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ORIGINAL PAPER

Integrating the lived experience of language with discursive approaches to policy: an exploration of Luxembourgish primary school students' accounts of German language education policy

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Abstract

This paper expands on discursive approaches to language policy by incorporating the notion of the lived experience of language (Busch, 2015). More specifically, I analyse young people's lived experience of language education policy by focusing on students in Luxembourg who are educated in a language that is not their main or home language. Indeed, in this educational context, a diverse student population navigates German-medium primary education. I explore the case studies of two students whose descriptions of their lived experience of German language education policy are marked by the themes of (negative) affective orientations, (low) language proficiency, educational difficulty, (low) academic performance and internalised views of deficiency. Data for this research was generated through qualitative, semi-structured interviews. The thematic analysis highlights the emotional ramifications and educational difficulties young people may face when there is a disconnect between their own linguistic repertoires and the language regime at school, and when they are not highly proficient in the medium of instruction. This provides insight into a larger phenomenon as educational contexts around the world can constitute sites of struggle for young people who are educated in languages in which they are still developing proficiency. Thus, foregrounding the lived experience of language (education) policy contributes to language policy scholarship by pushing understandings of policy beyond its social and discursive nature to include its individually lived, emotional dimension.

Keywords Discursive approaches to language policy · Language education policy · Lived experience of language · Multilingual education · Research with young people

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Introduction

Education occupies a central place in the lives of young people, exerting important influence over their futures with the potential of being a site of struggle. Language education policy in particular functions as a mechanism through which education systems contribute to the maintenance of social and cultural order by reproducing and legitimising the interests and values of the dominant social group (Bourdieu, 1991; Heller, 2006). In educational contexts that do not actively support equitable education and opportunities through policy and practice, young people from ethnic and linguistic minority backgrounds are particularly likely to find themselves in "fragile" positions (Tavares, 2020a). This may especially be the case when students are educated in languages that are not their main or home language– a situation that applies to many students around the world (García et al., 2012). In the Global South, for instance, more and more primary and secondary education systems have been adopting English as the medium of instruction (EMI), with "neoliberal ideologies of competition, choice and entrepreneurship" acting as key factors pushing such policy changes in many contexts (Phyak & Sah, 2022, p.5). However, empirical studies have shown that in many of these settings, EMI policies are implemented in ways that reinforce social and educational inequalities (see e.g. Sibomana, 2022; Milligan et al., 2020; Sah, 2022). The use of a language of instruction in which students are still developing proficiency, regardless of whether this is English or another language, can not only negatively affect students' "academic achievement and cognitive growth, but also their self-perception, self-esteem, emotional security, and their ability to participate meaningfully in the educational process" (Tollefson & Tsui, 2003, p.17; see also Milligan et al., 2020; and Back et al., 2020, pp.389–399). This paper analyses the experiences of young people with language education policy in contexts marked by a disconnect between their linguistic repertoires the official language regime at school.

More specifically, this paper explores the lived experience of language (Busch, 2015) of young people in connection with language education policy in the Luxembourgish state education system. Here, many students are educated in a language that is not their main or home language, as a linguaculturally diverse student population navigates a German-medium primary school system in which French and Luxembourgish are also part of the "language regime". This term was defined by Kroskrity (2000, p.3) as drawing attention to the presence of the political power of language, as the latter is often viewed as apolitical or asocial. Drawing on this definition, I refer to the trilingual language curriculum in the Luxembourgish state education system as a *language regime* to signal that language education policies are not random or natural, but the result of politically motivated and socio-historically situated choices.

Although frequently positioned as a model for multilingual education in the European context, the Luxembourgish education system's contribution to the reproduction of social stratification is well-documented, affecting predominantly students from language minority and low socioeconomic status backgrounds (OECD, 2019; SCRIPT and LUCET 2016; ONQS, 2022; LUCET et al. 2024). However, little is known about the lived experience of the students behind these statistics. Particularly at primary school level where students develop their literacy skills and where decisions are taken as to their secondary school trajectories, more needs to be known

about the experiences of the large number of students who do not have a Germanic (i.e. Luxembourgish) language background and are navigating the German-literacy programme. By analysing the lived experience of language education policy of Luxembourgish primary school students, the findings brought forward in this paper have implications and applications for policy makers, educators and teachers who wish to create and implement more equitable educational policy and practice. Moreover, the innovative integration of the notion of the lived experience of language (Busch, 2015) with discursive approaches to language policy (Barakos & Unger, 2016) aligns language policy research with affective turns that have taken place in other research fields. This pushes the conceptualisation of policy beyond its socially and discursively constructed nature to include its individually lived, emotional dimension.

A critical view of language education policy in the fourth wave of language policy research

Building on the three main paradigmatic shifts in language policy (and planning) research identified by Ricento (2000), Johnson (2016) outlines the features of the fourth, and current, phase of language policy scholarship, which expands on the critical turn that characterised the third phase (Tollefson, 1991). This paper draws on the main pillars of fourth wave language policy scholarship, where issues surrounding language, power and social justice represent key interests alongside a continued focus on ideology that emerged in the third phase (Ricento, 2000). This paper engages with issues of language and power by exploring how young people experience language education policy (LEP) and its impacts in educational contexts. Such an approach warrants a language ideological perspective, as LEP is a broad concept that refers to ideological mechanisms that function as a key tool in the reproduction of unequal power structures. From this perspective, LEP covers a wide range of official textual, as well as overt and covert policies, moreover including various mechanisms from which practiced policies are derived such as textbooks, teaching practices, curricula and tests (Shohamy, 2006). Being part of wider educational agendas and language regimes (Kroskrity, 2000), language education policies are underpinned by political, social and economic interests (Tollefson & Tsui, 2003). As such, they not only "turn ideology into practice" but also "create and impose language behavio[u]r in a system which it is compulsory for all children to participate in" (Shohamy, 2006, pp.76, 77). This makes educational contexts an important site for critical analysis.

