

Exploring the Dynamic Identities of Multilingual Adolescents in Contexts of L3+ Learning in Four European Sites

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Abstract : A necessary outcome of today's contemporary globalised reality, current views of multilingualism hold that it no longer represents the exception, but rather the rule. As such, the simultaneous acquisition of multiple languages represents a common experience for many of today's students and therefore represents a key area of inquiry in the domain of foreign language learner identity. Second and multilingual language acquisition processes parallel each other in many ways; however, there are differences to be found in the ways in which a student may learn a third language. A multilingual repertoire will have to negotiate complex change as language competencies dynamically evolve; moreover, this process will vary according to the contextual factors attributed to a unique learner. A developing multilingual identity must, therefore, contend with an array of potential challenges specific to the individual in question. Despite an overarching recognition in the literature that plurilingual acquisition represents a unique field of inquiry within applied linguistic research, there is a paucity of empirical work which examines the ways in which individuals construct a sense of their own identity as multilingual speakers in such contexts of learning. This study explores this phenomenon via a mixed-methods, comparative case study approach at four school sites based in Finland, France, Wales, and England. It takes a strongly individual-in-context view, conceptualising each adolescent participant in dynamic terms in order to undertake a holistic exploration of the myriad factors that might impact upon, and indeed be impacted by, a learner's developing multilingual identity. Emerging themes of note thus far suggest that, beyond the expected divergences in the experience of multilinguality at the individual level, there are contradictions in the way in which adolescent students in each site 'claim' their plurilingualism. This can be argued to be linked to both meso and macro-level factors, including the foreign language curriculum and, more broadly, societal attitudes towards multilingualism. These diverse emergent identifications have implications not only for attainment in the foreign language but also for student well-being more generally.

Keywords : foreign language learning, student identity, multilingualism, educational psychology

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