participate in regular classes in one or more subjects alongside regular students.

Table 1. Correlations of all variables.

	M	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Teachers' multicultural beliefs	5.23	.58	-								
2. Teachers' perceptions of in-service teacher training	2.42	1.18	.03	-							
3. Contact experiences	-	-	.12*	.18**	-						
4. Gender[a]	-	-	.19**	.01	.12	-					
5. Class setting: a special class for refugees where they are taught separately in all subjects[b]	-	-	.06	.25**	.58**	.01	-				
6. Class setting: a special class for refugees. However, the refugees are taught together with regular students in one or more subjects[b]	-	-	.17**	.14*	.46**	.15**	-.12*	-			
7. Class setting: a regular class in which refugees are taught separately in one or more subjects[b]	-	-	.03	-.09	-.14*	-.05	-.13*	-.10	-		
8. Class setting: a regular class in which refugees are not taught separately in any subject but receive additional separate language support[b]	-	-	-.11	-.15	-.28**	-.11	-.35**	.26**	.28**	-	
9. Class setting: a regular class in which refugees are not taught separately in any subject and do not receive additional separate language support[b]	-	-	-.05	-.05	-.32**	.05	-.23**	.17**	.19**	-.51**	-

Dummy coded variables. [a]Gender: 1 = male, 2 = female. [b]Class setting: 0 = no, 1 = yes

5.2 Classroom Settings as Determinants of Teachers' Multicultural Beliefs

An ANOVA was conducted to examine the effect of classroom setting on teachers' multicultural beliefs. Given the non-significant results of Levene's test for equality of error variance, it was reasonably assumed that the homogeneity of variance was met. A significant main effect of classroom setting was found, ($F(4, 295) = 3.06$, $p = .02$, $\eta p2 = .04$), indicating that teachers' multicultural beliefs vary across classroom settings (Figure 2). Specifically, the findings suggest that educators teaching in a special class for refugee students, where refugee students also participate in regular classes in one or more subjects alongside regular students, tend to hold more favourable multicultural beliefs.

Table 2. Pairwise post-hoc comparison of teacher's multicultural beliefs across class setting.

Comparison variable Class setting: a special class for refugees where they are taught separately in all subjects	*Mean Difference (M diff)*	*Standard Error (SE)*	*p*	95% Confidence Interval	
				Upper bound	Lower bound
Class setting: a special class for refugees. However, the refugees are taught together with regular students in one or more subjects	.165	.291	.988	-.74	1.07
Class setting: a regular class in which refugees are taught separately in one or more subjects	1.048	.277	.007	.19	1.91
Class setting: a regular class in which refugees are not taught separately in any subject but receive additional separate language support	.917	.200	.001	.30	1.54
Class setting: a regular class in which refugees are not taught separately in any subject and do not receive additional separate language support	.819	.216	.007	.15	1.49

Figure 2. Teachers' multicultural beliefs across classroom settings.
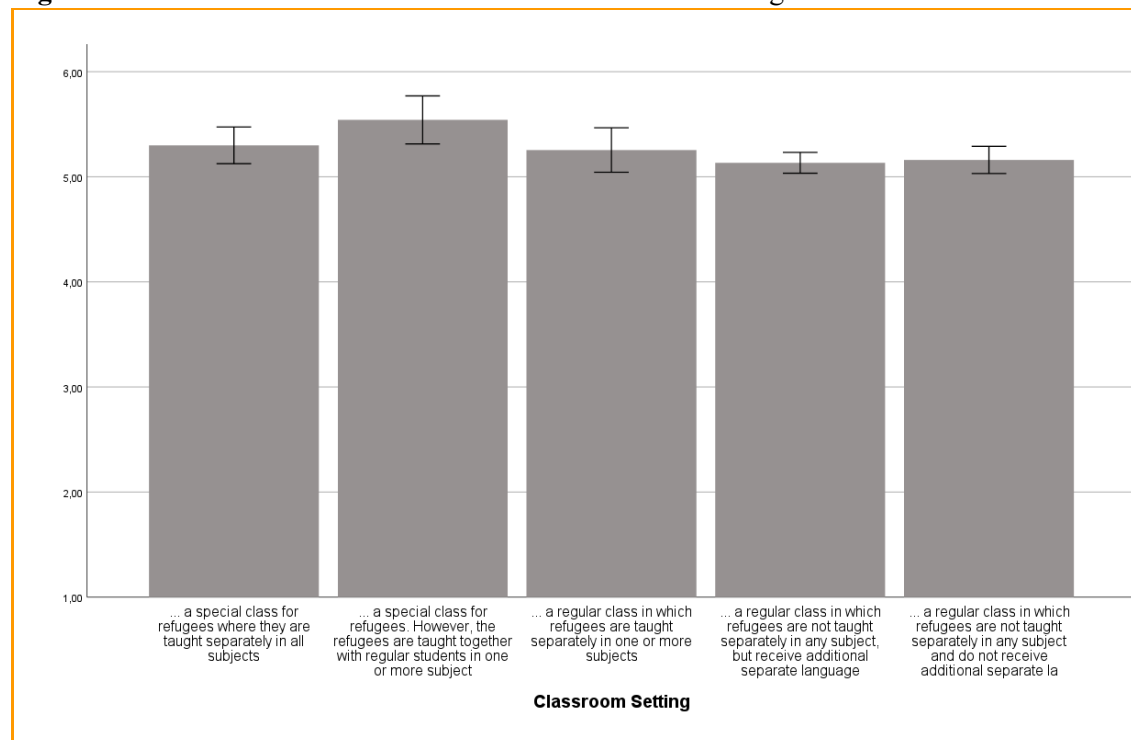
5.3 Key Predictors of Teachers' Multicultural Beliefs