Exploring the experiences of young people with LEP requires a broad view of policy actors that acknowledges the ability of individuals to construct meanings of policy within wider socio-political structures. This is connected to another principal concern in fourth wave language policy research: moving beyond simplified micro/macro dialectics (Johnson, 2016, p.16) to discover how the meanings of policies beyond textual documents are understood, implemented and enacted by various policy actors in "processes of appropriation" (Mortimer, 2016, p.350). By including the emotional dimension of policy on an individually experienced level, the analysis in this paper expands this conceptual scope beyond the involvement of individuals in

the appropriation and implementation of policy to conceptualise them as *experiencing* actors. This is explained in more detail in the following section.

Finally, fourth phase language policy scholarship is concerned with exploring theoretical frameworks through the generation and analysis of empirical data with increased attention to methodology, as well as "ethics, positionality and advocacy" (Johnson, 2016, p.14). This is reflected in the prominence of ethnographic (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007; Mortimer, 2016; da Costa Cabral, 2020), engaged (Davis, 2014; Phyak & Bui, 2014), and discursive (Barakos & Unger, 2016; Cushing, 2019) approaches to language policy; three productive and to some extent overlapping research strands that all share a critical perspective. This paper, too, is concerned with social justice and advocacy, and highlights the lived experience of young people to support calls for more equitable policies in education systems. This research provides insight into their experiences and perspectives supported by empirical data that was generated together with young people through a qualitative participant-centred research design.

Integrating the lived experience of language with discursive approaches to language policy

Situated firmly within the fourth phase of language policy scholarship, discursive approaches to language policy (DALP) view language policy as a "multiphenomenon that is constituted and enacted in and through discourse" and "constructs, transports and recontextualises ideologies about the value of language and their speakers" (Barakos & Unger, 2016, p.1,2). As such, DALP are practice-based (Bonacina-Pugh, 2012; Barakos & Unger, 2016) and employ an analysis that traces the "trajectories and contact points between different policy layers" where they are devised, interpreted and appropriated (Cushing, 2019, p.3; 2020; Mortimer, 2016). The conceptualisation of policy as socially and discursively enacted processes creates an analytical space that, bridging individual actors and wider social structures, allows for the exploration of how individuals may support, negotiate and resist policies (and underpinning ideologies) (Barakos, 2016, p.43). This understanding of policy captures the complexity inherent in the connection between "policy actors, action, and the political, economic and social structures shaping these" (Barakos, 2016, p.24). DALP have productively been applied in a variety of contexts including private sector businesses (Barakos, 2020), citizenship and language testing (Kremer & Horner, 2016), as well as monolingual and multilingual educational contexts (Cushing, 2019; Weber, 2016; Mortimer, 2016; Poudel & Choi, 2021).

The role of young people as active participants in language policy in educational contexts has been a growing research interest (Boyd & Huss, 2017; Lourêiro & Neumann, 2020; Rickert, 2023) and research with, rather than on, young people and their perspectives is still relatively new (Prasad, 2015; James, 2007). In this light, Cushing and Helks (2021) have addressed the under-researched area of "student voice" in language policy research in relation to experiences with grammar and pedagogy in the UK. They analyse students' experiences at the end of the complex trajectory of policy implementation where young people "typically ha[ve] very little agency in terms of

how policy gets transformed into material actions" (2021, p.3). Expanding this line of enquiry further, this paper explores individually experienced dimensions of language education policy of young people in Luxembourg. To achieve this, I integrate discursive approaches to language policy with the concept of the lived experience of language (*Spracherleben*), which is grounded in phenomenology.

As a philosophical branch, phenomenology seeks to understand how individuals make sense of what they experience at the intersection between the subjective mind and the outside world (Zahavi, 2019, pp.117, 30). In particular, I draw on Busch's (2015) definition of the lived experience of language which is grounded in the phenomenology of perception of philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, focusing on direct experiences of the bodily and emotional dimensions of speech. Busch (2015, p.341) defines the lived experience of language as comprising of the "emotionally loaded and bodily inscribed experience" of language and interaction. This can become part of bodily memory and the linguistic repertoire in the form of attitudes and language practices through intensity or recurrence of an initial experience (2015, p.350). Due to its phenomenological roots, the concept of the lived experience of language is explored from a first-person perspective and centres on views of the individual as a subject that is able to act and experience. In this light, Busch (2012, 2015) describes the bodily being as both the basis of the speaking and experiencing subject which is "formed through and in language and discourse", as well as being that which "positions the subject in the world" (2015, pp.346, 350). Integrating the lived experience of language with DALP provides deeper insights into how individuals perceive and evaluate language policies, how they emotionally and bodily experience language policies that impact them, the consequences this has on their lives and sense of self, and the feelings, emotions and attitudes connected to all this. This can shed more light on the individually experienced dimensions of policy within social and discursive policy enactments, themselves located within wide complex networks of actors, discourses, and ideologies.

In relation to young people in educational contexts specifically, the approach outlined above conceptualises young people as *experiencing* policy actors and enables the exploration of how language education policy impacts students directly: this includes how they live and experience language policies that shape their daily lives at school and their educational trajectories more generally, and the effects of these on their emotional and bodily memory and sense of self. These are critical insights connected to the intersubjective, social, emotional and bodily dimensions of language (Kramsch, 2009; Busch, 2015; Prasad, 2015). Other research fields have already developed a growing interest in these dimensions following an "affective turn" (see e.g. Pavlenko, 2013 for Second Language Acquisition, Back et al., 2020 for Foreign Language Learning). I will illustrate the insights granted by the concept of the lived experience of language (education) policy through the analysis of empirical data, and I will return to and expand on its affordances in the conclusion of this paper. The following section provides contextual information on Luxembourg and explains the educational system that the focal students introduced in this paper navigate.

