



Multilingualism at the Interface of Formal and Non-Formal Education: Insights from the German Education System

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2025-02-18	In an increasingly globalised world, linguistic diversity in schools is a much-discussed topic. Research in recent years has shown that the productive inclusion of multilingualism in the classroom is possible and conducive to learning. Nevertheless, it remains an exception in everyday teaching practice. Instead, measures that address language in the educational context of the migration society often focus exclusively on promoting German as a second language. This situation can be explained by, among other things, the historically monolingual orientation of schools. This article raises the question of whether and to what extent non-formal educational actors affect these manifest habits by cooperating with schools. To this end, collaborations between formal schools and non-formal education stakeholders in Frankfurt/Main, Germany that focus on language education are analysed. Four types of cooperation are differentiated according to their formal orientation and categorised into a continuum of three areas of language education: language support for all children regardless of family language, promotion of German as a second language and promotion of multilingualism. While the proportion of programmes promoting multilingualism is very low, these programmes tend to enter into very far-reaching forms of cooperation. It can be deduced from this that non-formal players have the potential to at least soften the monolingual structures of the formal education system. Keywords: Multilingualism, co-operation in education, non-formal education, German as a second language.
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Introduction

The inclusion of individual and social migration-related multilingualism in school teaching and learning processes has been discussed in educational research with regard to numerous advantages in cognitive, linguistic-communicative, social and societal terms (Akbulut et al. 2017; Bialystok 2007; Dirim 2015; Gombos 2015). Some educational policy statements at a formal level also demonstrate a certain openness to the inclusion of all linguistic competences of schoolchildren, as well as an assessment of this diversity as a potential for social development (KMK 2013, p.3). However, this can vary greatly between the federal states of Germany. While curricular regulations (Rahmenpläne) in some federal states of Germany do not mention multilingualism at all, other federal states of Germany (Hamburg, Berlin, North Rhine-Westphalia) assign an important role to multilingualism as a component of “Durchgängige Sprachbildung” and part of the promotion of the language of education (e.g.



Freie und Hansestadt Hamburg 2022, Bildungsserver Berlin-Brandenburg 2015). Nonetheless, studies on educational practice (Cunningham & Little, 2022 for the UK, e.g. Putjata et al., 2022 for Germany) and organisational structures of educational provision and decision-making processes (e.g. Gomolla & Radtke, 2009; Plöger 2023) point to a gap between academic proclamations and multilingualism-oriented political statements on the one hand and actual practice on the other. Although multilingualism is seen by many different stakeholders (teachers, political decision-makers, parents) as potentially beneficial to education (David-Erb & Panagiotopoulou 2025; Polat & Lange, 2025), its productive inclusion in formal school education settings remains exceptional¹ or tends to relate to privileged multilingualism that can be assigned to the discourse area of internationalisation (e.g. the bilingual state European School in Berlin, Baumert et al. 2017).

Nevertheless, in some schools multilingualism is considered by co-operating with non-formal partners (associations, private individuals, public initiatives etc.). In these cases, multilingualism is integrated into formal school programmes not as a regular component, but as a special feature provided by external actors from the non-formal education sector. The examination of these non-formal educational offers refers on the one hand to the structures of the formal state school itself, and on the other to the social order and ways in which multilingualism is addressed: The co-operation makes visible the lines along which formal schools demarcate their own sphere of action. At the same time, however, as a study by David-Erb (2022) shows, it also indicates an opening on the part of the school, which ultimately takes multilingualism into account through co-operation agreements within the formal system by outsourcing its promotion to external partners, while supporting their work and making it possible in the first place (David-Erb, 2022).

This paper investigates how multilingualism is addressed within educational collaborations between formal schools and non-formal partners. The aim is to analyse how such cooperation can be systematised and what types of partnerships exist, particularly with regard to the kinds of language education they provide. In this context, language education is understood as encompassing all forms of language-related educational measures—from language-sensitive subject teaching to foreign language learning, German as a second language, and multilingualism. While the analysis focuses on the role of multilingualism, it adopts a broader perspective on language education to distinguish it clearly from other approaches and practices within the field. The central research questions are: What forms of cooperation between schools and non-formal actors can be identified? What are their specific focuses in terms of language education? To what extent do these partnerships explicitly promote multilingualism? Finally, how deeply do these initiatives penetrate the formal education system—do they remain external additions, or do they have the potential to contribute to

¹ E.g. in the school experiment Bilingual Primary School Classes in Hamburg, cf. Gogolin et al. 2009; for an detailed overview see Busse & Hardy 2023; for examples of experimental multilingual practices David-Erb 2024.

structural transformations in how multilingualism is recognised and supported within schools?