To investigate the potential predictors of teachers' multicultural beliefs, linear regression analysis was conducted. The linear regression analysis included teachers' multicultural beliefs as the dependent variable whereas predictors were teachers' characteristics—gender, teachers' perceptions of their in-service teaching training, and classroom settings were added as dummy-coded variables.

Prior to performing the HMR analysis, several assumptions were assessed: First, autocorrelation was examined using the Durbin–Watson test, which yielded a value of 2.22, indicating no significant autocorrelation. Second, collinearity statistics confirmed that all predictors met the required criteria (Field 2013). Third, P-P plots showed that the residuals followed a normal distribution.

As shown in Table 3, all the predictors collectively accounted for 6.7% of the variance in teachers' multicultural beliefs, $F(7, 290) = 2.91$, $p < .01$. Overall, the results suggest that female teachers, as well as those teaching in specialised classes for refugee students where refugee students also participate in regular classes in one or more subjects alongside regular students, tend to hold more positive multicultural beliefs.

Table 3. Linear regression model: prediction of teachers' multicultural beliefs.

Predictors	B	SE B	β	t	p	VIF
Constant	4.863	.147		33.102	.001	
Gender*	.188	.071	.15**	2.635	.009	1.034
Teachers' perceptions of in-service teacher training	-.023	.030	-.05	-.765	.445	1.128
Contact experiences	.003	.010	.03	.266	.791	2.636

Class setting: a special class for refugees where they are taught separately in all subjects*	.160	.142	.08	1.130	.259	2.263
Class setting: a special class for refugees. However, the refugees are taught together with regular students in one or more subjects*	.333	.166	.15+	2.006	.046	1.871
Class setting: a regular class in which refugees are taught separately in one or more subjects*	.179	.119	.08	1.507	.133	1.107
Class setting: a regular class in which refugees are not taught separately in any subject but receive additional separate language support*	.023	.083	-.02	.272	.786	1.225
R^2						.067

*Dummy coded variables. Gender: 1 = male, 2 = female. Class setting (reference category): a regular class in which refugees are not taught separately in any subject and do not receive additional separate language support.

6. Discussion

The present study investigated the predictive influence of both individual and contextual factors on teachers' multicultural beliefs. Consistent with previous research using the Teacher Cultural Beliefs Scale (Hachfeld et al., 2011), the descriptive results indicate that teachers generally hold high (positive) levels of multicultural beliefs (Becker et al., 2023; Hachfeld et al., 2015; Schotte et al., 2022). Furthermore, the findings align with international studies suggesting that in-service teachers perceive a lack of adequate training to address the needs of refugee students in their classrooms (Becker et al., 2023; Prentice & Ott, 2021; Koehler & Schneider, 2019). This result reinforces calls from numerous educational researchers urging policymakers and governmental bodies to prioritise investment in strengthening and developing formal training programmes in both teacher education and professional development, with a specific focus on teaching refugee students. Refugee learners bring significant social, emotional, and educational challenges to schools, for which teachers often have little to no training to address these unique needs (Wiseman & Galegher, 2019).

The results of the ANOVA revealed that teachers' multicultural beliefs vary across different classroom settings. Specifically, the data indicate that teachers instructing a special class for refugee students, where refugee students also participate in regular classes in one or more subjects alongside regular students, exhibit the most favourable multicultural beliefs. However, despite this significant difference, the effect size is relatively modest, limiting its practical significance. Overall, it is important to note that teachers across all classroom settings demonstrate consistently high levels of multicultural beliefs. To gain a deeper understanding of the potential reasons behind these differences, future research could benefit from qualitative studies, such as interviews.