The trilingual language regime of the Luxembourgish education system

Located on the Romance/Germanic language border (Fehlen, 2002), Luxembourg is a small state whose population on 1st January 2024 counted 672,100 individuals and was made up of 47.3% resident foreigners (STATEC, 2024, p.14). Luxembourg is officially trilingual; recognising Luxembourgish, German and French as languages of the state, yet the actual language situation is more complex. Traditional patterns of language use are based on a "spoken/written distinction" whereby Luxembourgish has been used predominantly for spoken functions with French and German predominantly used for written functions, although this pattern has been in the process of being partially reversed (Horner & Weber, 2008, p.70). As such, the written use of Luxembourgish has increased, especially, though not only, in the new media (Wagner, 2013; de Bres & Franziskus, 2014). German has become the "least socially used" of the three officially recognised languages (Tavares, 2020b, p.235), and has been described as a quiet language in Luxembourg which only a (limited, mostly Luxembourgish-dominant) part of the population uses receptively through reading (e.g. newspapers) and listening (e.g. television) (Scheer, 2017). In addition, a large number of cross-border workers contribute to the strong presence of French as a spoken lingua franca. The majority hail mainly from France and Belgium, with a smaller number coming from Germany (233,300 in total in 2024, STATEC, 2024, p.21). Varieties of Portuguese are also widely spoken in Luxembourg, and Portuguese nationals constitute the largest ethnic minority at almost 15% of the total population (STATEC, 2022). This is the result of immigration from Portugal (and Cabo Verde) to Luxembourg starting in the late 1960s, which was facilitated by labour agreements between both governments. At that time, the need for labour force concerned predominantly the building and construction sector and still today, many members of the Lusophone community predominantly work in the construction, as well as cleaning and hospitality sectors (Marques, 2019).

A major pillar of the state education system is the Luxembourgish "trilingual ideal" of high proficiency in Luxembourgish, German and French (Weber & Horner, 2012). At primary school level, German plays a predominant role as it is used as the medium of instruction and for teaching basic literacy skills, in addition to being a curricular language subject. French is used in a playful way during Kindergarten and in Year one, while becoming a full language subject towards the end of Year two. Luxembourgish is taught for an hour per week. Its use during the teaching of academic subjects is discouraged by official language policies, however, in practice it is spoken extensively by teachers and students in ways that fulfil social and academic scaffolding purposes (Davis, 1994; Weber, 2009a; Redinger, 2010, Muller et al., 2019).

It is the use of German as the literacy language in primary school in particular that constitutes an important obstacle for many students. Due to the linguistic proximity between Luxembourgish and German as West Germanic languages, Standard German has been used as the language of instruction and for the teaching of basic literacy skills (commonly referred to as *alphabetisation* in Luxembourg) since the 19th century (Horner & Weber, 2008, p.107). The teaching of and through German still today follows a "second mother tongue approach" (Scheer, 2017), which is based

on the assumption that students with sufficient proficiency in Luxembourgish are able to draw on this knowledge to develop literacy skills through and proficiency in Standard German (Scheer, 2017; Weber, 2008; Weth, 2018). In this light, in 2018, the Minister of Education stated that "(…) our [education] system until now is still geared towards children who, at the age of six, master the Luxembourgish language very well, so that they can learn to read and write in German without a problem" (Meisch, 2018, p.34, my translation). Thus, the language regime in Luxembourgish primary schools is designed for and advantages students with strong Luxembourgish proficiency (De Korne, 2012, p.484). Large numbers of students with non-Luxembourgish/Germanic language backgrounds, in turn, experience inequality already at the beginning of their educational trajectory through the German-literacy programme (Tavares, 2020a, p.327; Weber, 2009b).

Indeed, in this education system that is frequently portrayed as a model for multilingual education in national as well as European discourses (Scheer, 2017), this language regime does not offer the needed flexibility to accommodate the diverse needs of a highly heterogeneous student population. In recent decades, the number of students with Luxembourgish as their only home language has been steadily declining. In 2020/21, 45% of primary school students had citizenships other than Luxembourgish, 66.9% indicated to have a first language other than Luxembourgish and 35.4% of students indicated to not speak any of the officially recognised languages in the home (MENJE/SCRIPT, 2022a, pp.34, 35, 37). Among the diverse linguacultural make-up of the student body, a large number of students have a Romance-language background (e.g. varieties of French, Portuguese, Italian). For many students, German does not feature as a widely used language in their communities (Scheer, 2017; Tavares, 2020b), and may be virtually absent from their extracurricular lives (Weber, 2009a, p.200).

Many of the students who face difficulties with the education system and specifically the pressures of the German-literacy programme repeat grades or leave school early (Tavares, 2020a, p.318; Davis, 1994). Particularly students with a Lusophone language background are overrepresented in statistics on grade repetition (MENJE, 2017a) and early school leavers (MENJE, 2017b). There also exists a marked demographic difference between the two main tracks that exist at secondary school level: *secondaire classique* (commonly referred to as *lycée classique*) is the more prestigious stream and prepares students for further academic study. *Secondaire général* (commonly referred to as *lycée technique*) is overall more vocationally-oriented. Decisions as to which stream a student can attend are based on an orientational student tracking process. This decision is based on educational performance during the final two school years, results in standardised tests in German, French and mathematics taken in the final year, as well as an optional psychological evaluation. In 2020/21, 45.8% of students in *secondaire général* did not have Luxembourgish citizenship and 27.6% of students had Portuguese citizenship (MENJE/SCRIPT, 2022b, p.12). In *secondaire classique*, however, only 28.5% of students did not have Luxembourgish citizenship and only 7.7% of students were Portuguese (2022b, p.11).