To explore these questions, this research draws on document analysis and an expert interview conducted in Frankfurt/Main, Germany, with a coordinator at the Office for Multicultural Affairs (AmkA), which mediates partnerships between schools and non-formal actors. Based on these insights, the study maps the current role of multilingualism in cooperative educational practices and reflects on their transformative potential within the formal system.

Language education and multilingualism in the context of educational co-operation: non-formal actors in the formal sector²

Today, 30 years after Ingrid Gogolin (1994) denounced the monolingual habitus of multilingual schools in her habilitation thesis and called for a paradigm shift towards recognising the individual and societal potential of multilingualism, it is well established that language education can and should be designed in accordance with the specific linguistic repertoires of pupils. Numerous frameworks and policy documents—some of them quite comprehensive, such as those in the Saarland—explicitly support continuous language education and the inclusion of pupils' multilingual resources. Such developments contribute to more equitable educational opportunities. However, recent studies (David-Erb & Panagiotopoulou, 2025) also demonstrate that, despite these advances and policy commitments (KMK, 2015), monolingual orientations still persist and influence educational practice at various levels, particularly in implementation and everyday school routines. Therefore, a gap is recognisable between educational policy and research on the one hand and educational practice on the other. However, a closer look reveals – in keeping with the image of the gap – bridge-like structures that connect those two sides. These bridges are often formed by non-formal educational actors. The focus on non-formal actors does not imply that the responsibility for promoting multilingualism should or could be shifted away from schools. Rather, it reflects the empirical and structural observation that non-formal educational organisations frequently operate at the interface between policy intentions and pedagogical realities. They often act as brokers or translators between educational policy discourses, research findings, and school practice, especially in areas that have not yet been systematically institutionalised within the formal education system, such as multilingual education. By analysing non-formal actors, this study therefore sheds light on the mechanisms through which ideas of linguistic diversity and multilingual competence enter (or fail to enter) the formal school context. Non-formal partners make visible the ways in which schools engage with external expertise, community resources, and innovative pedagogical models. In this sense, they are not substitutes for the school's responsibility but rather indicators and mediators of how the school system positions itself toward multilingualism.

² I refer primarily to the state of research in German-speaking countries, as the focus of the empirical investigation lies in Germany.

Their activities reveal both the potential and the limits of cross-sectoral collaboration in a largely monolingual institutional framework.

Following Sandhaas (1986), non-formal education is defined, in contrast to formal and informal education, as education that takes place under school-like conditions in educational institutions as controlled learning, but which does not lead to formal qualifications and is not necessarily recognised by formal institutions. Formal education, on the other hand, is taught in schools, leads to state-recognised certifications and enables access to further educational institutions. Informal education takes place outside of educational institutions in the course of everyday life. The educational influence of the family or the media are examples of this.

Foundations and their purposes are well documented statistically in Germany. We can see that many of them are involved in education. According to the latest data from the Federal Association of German Foundations (BVDS) from 2023, around 31 per cent of the 25,000 foundations in Germany list education as a central foundational purpose in their statutes (cf. www.stiftungen.org). They are involved along the educational biography from the early childhood phase through school to entry into the labour market and beyond. There is also a wide variety of topics, ranging from space as the third educator, STEM promotion, involvement in the areas of inclusion and parental education and the promotion of political and democratic education and the Latin language, to name just a few examples (Warnke, 2018, p.241). The situation is different again in the area of associations and church initiatives. Here, too, various activities focus on the education sector, but the exact figures are much more difficult to access due to the lack of umbrella organisations.

All of these initiatives, understood as non-formal education actors operating at least partly with public funding, are included in the scope of this study insofar as they cooperate with institutions in the formal education sector. What they have in common is that they are not directly supervised by the state and have no status under public law.