The second research objective was to examine the extent to which teachers' personal and contextual factors influence their multicultural beliefs. As anticipated, female teachers hold more positive multicultural beliefs. This finding may be explained by evidence from a study conducted by Cherng and Davis (2019), which found that female pre-service teachers reported higher levels of multicultural awareness than their male counterparts. However, further research involving more detailed and nuanced analyses is needed to explore these assumptions more thoroughly.

Contrary to expectations, teachers' perceptions of their in-service teacher training and their contact experiences did not emerge as significant predictors of their multicultural beliefs. Moreover, these factors accounted for only a small proportion of the total variance. Both predictors were assessed in terms of extent (i.e., sufficient training, rated on a scale from *disagree* to *agree*) or amount (i.e., the

number of refugee students in the classroom), without capturing explicit information on the perceived quality of the training or contact experiences. This suggests that individual evaluations of the quality of these experiences may be more meaningful in shaping teachers' multicultural beliefs (Visintin et al., 2017). The findings also indicate that the quantity of contact alone may not be sufficient to influence teachers' multicultural beliefs. While the number of refugee students in a teacher's classroom was not a significant predictor, the quality of contact—such as the depth of interaction and the ability to form meaningful relationships—may play a more critical role. This interpretation aligns with Allport's (1954) intergroup contact theory, which emphasises that positive intergroup attitudes are more likely to develop when contact is meaningful, cooperative, and of high quality. Moreover, this finding implies that additional variables not included in the present study may play a significant role in influencing the development of teachers' multicultural beliefs. These variables could include the broader societal and cultural context, institutional and policy factors (e.g., school leadership), the school and classroom environment (e.g., demographic composition of the student body), and specific aspects of teacher education programmes (e.g., teacher participation in critical pedagogy courses (Freire, 2005) or anti-bias training). In this context, it is important to recognise that teachers' multicultural beliefs are shaped not only by their individual experiences and classroom setting but also by the broader socio-political dynamics surrounding migration in Germany. The rise of right-wing violence and neo-nationalist sentiments, as documented by scholars such as Hertz (2018), may influence how teachers perceive and respond to cultural diversity, potentially reinforcing or challenging their multicultural beliefs. These socio-political forces may create a polarised environment where teachers are either encouraged to adopt more inclusive multicultural approaches or pressure to conform to exclusionary narratives, highlighting the complex interplay between societal discourses and individual beliefs. Therefore, it is crucial for teacher educators to raise awareness among pre-service teachers about the importance of reflecting on diversity and their own multicultural beliefs. This includes providing opportunities to critically engage with current socio-political dynamics, equipping them to recognise and challenge exclusionary narratives, and incorporating training on cultural competence, anti-bias education, and strategies for fostering equality and inclusion.

Contrary to the stated hypothesis, the findings indicate that teachers who teach in special classes for refugee students—where refugee students also participate in regular classes in one or more subjects alongside regular students—hold more positive multicultural beliefs. One possible explanation is that teachers in such special classes may develop a more pronounced understanding of multicultural awareness (Pohlmann-Rother et al., 2023). By instructing refugee students as a homogeneous group in certain lessons, these teachers may have more opportunities to engage with individual students on a personal level, which is often more challenging in fully inclusive classrooms where time for individual interaction is limited. Furthermore, this finding can be interpreted through the lens of Allport's (1954) intergroup contact theory, which suggests that specific conditions for meaningful intergroup interactions—such as frequent and high-quality contact—can reduce prejudice and foster more favourable attitudes. The unique structure of these special classes may provide opportunities for sustained and meaningful interactions with refugee students, thereby promoting more positive multicultural beliefs among teachers. Consequently, the increased interaction with individual refugee students in specialised classrooms may positively influence teachers' multicultural beliefs. These findings align with those of Arar (2021), who demonstrated a correlation between more positive multicultural beliefs and the quantity of experiences teachers gain when working with refugee students. In addition to their experience in specialised classes, teachers also have the opportunity to experience the refugee students in another learning context: regular classes. This dual exposure allows teachers to gain a more comprehensive understanding of refugee students' learning development. Furthermore, teachers may also value the benefits of joint learning experiences for students with and without backgrounds, particularly in social terms (Letzel-Alt & Pozas, 2024).

The less pronounced multicultural beliefs among teachers of refugee students in regular classrooms with no segregated instruction time may be attributed to the observation that educators often perceive themselves as inadequately prepared to teach in fully inclusive environments (Pozas & Letzel, 2020). In their study, Pozas & Letzel (2020) found that educators reported facing significant challenges when teaching highly diverse classrooms. Additionally, empirical studies have shown that teachers tend to

associate more homogeneous classes with reduced preparation time and lower stress levels (Pozas et al., 2023), which may positively influence their perceptions of multiculturalism. Considering these factors, it is plausible that the teachers in the current study hold more favourable multicultural beliefs when teaching in special classes, as they may perceive their students as forming a more homogeneous learning group compared to inclusive settings.