In response to these various problems in the education system, alternative models have been put in place in recent years. Since 2016, six state-funded international schools have opened across Luxembourg, offering French-, English- and (less so)

German-language tracks. They offer an important alternative for students who struggle with the rigid language regime of the regular state education system and who are now able to choose a language track at primary and secondary school level. Additionally, since September 2022, four regular state primary schools have been piloting an additional track in which basic literacy skills are taught in French. It is possible that such parallel French-literacy tracks may be rolled out nationally starting in 2026/27. Notwithstanding these recent educational alternatives, the state education system at primary school level has– at its core– not undergone any major changes since the early 20th century and continues to disadvantage students from minority language and/or low socio-economic status backgrounds (OECD, 2019; SCRIPT and LUCET 2016; ONQS, 2022; LUCET et al. 2024).

A qualitative inquiry with young people

In light of the inequalities embedded within the Luxembourgish state educational language regime, this paper explores the lived experience of language education policy of primary school students who reported to struggle with, and because of, the teaching and use of German in their education. The analysis is based on case studies of two multilingual students with a Portuguese language (i.e. Lusophone) background. While this demographic group is overrepresented in many measurements of educational inequality, the analysis is not intended to generalise the experiences of the focal students to all Lusophone students in Luxembourg. Rather, it aims to bring to the fore the experiences of young people who usually remain hidden behind statistics.

The data analysed in this paper stems from a larger research project (Muller 2020) that involved a total of 34 participants aged between 10 and 13 in their penultimate year of primary school in Luxembourg city. Fieldwork entailed a total of 12 weeks during which I participated in students' lives at school as well as in the optional after-school club. This time spent together was key for building rapport with students and gaining a detailed understanding of their day-to-day realities at school. The overall research design followed a participant-centred approach (Punch, 2002), meaning that the research was not conducted on participants, but rather with and for them by providing a platform for their perspectives and experiences. In line with this, I refer to the students as "young people" rather than "children" as I subscribe to and wish to reinforce a view of young people as socially competent actors (Qvortrup 1994; James & James, 2004).

The case studies below draw on data generated during two semi-structured, qualitative interviews in June 2018 that were designed to elicit in-depth narratives on participants' lived experience of language. These interviews combined one-on-one conversations with interactive Likert scales as visual prompts for reflexion and discussion (see Figs. 1 and 2). More specifically, students were asked to place individual school subjects on the scale to reflect their attitude towards and experience with them. The scale featured three smiley faces at the ends and in the middle of the scale; representing sad, neutral and happy faces to illustrate the weighting of the scale. These smiley faces also served to activate reflections on emotions and feelings, and acted as a reference point during discussion to elicit narratives that focused on affective

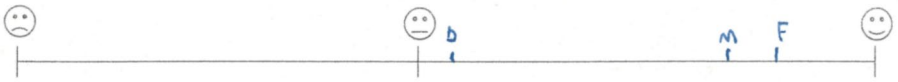

Fig. 1 Lurdes' Likert scale: D = German figures in the middle, M = maths and F = French figure on the right side

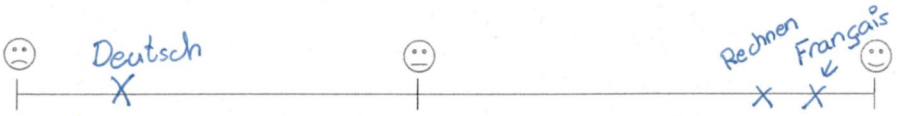

Fig. 2 Naruto's Likert scale: Deutsch = German features on the left end, Rechnen = maths and Français = French feature on the right end

elements in participants' lived experience of these subjects and connected policies. Incorporating visual methods in the generation of empirical data can add rich nuances if meaning-making processes are understood as a "mixed system" in which multiple modes (e.g. verbal, visual) complement each other (Barthes, 1968). Moreover, multimodal research methods that involve such reflexive visualisation processes allow participants to first activate knowledge prior to involving the researcher, and this may put them in a more confident position during the ensuing conversation (Literat, 2013; Chik, 2019). The multimodality of this Likert scale activity, combining the relative positioning of subjects on the scale together with verbal explanations, provided deep insights into students' lived experience of various subjects and language education policy. The following analysis focuses specifically on German as a curricular language subject, as well as its role as the medium of instruction and testing in other subjects.

The interviews were transcribed and analysed following a thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The two case studies illustrate some of the wider thematic trends identified in this fashion that marked all participants' narratives: affective orientation, language proficiency, educational difficulty and academic performance. However, more importantly, the aim of the analysis of the following case studies is to provide detailed insight into the individual lived experience of German as a curricular language subject and medium of instruction and testing (though these are often intertwined). In this light, Lurdes[1] and Naruto were selected as participants who discussed in detail their educational difficulties with, and because of, German at school. Both participants were born in Luxembourg, had a Lusophone background and were 12 years old at the time of the interview. They were selected as focal participants for this paper because of their detailed articulations of their experiences. These cannot be generalised, but are nonetheless suggestive of the experiences of a wider segment of the school population in Luxembourg and more generally of students who are educated in a language that is not their main or home language.

[1] All names are pseudonyms that participants self-selected.

The lived experience of German language education policy in Luxembourgish primary school

Lurdes: "I am really zero, I am not good at German"

Lurdes uses Luxembourgish, Portuguese and French as home languages. Her mother was born in Portugal and her father was born in Luxembourg to Portuguese-born parents. As a result, Portuguese is the dominant language within the nuclear family. Lurdes uses predominately Luxembourgish with her two brothers and described the flexible use of Luxembourgish, French, and Portuguese as normal for interactions with friends and family.