Depending on the perspective, the term *co-operation* has different meanings (McWhinney, 1992) that ranges from exchange to coordination and networking. In a brochure published in 2015 to mark its 20th anniversary, the German Children and Youth Foundation (DKJS) took a detailed look at co-operation between the state and foundations. As a foundation that repeatedly designs and implements projects as an interface for federal and state governments, among others, and also operates at a local level, the DKJS conducted interviews with numerous experts and analysed these based on its own experiences (cf. Bleckmann et al., 2015). Four types of co-operation are described there:

1. Thematic exchange;
2. Project-related co-operation;
3. Systematic co-operation; and
4. Horizontal and vertical networking.

Thematic exchange focusses on a specific topic, for example at events such as conferences, meetings or specialist forums, where stakeholders from all levels of the state hierarchy, foundations and other non-formal partners can exchange ideas and, if necessary, discuss

current topics. Non-formal education providers harbour potential for such an exchange if they reflect existing practice on the basis of their operational work, or if their employees promote constructive discourse as professional experts (Bleckmann et al., 2015, p. 35). *Project-related co-operation* describes the more ‘classic’ type of co-operation in joint pilot projects. They are aimed at a specific project, thematically focussed and limited in duration (Bleckmann et al., 2015, p. 36). In *systematic co-operation*, both sides engage in a largely open development and design process. The scope and nature of the co-operation depend on the jointly defined challenge (Bleckmann et al., 2015, p. 36 f.). Finally, *horizontal and vertical networking* describes non-formal actors as bridge builders between the various levels and functions, particularly at the state level, and explicitly includes links with civil society, businesses and academia (Bleckmann et al., 2015, p. 37).

Of course, these areas cannot always be clearly distinguished from one another. However, they provide a useful indication of the working methods and intentions underlying different forms of cooperation. Accordingly, the cooperations identified in this study were classified within this framework based on the information available online. This allows us to understand how and to what extent language education—especially multilingualism—is integrated into formal educational institutions through the involvement of non-formal actors.

Methodology

This research was conducted within the framework of a qualitative research paradigm. The study was designed to systematically map language education-oriented collaborations between schools and non-formal (non-state) educational actors in Frankfurt/Main. Frankfurt/Main was chosen as the research site due to its high rate of migration, its status as a financial center, and its global interconnectedness, which make language education and multilingualism particularly relevant in this urban context.

Data Collection Process

Data were collected through document analysis and an expert interview. First, a semi-structured orientation interview was conducted with the Head of the Department for Migration and Language at the Office for Multicultural Affairs (AmkA) in Frankfurt/Main (duration: 45 minutes). This interview served solely to map the field and identify potential partnerships and was therefore not part of the analytical corpus. The information obtained during this interview informed the selection of actors and guided the strategy for the systematic online search.

Subsequently, a systematic online document analysis was carried out. The websites of all 167 schools listed in the Frankfurt school directory were individually examined to identify references to partnerships or projects related to language education. In addition, the City of Frankfurt’s *Guide to Language Education Offers* and the regional education servers were reviewed. From these sources, only collaborations between schools and non-formal educational actors were included in the analysis.

In total, 50 non-formal partners and 440 corresponding collaborations were identified. In cases where data inconsistencies were found, the information published on the websites of the non-formal partners was considered more accurate and therefore prioritized.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the approach of Qualitative Content Analysis as proposed by Kuckartz (2018). The analysis followed a deductive framework, with categories defined theoretically in advance. The field of language education was divided into three main categories: (1) promotion of academic language skills in German, (2) promotion of German as a second language (DaZ), and (3) promotion of multilingualism, including heritage language education, foreign language education, and multilingualism in the narrower sense.

Table 1 presents the resulting category system, which combines these three areas of language education with the four types of cooperation developed by Bleckmann et al. (2015).

Table 1. Category system

	Thematic exchange	Project-related cooperation	Systematic co- operation	Horizontal and vertical networking
Promoting academic language skills	Category 1	Category 2	Category 3	Category 4
German as a second language	Category 5	Category 6	Category 7	Category 8
Multilingualism	Category 9	Category 10	Category 11	Category 12

The cooperation types proposed by Bleckmann et al. (2015) include thematic exchange (TE), project-based cooperation (PR), systematic cooperation (S), and horizontal/vertical networking (H/V). Combining these two dimensions resulted in a 4×3 matrix with twelve analytical categories (see Table 1). Each collaboration was qualitatively assigned to one of these categories based on the dominant features described in publicly available project documentation and websites. Cases displaying balanced indicators of two types were noted as mixed categories (mixed category: cases in which two types of cooperation were equally present).