In conclusion, the findings of the present study contribute to the development of a research paradigm that examines the influence of teachers' beliefs about cultural diversity on the educational experiences of refugee students. In this regard, the study also provides valuable insights into a research perspective that highlights the structural factors contributing to or perpetuating the educational disadvantages faced by refugee students as they transition into new school environments. Despite the low practical significance of the results, the current study does offers important findings that enhance our understanding of the factors influencing teachers' multicultural beliefs, further in-depth research is needed to explore the complex and multifaceted relationship between the quantity and quality of personal interactions with refugee students, pre-service and in-service training, and classroom and school-specific factors (e.g., class composition, school atmosphere, and collegial support) and their impact on teachers' multicultural beliefs.

7. Limitations

This study sought to gain insight into teachers' multicultural beliefs. Specifically, it demonstrated that gender, contact experiences, and certain classroom settings are predictors of teachers' multicultural beliefs. The data used were drawn from a German nationwide large-scale study and were analysed quantitatively. However, the study design itself, as well as the fact that education in Germany is overseen by individual federal states, presents several limitations.

First and foremost, the study employed solely a quantitative data approach. Future studies using qualitative methodologies, such as interviews or observational studies, are recommended to explore the findings of this study in greater depth. For instance, the observation that teachers in special refugee classes hold more positive beliefs than those in inclusive regular classes warrants further investigation. Secondly, the study relied on self-ratings by teachers, which could introduce biases related to social desirability. Thirdly, it may be beneficial to examine the research question using the same instruments across individual federal states in Germany, given the differences in teacher professional development (Burgmer & Damaschke-Deitrick, 2023). Fourthly, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations of using single-item measures for the two key predictors: perceptions of in-service teacher training and contact experiences. This approach may restrict the reliability and depth of constructs being assessed. However, as this study is based on secondary data analysis of the existing ReGES dataset, the use of single-item measures for these variables was predetermined and beyond our control. To address this limitation, future research could build on our findings by employing multi-item scales to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced assessment of these predictors. Fifthly, we did not apply weighting adjustments from the ReGES dataset in our analysis. This represents a limitation, as the absence of such adjustments may affect the generalisability of our findings to the broader population. Lastly, it is important to note that the ReGES study used an adapted version of the Teacher Cultural Beliefs Scale (Hachfeld et al., 2011) rather than the full version with the three subscales. Therefore, the results from this study should be interpreted with caution. It is strongly recommended that further studies use the complete scale to examine potential differences across the subscales of multicultural, egalitarian and assimilation beliefs. An additional limitation concerns the hierarchical structure of the data: teachers (and classrooms) are likely nested within schools and/or tracks, while tracks may be nested within broader local jurisdictions. The analytic approach used in this manuscript did not explicitly model this nesting with random effects or clustered standard errors. The results should therefore be interpreted with caution. Moreover, classroom setting may be confounded with other factors, including tracking practices, school resources, student composition, teacher experience, and local policy contexts. Because these influences were not accounted in this study, the estimated associations may capture both classroom setting and unobserved contextual characteristics. Accordingly, the findings should be interpreted with

caution, and future research should employ multilevel models as well as include other potential sources of bias more systematically.

8. Conclusion

The objective of the present study was to examine the influence of diverse personal and contextual factors on teachers' multicultural beliefs. This was accomplished using data from the comprehensive ReGES study, which investigates the conditions under which the integration of refugees into the German education system can be successfully achieved. The findings indicate that participating teachers generally hold positive multicultural beliefs. However, contrary to the initial hypothesis, teachers instructing in specialised classrooms for refugee students exhibited more positive multicultural beliefs than those teaching refugee students in regular classes. Despite this notable difference, the effect size was relatively modest, limiting its practical significance.

Additionally, the findings suggest that teachers' perceptions of in-service training and their direct experiences with refugees account for only a small proportion of the variance in their multicultural beliefs. This highlights the complexity of multicultural beliefs as a phenomenon, warranting further in-depth investigation. Moreover, given the significant influence of teacher beliefs on students' educational experiences, this research underscores the importance of examining how structural elements within education systems—such as policies and practices that result in varying levels of educational quality based on the characteristics of the recipients—can facilitate the integration of refugees into host countries (Arar, 2021). Finally, these findings are also relevant for teachers globally, highlighting the importance of critically reflecting on how their beliefs, shaped by local policies, training opportunities, and classroom experiences, affect their capacity to support the integration and educational success of refugee and multilingual students in diverse educational settings.

9. References

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Data Availability

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Disclosure statement

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