Lurdes describes her lived experience of German at school as centred mostly around emotions of dislike and aversion: the expression *ech hunn Däitsch net gär* [I don't like German] (with variations) is articulated on multiple occasions in her interview. This affective orientation is also reflected in the positioning of German (D) on Lurdes' Likert scale (Fig. 1).

Rather than its absolute position in the centre of the scale, it is the relative positioning in final place far behind mathematics and French that is telling about Lurdes' general attitude towards German. She first placed French and maths on the scale and German last. Lurdes narrated this process as she was drawing and discussed her competences in all three subjects:

Extract 1[2]

Lurdes: (…) Däitsch géing ech ongeféier do maache well Däitsch hunn ech net sou gär, well ech sinn och bëssen traureg mat Däitsch well ech hunn Däitsch net gär.

(…)

Ech si gutt am Franséischen, am Rechnen, ausser et ass den Däitschen (.) den Däitsch wat mech bësse stéiert well do ass bëssen, keng Anung, ech sinn net gutt do.

Lurdes: (…) German I would put roughly here because I don't like German so much, because I'm also a little bit sad at German because I don't like German.

(…)

I'm good at French, at maths, except it is German (.) German that bothers me a little because there is like, I don't know, I'm not good there.

[2] Original interview extracts in Luxembourgish, English translations are mine. Original extracts and translations have been minimally edited for easier comprehension. Transcription conventions: WORD = emphasis. ((word)) = descriptions. (…) = content omitted

Extract 1 provides insight into Lurdes' aversion to German. She brings up feelings of sadness (*ech sinn och bëssen traureg* [I'm also a little sad]) as well as annoyance (*wat mech bësse stéiert* [what bothers me a bit]). These affective elements are all key to Lurdes' lived experience of German, and are also intertwined with her negative educational experiences with German that are marked by difficulties and internalised views of deficiency: *ech sinn net gutt do* [I'm not good there]. Deficit discourses, as they relate to educational contexts, include "the negative perceptions, assumptions, generali[s]ations, and beliefs (…) rooted in the idea that marginali[s]ed groups lack certain qualities (…)" (Carales & López, 2020, p.104). As such, deficit views are ideologies that construct difference as an educational obstacle and reify certain characteristics as the norm (Shapiro, 2014, p.387). Deficit discourses thus always intersect with wider discriminatory and devalorising societal discourses and ideologies that contribute to the positioning of certain students as linguistically and/or academically deficient. Concerned individuals may resist such views (see e.g. Shapiro, 2014) or internalise and self-direct them, which applies to Lurdes.

Lurdes elaborates on her educational difficulties with German as the language of instruction, discussing an uncomfortable lived experience of this language that she experiences as *komplikéiert* [complicated], *komesch* [weird], and that she mentions at another point of the interview she somewhat resists (*Däitsch wëll ech net léieren* [German I don't want to learn]). When asked whether it would be easier for her if French was the language of instruction, Lurdes confirms this and describes how she occasionally uses the French-language maths textbook of a newcomer student in her class:

Extract 2

Lurdes: Natalie huet jo de Buch op Franséisch a puermol am Rechnen do, mir maache jo Sachaufgaben. Ma an do steet ëmmer alles op Däitsch a wann e Wuert ass wat ech net gutt verstinn, da froen ech Natalie wann ech (…) deen Abschnitt ka liesen an da verstinn ech e bësse besser.

Sarah: Well dat op Franséisch dann ass?

Lurdes: Jo well do sinn och bësse méi Wierder déi bësse méi gutt erkläre well wann zum Beispill sou déck schwéier Wierder sinn am Däitschen, an am Franséischen do si méi liicht (…) Wierder. Ma, an dofir froen ech hatt ëmmer wann ech dierf liese well dat ass am Fong bësse schwéier den Däitsch, dofir.

Lurdes: Natalie has the book in French and sometimes in maths we do word problems. And everything there is always in German and if there is a word that I don't understand well, then I ask Natalie if I (…) can read that paragraph and then I understand a bit better.

Sarah: Because that's in French then?

Lurdes: Yes because there are also a few more words that explain a bit better because if for example there are like really difficult words in German, and in French there are easier (…) words. So, and that's why I always ask her if I can read because that is actually a bit difficult German, that's why.

The use of German as the language of instruction poses difficulties for Lurdes to the point where reading the instructions to mathematical word problems in a French-language textbook is experienced to be *méi liicht* [easier] and can *bësse méi gutt erklären* [explain a bit better]. The student referred to, Natalie, is a newcomer in the Luxembourgish education system from Northern Africa. At the time of data collection, she was learning German simultaneously to following most of the mainstream lessons where German was used as the language of instruction and in which she had access to French-language versions of the textbooks. Such alternative provisions are not systematically available for students who have been navigating the education system since the beginning, regardless of their linguistic repertoire.

Thus, while Lurdes holds no power over choosing the language of her textbooks, she actively seeks out linguistic support through her classmate's French-language textbook to support her understanding of lesson content whose official monolingual provision in only German poses difficulties for her. This underlines the obstacle that German as the language of schooling can pose to students who are still developing their German language proficiency.

Lurdes' educational difficulties with and because of German compound with emotions of aversion, sadness and discomfort. All of these elements have resulted in Lurdes having internalised the belief that German is a constant negative element in her educational trajectory, which emerged during a discussion of feelings of stress and fear when receiving graded tests:

Extract 3

Lurdes: Wa mer deen [Prüfung] zeréck hunn, well do bass de sou „O mäi Gott o mäi Gott wéi eng Nott", du biets grad fir eng gutt Nott (…) du bass einfach stresséiert.

Sarah: Jo jo jo. Bass de an all, fir all Prüfung, fir all Fach nämmlecht stresséiert oder bei puer Fächer, bei puer Prüfunge méi wéi bei aneren?