In addition to the main categories, the analysis also considered the target groups of the collaborations, which were classified as primary school pupils (P), other pupils (O), teachers, and parents. The types of schools involved were also included in the analysis. This approach made it possible to examine how language education initiatives are distributed and positioned across different educational levels and stakeholder groups.

The developed category system served as a heuristic framework for the presentation of the results rather than as a rigid coding scheme. This allowed both dimensions—types of cooperation and areas of language education—to be systematically addressed across all cases. The analytical process was guided by transparent and replicable criteria. Furthermore, in cases where multilingualism was not explicitly mentioned, references to language education were reexamined in a second step to determine whether multilingualism was implicitly addressed. This framework served as the basis for interpreting the tables and examples presented in the results section.

Findings

The above presented methodological approach was used to identify 50 non-formal partners, some of which co-operate with one and some with several of the 167 public schools (including all types of schools from primary school to „Berufsschulen“) that existed in Frankfurt at the time of the research.

First, the distribution of initiatives across the content areas is presented, followed by a closer examination of the types of cooperation that specifically focus on multilingualism. The figures show how many non-formal institutions are involved and how many co-operations they maintain, i.e. how many schools are involved.

Table 2. Quantitative distribution of programmes at content level

	promoting academic language skills	German as a second language	Multilingualism	
Number of non- formal partners	25	8	Heritage language education	11
			Foreign languages	3
			Multilingualism in the narrower sense	3
Number of co- operations	244	34	Heritage language education	122
			Foreign languages	5
			Multilingualism in the narrower sense	35

The data presented in Table 2 provide an overview of the 440 educational co-operations identified in Frankfurt that address language education in various forms. The distribution across the three main areas of language support reveals a strong predominance of German-language promotion. Specifically, 244 co-operations (55%) focus on promoting academic language skills in German, while 34 co-operations (8%) are situated in the field of German as a Second Language (DaZ). In contrast, 162 co-operations (37%) address multilingualism in a broader sense.

Within this latter group, however, the majority (122 co-operations, or 75%) relate to heritage language instruction, while only smaller proportions target foreign languages (28; 17%) or multilingual classroom practices in a broader sense (12; 7%).

Overall, these findings confirm the continued dominance of German language support—both in academic and second-language contexts—across the landscape of school–non-formal education co-operations. Initiatives explicitly oriented toward multilingualism as a pedagogical resource remain comparatively rare, suggesting that multilingual education is still framed primarily through the lens of language support rather than language diversity.

The following tables 3, 4 and 5 provide a closer look at the non-formal education actors in the three areas. There are abbreviations in the tables that need to be explained briefly: In the area of target groups, primary school pupils (P) are distinguished from all other pupils (O). Other target groups are named directly. In the column on the type of co-operation, TE stands for thematic exchange, S for systematic, PR for project-related and H/V for horizontal/vertical, each of the types that Bleckmann et al. introduce. When determining the number of co-operation schools, it happened that the information on the websites of the schools (SWS) differed from the information on the websites of the non-formal partner (NFWS). In cases of inconsistency between the data provided on school websites and those published by non-formal partners, the latter were considered more precise and up to date; therefore, their figures were used as the primary reference when calculating the total number of cooperations. The following table 3 provides an overview of those co-operations that are active in the area of promoting academic language skills in German, listed here in order to provide insights as complete as possible into the field of language education qua educational co-operation, and for better contextualisation of the results from the field of multilingualism.

Table 3. Overview of promoting academic language skills co-operations

Offer	Non-formal partner	Number of co-operating schools	Targetgroup	Type of co-operation	Focus of the co-operation
Frankfurter Lesepaten	Die Frankfurter Lesepaten e.V.	SWS: 19 NFWS: 65	P + O	S	Reading
Lesementoren	Mentor Hessen e.V.	11	P + O	S	Reading
Erzählzeit Frankfurt	Kunst für Kinder e.V., Freies theaterhaus gGmbH	4	P	S	Oral language use: narration
Lese- und Schreibwerkstatt	Frankfurter Bürgerstiftung	1	P	S	Reading and writing

Lernen beim Schlosskater Ferdinand	Frankfurter Bürgerstiftung, Cronstett- und Hynspergische evangelische Stiftung	1	P	S	Reading
Leseevent	Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer (law firm)	1	P	PR	Reading
Chancen-Schule	Chancenwerk e.V.	2	P + O	PR	Language development support
Sternpiloten	Kubi gGmbH, Frankfurter Institut für Erziehungshilfen e.V., Internationales Familienzentrum e.V., ASB Lehrerkooperative gGmbH, Haus der Volksarbeit e.V., sozialdienst katholischer Frauen e.V. u.a.	39	P	S	Academic Language Skills
Kinder-Helden	KinderHeldengGmbH	SWS: 1 NFWS: 4	P	S	Academic language skills
Leseclubs	Stiftung Lesen	3	P	S	Reading
Fit für die Zukunft – Deutsch als Bildungssprache	Stiftung Polytechnische Gesellschaft	0	O	PR	Academic Language Skills
Meine Zeitung – Frankfurter Schüler*innen lesen die FAZ	Stiftung Polytechnische Gesellschaft	0	O	TE	Reading
Wörtermeer	Literaturhaus Frankfurt e.V.	3	O	PR	Reading and writing

Zeitungsprojekt	FAZ	7	O	TE	Reading
Schreibwettbewerb	Stiftung Handschrift	2	O	PR	Writing
Deutschland/Frankfurt schreibt	Polytechnische Gesellschaft	9	O	TE	Writing
Autorenlesung	DFB-Stiftung	1	O	PR	Reading
Jugend debattiert	Hertie Stiftung	3	O	PR	Oral language use: debating
Sprachförderprojekt	Rotary Verlag GmbH	1	O	PR	Academic language Skills
Lesen	Stiftung Lesen	2	Teachers	TE	Reading
Leseförderung	Hardtberg Stiftung	SWS: 7 NFWS: 9	Teachers	TE	Reading
Sprachentdecker	BHF-Stiftung	0	Teachers	TE	Teaching
Fußball trifft Kultur	LitCam gGmbH	2	P (up to grade six)	S	Reading and writing
Tusch	Theater Frankfurt	NFWS: 74	P + O	S	performance
Zukunftsbaukasten	ZuBaKa gGmbH	0	P + O	S	Academic language skills

Abbreviations: SWS – school websites, NFWS – websites of non-formal partners, P – primary school pupils, O – other pupils, TE – thematic exchange, PR – project related co-operation, S – systematic co-operation

Table 3 provides an overview of the 25 non-formal partners that focus specifically on general German language support, representing a substantial subset of the 49 actors engaged in the broader field of language and multilingualism promotion in Frankfurt. Within this subgroup, the co-operations are distributed across the three represented structural types as follows: systematic co-operations (S) are the most frequent (n = 11; 44%), followed by project-related co-operations (PR; n = 8; 32%) and thematic exchanges (TE; n = 6; 24%). Horizontal and vertical networking (HV) was not observed in this subgroup (n = 0). The focus of these 25 co-operations is primarily on strengthening academic language skills in German. Initiatives target pupils directly and are often framed around the familiar narrative of “language as the key to education.” The term *multilingualism* does not appear in the descriptions of these co-operations, indicating that German-language support remains the dominant orientation within this segment of the educational network. Overall, these results highlight that non-formal actors play a significant role in promoting German-language proficiency, particularly

in the context of academic skills, while broader multilingual approaches are addressed by other co-operations outside this subgroup.

Table 4. Overview of co-operations in the area of German as a second language

Offer	Non-formal partner		Number of co-operating schools ³	Targetgroup	Type of co-operation
Deutsch & PC	Hertie Stiftung		9	P	S
Deutschsommer	Stiftung	Polytechnische Gesellschaft	12	P	PR + H/V
Deutschsommer Schüler*innen aus der Intensivklasse	für Stiftung	Polytechnische Gesellschaft	0	P	PR
Diesterweg-Stipendium	Stiftung	Polytechnische Gesellschaft	3	P + Parents	PR + H/V
Diesterweg-Stipendium+	Stiftung	Polytechnische Gesellschaft	0	P	PR + H/V
Sprachförderprofis	Stiftung	Polytechnische Gesellschaft	0	P	PR + H/V
Mama lernt Deutsch	ASB	Lehrerkooperative gGmbH	10	Parents	S

Abbreviations: P – primary school pupils, S – systematic co-operation, PR – project-related co-operation, H/V – horizontal and vertical networking