Lurdes: Bei Däitsch weess ech, ech wäert ni eng gutt Nott kréien, dofir. Et ass net ech wäert NI eng gutt Nott kréie mee bei Däitsch ass well dat ass deck schwéier an dofir, zemools bei de Verben.

Lurdes: When we get it [test] back, because then you're like "oh my god oh my god what grade", you're praying for a good grade (…) you're just stressed.

Sarah: Yes yes yes. Are you stressed the same for all tests, for all subjects, or are you more stressed for some subjects, some tests?

Lurdes: With German I know that I will never get a good grade, that's why. It's not that I will NEVER get a good grade but with German it's because that is really difficult and that's why, especially with the verbs.

Extract 3 provides insight into intense emotions of stress and fear that Lurdes experiences when receiving a graded test: this is the reported emotional experience in a specific situation that is the result of being subject to a monolingual language of instruction and testing policy in which no linguistic support is available. In relation to German tests specifically, there is an added element of resignation as Lurdes has resigned to the fact that German is *déck schwéier* [really difficult] and does not expect to get good grades. Despite the slight relativisation of "never" in her utterance on low expectations for German test grades, this belief highlights how repeated negative educational experiences connected to German mark Lurdes' educational trajectory as a student and German language learner, and her future aspirations on this path.

Internalised views of deficiency and low self-esteem emerge once more when Lurdes describes her expectations of entry to secondary school. Indeed, she articulates her hopes to attend a *"Technique"* (*secondaire général*) and did not consider the more prestigious *"Classique"* (*secondaire classique*) as an option for her:

Extract 4

Lurdes: Also ech hoffe mol Technique ze goen.

Sarah: Jo? Net Classique?

Lurdes: Nee Classique ass am Fong net fir mech well (…) am Fong da misst de schonn déck gutt an all Fach sinn. Ben dat ass net mäi Cas dofir ((otemt haart a séier an)), dat ass well ech sinn déck nul, ech sinn net gutt am Däitschen, wann ech gutt an all wär da jo, da géif ech vläicht Classique goen. Awer lo ginn ech Tech-, ech hoffe mol Technique ze goen (…).

Lurdes: Well I hope to go to Technique.

Sarah: Yes? Not Classique?

Lurdes: No Classique is actually not for me because (…) actually then you'd have to be already really good in all subjects. Well that is not my case that's why ((quick sharp inhale)), that's because I am really zero, I am not good at German, if I were good in all then yes, then maybe I would go to Classique. But now I'll go to Tech-, I hope to go to Technique (…).

Lurdes' hope and aspiration to attend a *secondaire général* and her rejection of the idea that she could attend a *secondaire classique* are based on repeated negative experiences and beliefs that have created an internalisation of deficit views. These are observable in relation to her perceived overall academic performance (*ech sinn déck nul* [I am really zero]), specifically in German (*ech sinn net gutt am Däitschen* [I

am not good at German]). Because repeated negative lived experiences can become part of the linguistic repertoire and influence an individual's sense of self (Busch, 2015), Lurdes' educational experience and academic performance specifically with, and because of, German language education policies influence the narrative that she has built around herself as a student and language learner. This lived experience of language education policy negatively influences her sense of self, which also impacts on her aspirations for future educational trajectories.

Naruto: "I understand almost nothing"

Naruto also uses Luxembourgish, Portuguese and French as home languages. His father was born in Portugal, and his mother was born in Portugal but moved to Luxembourg as a young child. Naruto speaks Luxembourgish with his older brother, Portuguese with this father, and uses Luxembourgish, French and Portuguese flexibly with his mother.

Naruto's lived experience of German at school is marked by educational difficulties as well as a dislike. When completing his Likert scale (Fig. 2), Naruto directly involved me in this process, asking me to guess what the cross at the very left end of the scale symbolised (see Extract 5).

Extract 5

Naruto: ((moolt en X ganz lénks op der Skala)) Wat mengs de?

Sarah: ((heh)) Däitsch?

Allen zwee: ((laachen))

Naruto: ((draws an X on the very left end of the scale)) Guess what?

Sarah: ((heh)) German?

Both: ((laugh))

Naruto's difficulties with and dislike of German had been so established by the end of my fieldwork period, that his question in Extract 5 can be interpreted as an inside joke between us. The answer to his question is understood by both of us to be obvious, which is confirmed by our immediate laughter following my response. Naruto's decision to involve me in the completion of his Likert scale in such a playful way highlights the benefits of incorporating (elements of) multimodal research methods in qualitative research, as they can support a participant-centered approach that enables and encourages research participants to be actively engaged in the research process.

Within Naruto's educational trajectory, he repeated Year two of primary school because he did not reach the German language competency levels required to progress to Year three. As a result, Naruto's narratives on his experience with German are consistently negative and linked to the grade repetition; a key event in his life whose

emotional weight strongly marked him. This is visible in Extract 6, where Naruto begins by recounting the ease with which he first started to learn German at the very beginning of primary school:

Extract 6

Naruto: Dat war ganz liicht fir mech mee dono gëtt ëmmer méi schwéier an da sinn ech duerchgefall.

Sarah: Firwat war dat, also am Ufank seess de dat war liicht, waars de och frou fir dat ze léieren?

Naruto: Mhm an duerno, wann zweet Schouljoer, wann ech sinn duerchgefall, war ech net frou a lo hunn ech net sou gär Däitsch.

Sarah: Weess de da firwat dass de duerchgefall bass?

Naruto: Wéinst Däitsch.

Sarah: Also soten si dat wier net gutt genuch oder?

Naruto: Mhm net gutt genuch well meng Mamm sot ëmmer jo du muss méi, méi Däitsch léieren. (…) Ech wollt wierklech léiere mee et ass einfach net gaangen. An da war ech schlecht an da jo, da sinn ech duerchgefall.