Table 4 presents the co-operation programmes that focus specifically on promoting German as a second language (DaZ). In total, seven programmes were identified in this category, involving 24 schools across the city. Notably, five of these seven offers originate from the same non-formal partner, although they represent distinct programmes addressing different target groups. The programmes primarily target pupils in primary schools, indicating that younger children are the main focus of structured DaZ support within educational co-operations, while older pupils are hardly considered in comparable formats. On the side of educational stakeholders, the programmes often also involve parents, yet teachers are not explicitly addressed as participants or beneficiaries of these initiatives. This distribution suggests that language support in the field of DaZ is strongly oriented toward early educational intervention and family involvement, but less toward institutional or teacher-focused professional development.

Multilingualism

As previously explained, the programmes supporting multilingualism are divided into three categories. heritage language teaching, foreign language teaching and multilingualism-

³ If a 0 is indicated, this refers to co-operations that are not linked to individual schools, but are aimed at specific groups of actors (teachers, pupils, etc.).

supporting programmes in the narrower sense. The following tables show the results for the respective areas.

Table 5. Heritage language education in Frankfurt in the 2023/2024 school year

Offer	Responsibility with the non-formal education partner	Responsibility with the state Hesse	Responsibility with the consulate	Number of co-operating schools
Albanian			yes	0
Macedonian			yes	1
Bosnian	Deutsch-Bosnisch-Herzegowinischer Kulturverein			1
Spanish	Instituto Cervantes			7
Slovenian	SKPD Sava e.V., Slevelander Kultur- und Bildungsverein	No specification possible	No specification possible	No specification possible
Italian	CGIL - Bildungswerk e.V.	yes		11
Portuguese			yes	2
Serbian		yes	yes	6
Turkish		yes	yes	48
Greek			yes	2
Croatian			yes	11

Table 5 highlights the highly heterogeneous organisational structure of the various heritage language education offerings in Frankfurt. In total, at least 89 individual offers of heritage language instruction could be identified, covering eleven different languages. Turkish is by far the most frequently offered language, with 48 schools participating, whereas Macedonian and Bosnian are mentioned by only one school each.

With regard to organisational responsibility, four non-formal educational partners are involved, accounting for approximately 36% of all offers. Consulates are responsible for seven cases (about 27%), while in three instances (roughly 10%) responsibility is shared between the State of Hesse and either a non-formal partner or a consulate. The remaining offers are coordinated directly by the State of Hesse itself (around 27%).

From the perspective of the study's research questions, these findings are significant for several reasons. In terms of forms of co-operation, heritage language education represents a particularly formalised type of partnership between schools and external institutional actors such as consulates, cultural associations, or state education authorities. Regarding the focus of language education and the promotion of multilingualism, these programmes are the only ones in the dataset that explicitly address languages other than German, thereby providing the clearest institutional recognition of multilingual repertoires. However, their fragmented

organisational structure and uneven distribution across schools reveal that multilingualism remains weakly institutionalised and largely reliant on external initiative rather than internal school engagement—which in turn limits the extent to which these co-operations penetrate the formal education system.

Table 6. Non-formal educational co-operation for foreign language acquisition

Offer	non-formal partner	Number of co-operating schools	Target group	Type of co-operation
Frühe Fremdsprache Französisch	Deutsch-Französisches Jugendwerk	1	P	S
Día de español	Instituto Cervantes	1	O	PR
Schools on The English Theatre Stage	Frankfurt	3	O	PR

Abbreviations: P – primary school pupils, O – other pupils, SWS – school websites, PR – project-related co-operation

Table 6 presents the co-operations that focus on foreign-language education. In total, three offers were identified in this category, involving five schools. These programmes cover the languages English, French, and German, with each programme centring on one of these target languages.

In terms of target groups, one co-operation is aimed at primary school pupils, while the other two address students at secondary level. Regarding the types of co-operation, one initiative can be classified as a systematic co-operation, whereas the remaining two are project-based. From an analytical perspective, these findings complement the overall picture of language education in Frankfurt by showing that foreign-language education—in contrast to both German language support and heritage-language teaching—appears only marginally in the field of educational co-operation. The limited number of initiatives and their concentration in short-term project formats indicate that foreign-language education plays a comparatively minor role in inter-institutional collaboration, despite its curricular relevance within schools.

Table 7. Non-formal educational co-operation on multilingualism in the narrower sense

Offer	non-formal partner	Number of schools	Target group	Type of co-operation
Bücherkoffer	Chancenreich e.V.	SWS: 12 NFWS: 32	P, Parents	TE/PR
Schaworalle	Förderverein Roma	2	P + O (with reference to romania)	H/V
Viadukt	Evangelischer Verein für Jugendsozialarbeit in FFM e.V.	3	O	H/V

Only three co-operations were identified that explicitly pursue the goal of promoting multilingualism (see Table 6). Together, these initiatives involve between 17 and 37 schools, depending on whether the numbers reported on the schools' websites or those provided by the respective non-formal partners are used as the basis. In terms of their structural configuration, two of the co-operations correspond to the type of horizontal and vertical networking, while one represents a hybrid form combining features of project-related co-operation and thematic exchange.

These multilingualism-oriented co-operations therefore constitute a small but analytically significant subgroup within the overall landscape of language education initiatives in Frankfurt. They differ from the other categories not only in their explicit recognition of linguistic diversity, but also in the breadth of institutional participation and scope of collaboration they entail. The following section presents these three cases in greater detail, outlining their specific focus, target groups, and forms of co-operation.

As part of the project called „Frankfurter Bücherkoffer“, second graders are given a suitcase containing books in several languages. The suitcase goes from week to week to another child, who may take it home. The suitcase aims to improve educational opportunities, motivate children to read and promote linguistic diversity. By allowing the suitcase to be taken home, those responsible hope to build a bridge between learning at school and learning at home, as well as to involve parents more closely. The suitcase also contains an accompanying programme with information in several languages, as well as suggestions for parents to read together with their children and materials for teachers to use in the classroom.

The Schaworalle project is organised as a co-operation between the Roma Support Association, a primary school and a secondary school. The target group are Romani-speaking Roma children who are to 'get to know their culture and language of origin', and at the same time receive support in other subjects in both Romani and German. The partner schools where the children are formally enrolled send the children to Schaworalle's lessons, which are specially adapted to their needs and can take them through to their secondary school leaving certificates. Lessons in Romani are an important part of the programme, as are lessons in German.

Viadukt is aimed at teenagers and young adults with a migration and/or refugee background aged between 18 and 27 who are therefore no longer obliged to attend school, which conversely also means that they are outside the scope of compulsory state schooling while they are still on the way to their first school leaving certificate. A key characteristic of the target group, which is otherwise characterised as very heterogeneous on the website of the non-formal education provider, is their status as learners of German as a second language. The teachers are said to have knowledge of culturally, linguistically and trauma-sensitive teaching methods; formal qualifications are not mentioned. The co-operation agreement with the schools (evening secondary schools) states that the teachers are subject to the supervision of the church organisation. Viadukt is closely linked to its partner schools. The aim of the

project is to support the participants in their preparation for a qualification at the partner schools (Hauptschule or Realschule). To this end, Viadukt sends full-time and volunteer teachers to support the school teachers as team-teaching partners and also offers in-depth lessons in the afternoon. The teaching content is characterised in all data sources (interviews, website and co-operation agreement) as ‘supplementary’, and as a response to current needs on the part of the school. As with Schaworalle, the content and objectives are therefore largely narrowly defined by the schools and measured against formal curricula. Viadukt utilises the school’s premises and is oriented towards its time structures.

Discussion and conclusions

The presentation of results builds on the two analytical dimensions defined in the methodological framework: (1) the four types of co-operation and (2) the three forms of language education. Although not all twelve theoretical category combinations occurred in practice, this matrix served to identify dominant patterns and overlaps across the field.

In order to systematically address the study’s research questions, the discussion is further structured along four guiding dimensions: (1) the forms of co-operation identified, (2) their specific orientations in terms of language education, (3) their contribution to the promotion of multilingualism, and (4) the degree to which they are embedded in the formal education system. Together, these dimensions provide an integrated framework for interpreting the findings and situating them within broader debates on multilingualism and educational co-operation in migration societies.

Across the cooperation initiatives identified, four principal types could be distinguished: thematic exchange, project-related cooperation, systematic cooperation, and horizontal and vertical networking. The majority of collaborations belong to the project-related type—short-term, goal-specific partnerships that focus on immediate educational challenges, such as language support for recently arrived pupils. A smaller number of initiatives constitute thematic exchanges, often realised in the form of conferences, specialist meetings, or inter-institutional dialogues. Only a few cases, notably Viadukt and Schaworalle, exhibit the characteristics of systematic cooperation or horizontal and vertical networking, with long-term commitments, multi-level structures, and shared decision-making mechanisms.