Naruto: That was really easy for me and then it became more difficult and then I had to repeat the year.

Sarah: Why was that, so at the beginning you say that was easy, were you also happy to learn it?

Naruto: Mhm and afterwards, in Year two, when I repeated the year, I wasn't happy and now I don't like German so much.

Sarah: Do you know why you repeated a year?

Naruto: Because of German.

Sarah: So did they say it [your proficiency] wasn't good enough or?

Naruto: Mhm not good enough because my mum always said yes you have to learn more, learn more German. (…) I really wanted to learn but it simply didn't work. And then I was bad and then yes, then I repeated the year.

Naruto sees his grade repetition as the result of a gradual increase in difficulty in German that he was unable to keep up with, and identifies this as being directly connected

to his low proficiency. The grade repetition is also positioned as the cause for the deterioration of his affective orientation towards German. In this extract, Naruto and his mother perceive the responsibility for improving his proficiency as lying with him and he reports on pressure as well as determination to improve (*ech wollt wierklech léieren* [I really wanted to learn]). However, his inability to reach the required competency level to progress to Year three caused the grade repetition, and this impacted on his perceived sense of self: Naruto experiences this as an educational failure, something he is to blame for and as a result he internalises a view of deficiency (*ech si schlecht* [I am bad]). Policies that set "unrealistic and unattainable" goals for students without offering adequate support often position students who do not attain the set expectations as failures (Shohamy, 2006, p.86), and connected to this, "differences in academic achievement tend to be attributed to perceived deficiencies in the students, rather than in the system" (Shapiro, 2014, p.390). Naruto's example illustrates this.

Naruto also reports on difficulties with German as the medium of instruction policy in other subjects, for instance, when he explains his Likert scale in more detail:

Extract 7

Naruto: Ech hunn hei gär, ech hu mega gär Rechnen. MEE et ass just och Däitsch ass, weess de, do muss ee liesen an et ass Däitsch, dat hunn ech net gär.

Sarah: Dat hues de net gär? Ass dat och schwéier heiansdo oder?

Naruto: Sachaufgaben. (…) Ech versti bal näischt.

Naruto: Here I like, I really like maths. BUT it's just that it's also German, you know, you have to read and it's German, I don't like that.

Sarah: You don't like that? Is that also difficult sometimes or?

Naruto: Word problems. (…) I understand almost nothing.

The use of German as the language of instruction in his favourite subject; mathematics, adds an additional layer of difficulty for Naruto as his ability to understand lesson content, complete exercises or answer questions is dependent on his comprehension of the instructions. This is particularly difficult with "word problems"– a type of exercise that Lurdes had also commented on. This adds an element of dislike to Naruto's otherwise highly positive attitude towards mathematics. His acknowledgement of understanding *bal näischt* [almost nothing] highlights the immensely detrimental effect that German as the medium of instruction has on his comprehension and overall learning at school.

Naruto also reports on negative experiences during German language lessons which, at the beginning of the fieldwork period, were organised in ability groups due to the stark differences in levels of proficiency across the total of approximately 40 students in the year group:

Extract 8

Naruto: (…) éischter hate mer Gruppe gemaach, ech hu guer net gär well ech hat ëmmer vill Feeler an dann déi aner hu gelaacht.

Sarah: Wann s de geschwat hues oder sou?

Naruto: Jo oder, oder mir misste sou Froe beäntwerten an dann, an da seet ëmmer Schoulmeeschter: „Jo dat ass keen Däitsch".

Naruto: (…) before, we did ability groups, I didn't like at all because I always made many mistakes and then the others laughed.

Sarah: When you were speaking or so?

Naruto: Yes or, or we had to answer like questions and then, and then the teacher always says "Yes that's not German".

Naruto expresses a strong aversion to German language lessons and especially the teaching in ability groups where he feels that he is making many mistakes. In these situations, classmates laugh at him or the teacher openly criticises his contributions. The resulting public loss of face and ridicule can create intense feelings of shame. Such recurring experiences can have negative ramifications on class participation and investment in the learning process, and can also become embodied as dispositions of inferiority or shyness (Busch, 2015, p.353; see also Horwitz, 2010 on language anxiety). Both Naruto and Lurdes appear to have internalised negative feelings and views of deficiency in connection with their lived experience of German language education policy at school. These elements are also central in how Naruto evaluates his wider linguistic repertoire. When asked whether he considers himself to be multilingual, Naruto merely shakes his head in disagreement, upon which I prompt him to say more:

Extract 9

Sarah: Dat heescht wéi, géings du soen du schwätzt dann net sou vill Sproochen oder?

Naruto: Nee.

Sarah: Nee?

Naruto: 't ass ((zéckt)) eh Portugis (.) Lëtzebuergesch (:) Dä- bëssen Däitsch mee guer net vill a Franséisch.

Sarah: Mhm.

Naruto: Net sou vill.

Sarah: That means how, would you say you don't speak that many languages then or?

Naruto: No.

Sarah: No?

Naruto: It is ((hesitates)) uh Portuguese (.) Luxembourgish (:) Ger- a bit of German but not much at all and French.

Sarah: Mhm.

Naruto: Not so many.

Naruto appears to have internalised the idea that his language skills are not valuable, or not valuable enough to qualify him as a multilingual speaker, as he describes his linguistic resources as *net sou vill* [not so many]. He describes himself as speaking *bëssen Däitsch mee guer net vill* [a bit of German but not much at all]; positioning his proficiency in a language he has been studying at school and using as the medium of instruction for six years as extremely low. This view has likely been framed by his educational experiences, feelings of aversion, low confidence and insecurity, negative feedback from teachers, and has been further reinforced by the label of a student who has repeated a year because of his low performance and proficiency in German. Thus, Naruto's devaluing perception of his linguistic repertoire is directly linked to his lived experience of language with German.

Discussion

In this paper, I have explored the lived experience of language (education) policy by foregrounding the experiences of two primary school students in Luxembourg facing educational difficulties with, and because of, German language education policy: as a language subject, as the medium of instruction in class, as the language in which tests and exercises are done, etc. The main themes that recurred in their narratives included language proficiency, academic performance, educational difficulty, affective orientation and internalised views of deficiency. These themes were also highly interconnected.

Both participants reported on low levels of language proficiency in German which they saw as the cause for, and confirmed by, educational difficulties and low test grades. Their narratives on academic performance focused on educational difficulties; situations in all of which the use of German as the language of instruction and testing posed an additional challenge for these young people in the absence of additional (linguistic) support. This impacted on their perceptions of their own linguistic repertoires and educational identities, as participants described low levels of com-

prehension and language proficiency in German as tied up with negative affective orientations towards the latter. Lurdes and Naruto not only described emotions such as aversion, sadness, discomfort or pressure in relation to their lived experience of German language education policy. Feelings of insecurity and internalised views of deficiency that devalued their linguistic and academic skills also influenced how they made sense of their educational performance in the past and present, and further influenced their aspirations for future educational trajectories.

Within their narratives on their lived experience of German language education policy, the weight of internalised deficit views appeared most heavily in Lurdes' and Naruto's descriptions of their German language skills and their overall academic performance. In addition, they were particularly visible when Lurdes described her plans to attend a *secondaire général* at secondary school level and when Naruto refused to describe himself as a multilingual speaker. These examples illustrate how internalised views of deficiency, a sense of insecurity, and negative emotional experiences have detrimental impacts on students' investment in their learning and their sense of self (Norton, 2013; Prasad, 2015; Shapiro, 2014). Moreover, the two case studies show that students who internalise deficit discourses believe that they are at fault for low academic achievements, rather than questioning inequitable structures and processes. In a context where the education system has been shown to disadvantage students from low socio-economic backgrounds and/or language minority backgrounds, thus reproducing social stratification, these two case studies and the recounting of the lived experience of language education policy highlight the intersection of individual experience and the wider socio-political dimensions of language policy.

Conclusion

By exploring the lived experience of German language education policy of two primary school students in Luxembourg, this paper illuminates a larger phenomenon as students around the world navigate education systems marked by unequitable language education policies. Many are educated in a language that is not their main or home language, and the use of a medium of instruction that is not mastered well by students can have a myriad of negative effects on those who are still developing proficiency in it (Tollefson & Tsui, 2003; Milligan et al., 2020). As such, the insights presented in this paper provide a window into the experiences of a much larger number of students globally who usually remain hidden behind statistics that merely quantify the extent of educational inequality. These insights are important in addressing key challenges that policy makers, teachers, educators and researchers face in the ongoing struggle to devise and implement policies that support educational and social equity. Awareness and knowledge of students' lived experience of language education policy can support policy makers in devising more equitable policies that are adapted to local contexts. In multilingual contexts this may include flexible pedagogies (García et al., 2012; Hornberger & Link, 2012), and in the Luxembourgish context specifically, systematic access to alternatives to German-medium education. Recent developments in this area, outlined earlier in this paper, suggest that a move in this direction is on its way. A better understanding of the impact of policy on students

can also encourage teachers and educators to enact policy and adapt their practices in such a way that they meet students' educational and linguistic needs in a supportive way that fosters emotionally positive experiences.

The concept of the lived experience of language (education) policy, outlined in this paper, offers several affordances to language policy scholarship. From a methodological viewpoint, and due to its roots in phenomenology, the lived experience of language policy is analysed through autobiographical, first-person narratives in order to explore subjects' direct perspectives. This aligns with and expands the focus on empirical data and methodology that has come to the fore during the current phase in language policy research.

From a theoretical perspective, the concept of the lived experience of language policy expands the conceptual scope of viewing individuals as policy actors who not only implement, but also *experience* policy, and this approach offers critical insights to language policy research. In viewing language policy as a "multiphenomenon" (Barakos & Unger, 2016, p.1), the subject perspective inherent in the lived experience of language policy adds a key layer to our understanding of the interconnectedness of various policy levels. Such insights extend our analytical scope beyond the socially and discursively enacted nature of policy to exploring individuals' lived experience of the direct impact of policies on their lives. This is critical for language policy scholarship because it can highlight the (mis)match between "ideali[s]ed language policies "on paper" and the practical reality" of individuals' actual experiences, specifically in contexts where individuals are all too often subject to "standardi[s]ed, homogenous and "one-size-fits-all" policies" (Shohamy, 2009, pp.186, 185). The lived experience of language education policy and its articulations, Shohamy (2009) argues, should be viewed as part of language policy, particularly with a view to design, formulate, and introduce policies with input from the bottom up, as they have a direct effect on individuals' rights and opportunities. This is particularly important in contexts that are marked by structural inequalities, where it is essential to understand how policy affects the trajectories of impacted individuals and their wider sense of self.

Thus, by integrating the notion of the lived experience of language (Busch, 2015) with discursive approaches to language policy (Barakos & Unger, 2016), a conceptual space opens up for systematically studying language policy *as* experience by addressing its individually lived, emotional dimension. Indeed, Shohamy (2009, p.186) makes the case that this sort of knowledge is extremely important for "turning language policy from a bureaucratic field into a human one". While developments in language policy scholarship have already moved the field past its initial bureaucratic, text-based focus, including the analysis of the lived experience of language policy allows deeper understandings of policies far beyond their official, textual basis and provides critical insight that aligns language policy scholarship with affective turns that have occurred in other research areas.

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Ethics approval This study received ethical approval from the University of Sheffield.

Consent to participate Participants gave informed consent to participate in this study by signing a consent form.

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