This distribution highlights that cooperation in the field of language education is both widespread and fragmented. The dominance of project-related formats indicates a high level of activity but also a lack of structural continuity. Cooperation often depends on external funding or non-formal partners’ initiative rather than being a stable, policy-anchored element of educational governance.

Most cooperation initiatives focus on the acquisition and consolidation of German as the language of schooling, aligning with the education system’s monolingual orientation. This concentration on German reflects broader historical and institutional logics of integration through linguistic assimilation. Heritage and foreign languages play a considerably smaller

role. Only the field of heritage language education, encompassing at least eleven languages, represents a large-scale effort addressing languages other than German. Yet, these programmes are organisationally fragmented: four are run by non-formal partners, seven by consulates, and three through shared responsibility with the State of Hesse. In relative terms, non-formal actors thus manage roughly one third of the offerings, illustrating their significant yet uneven role in maintaining linguistic diversity.

Multilingualism in a narrower sense emerges as a central goal in only three cooperation programmes—Schaworalle, Viadukt, and Bücherkoffer. Each represents a distinct configuration within the typology described above. Bücherkoffer exemplifies a project-related cooperation: time-bound, awareness-raising, and limited in institutional reach. While it successfully involves both parents and teachers in thematic exchanges around multilingualism, its short-term nature and lack of curricular integration constrain its long-term impact. In contrast, Schaworalle and Viadukt embody systematic and networked forms of cooperation that bridge educational levels and organisational boundaries. They engage formal schools, non-formal institutions, and - in the case of Viadukt - state-level structures in a sustained collaboration. These partnerships demonstrate that where multilingualism becomes an explicit institutional concern, cooperation tends to acquire a more durable and structurally embedded form.

The degree of institutional anchoring varies markedly. The prevalence of short-term, externally initiated projects reveals that most collaborations remain peripheral to the formal education system, operating at its margins rather than within its core structures. Even where schools participate actively, cooperation often serves as an add-on rather than a transformative mechanism. Systematic and networked cooperations, although rare, illustrate a higher degree of institutionalisation, as they involve resource sharing, co-design of educational measures, and, in some cases, recognition within formal policy frameworks. However, even these examples largely operate within a German-dominant institutional logic, and multilingualism remains weakly institutionalised overall.

From this perspective, primary schools appear as particularly active sites of cooperation. Their institutional mandate to promote equal opportunities for all pupils - rooted historically in the Weimar model of a democratic “school for all” - renders them receptive to partnerships that support language learning and inclusion. Yet, it is striking that teachers themselves are seldom addressed as a target group in these initiatives. This points to the structural separation between school-based practice and teacher education, which remains largely under the control of the state and thus less accessible to non-formal actors.

Taken together, the findings portray a cooperation landscape characterised by breadth without systemic depth. Numerous actors contribute to language education, yet the initiatives are rarely interconnected or sustained over time. The cooperation forms identified show a clear hierarchy of structural integration: while project-related and thematic formats dominate the field, systematic and networked collaborations - though exceptional - demonstrate greater

potential for embedding multilingualism institutionally. Where such cooperation succeeds, it does so by establishing bridges between policy levels, institutions, and communities, thereby challenging the structural boundaries of the monolingual school system.

Limitations and further research

These conclusions must, however, be interpreted with caution. The study is based on a single urban context (Frankfurt/Main) and a limited empirical base - mainly online documentation and one expert interview. Its analytical focus lies on organisational structures rather than on classroom practices or learners' linguistic development. This broad mapping allows for identifying structural patterns and institutional logics but limits the depth of insight into pedagogical implementation and long-term outcomes. Further studies should therefore expand both the empirical scope and methodological depth, combining document analysis with multi-perspective fieldwork, including voices of teachers, pupils, and policymakers.

Despite these limitations, the present analysis provides a systematic overview of how multilingualism is institutionally negotiated in the intersection of formal and non-formal education. It highlights the persistence of a monolingual order within formal schooling while also identifying sites of transformation where multilingualism begins to gain structural legitimacy through cooperative forms that transcend traditional institutional boundaries.

Conflict of interest

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