

The Ungspråk project: Researching multilingualism and multilingual identity in lower secondary schools

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Abstract: The main objective of this article is to discuss the theoretical background and rationale for developing Ungspråk, a longitudinal, mixed methods study set in Norwegian lower secondary schools. The paper starts with an overview of different scholarly approaches to the study of multilingualism and their implications for research on multilingualism in education. After a brief introduction to multilingualism in Norwegian society and educational contexts, we present our research areas of interest and the main research questions. Particular attention is paid to the relevance of the concept of multilingual identity to the study. In addition, we discuss how the project will contribute to furthering the understanding of the relationship between multilingualism and intercultural competence. The mixed methods design of the Ungspråk project innovatively explores how different research methods and instruments can be combined to investigate questions related to multilingualism and multilingual identity and to create opportunities for meaningful interactions between researchers and participants. When discussing the mixed methods design of the project, we focus on how quantitative and qualitative components are integrated to address the research questions, engage participants in the research process and strengthen the overall validity of the findings. Overall, we hope that the Ungspråk project will contribute new insights into how languages can be learned and cultures explored in the 21st century multilingual classroom. Furthermore, the project may impact how researchers and participants interact with and benefit from empirical studies on education.

Keywords: Multilingualism, multilingual identity, intercultural competence, mixed methods research, interactive sessions, visualisations, interviews.

1. Introduction

To be or not to be multilingual remains an important question in applied linguistics and educational research. Even though multilingualism has always been a feature of countless individuals and societies throughout history (Adams et al. 2002; Pahta et al. 2018), the recent increase in transnational mobility associated with globalisation has brought the topic to the forefront of the research agenda. More than ever, educators and scholars feel the need to understand what it means to learn and use different languages, both at school and in other contexts (May 2013).

The objective of this article is to add to this discussion by presenting the design and ongoing implementation of the research project Ungspråk (2018-2022), a longitudinal mixed methods study conducted at the Department of Foreign Languages of the University of Bergen, Norway. The main aim of the project is to investigate young learners' multilingual identity in the Norwegian lower secondary school context. The term Ungspråk consists of the words *ung* (young) and *språk* (language). In Norwegian, *språk* is both singular and plural form and thus may refer to either one or several languages. In coining the term Ungspråk, we wanted to capture the main participants in our research, young learners. Furthermore, the choice of the non-transparent word *språk* alludes to the linguistic diversity of the learners along a continuum and the possibility for them to self-identify as monolingual or multilingual. The paper begins by discussing current definitions of multilingualism, language and multilingual identity and to what extent Norwegian pupils can be called multilinguals. We then go on to present the epistemological rationale underpinning the research project Ungspråk and its bearing on the main research questions and methods for data collection and analysis. Particular attention is paid to the sequential design of the mixed methods study (Schoonenboom & Johnson 2017) and how the research instrument designed for the first phase of the project (the Ungspråk

questionnaire) helped develop the interactive sessions with the learners and language teachers in the second phase. The interactive sessions are attempts to move away from a sole research *on* multilingualism, in which learners and teachers are *research objects*, towards a more participatory and collaborative approach in which participants also explore and contribute to the research process according to their own interests and concerns (Hales 2006; Kubanyiova 2008).

2. Defining the main concepts and theoretical framework

Multilingualism, a buzzword of our times, has been defined in several ways. In her overview of the various definitions of multilingualism, Cenoz (2013) sorted the most common approaches along three dimensions: the individual versus social dimension, the proficiency versus use dimension and the bilingualism versus multilingualism dimension (for further discussions on the concept of multilingualism and related terms, see Kemp 2009; Hammarberg 2010; Butler 2012).

The individual versus social dimension includes definitions that differentiate between a person's knowledge of multiple languages and the presence of multiple languages in a given society or geographical area. Some scholars refer to individual multilingualism as plurilingualism, which is the term used by the Council of Europe (2001).

The proficiency versus use dimension comprises definitions that take into account certain competency levels or frequency of use of a person's languages as criteria. The definitions vary from having an encompassing approach that includes people who are in the process of learning an additional language, irrespective of their proficiency levels (see for example Fisher et al. 2018), to restrictive definitions at the other end of the scale requiring near-native control of the languages in question. Definitions in the latter category, such as Braun's (1937: 115) "active, completely equal mastery of two or more languages" (orig. "aktive vollendete Gleichbeherrschung zweier oder mehrerer Sprachen") are rarely seen in current research studies, but Aronin and Singleton (2012: 2) suggested that this understanding of multilingualism typically represents the "man-in-the-street perspective".

Usage also belongs to this dimension. Do the languages have to be in active use in everyday life (see for example Commission of the European Communities 2007; Grosjean 2010: 4), or is receptive knowledge of a language also included in the researchers' definition of who is multilingual? Receptive multilingualism means that people understand and communicate with each other, normally using closely related languages and not a lingua franca (Zeevaert & ten Thije 2007; Rehbein et al. 2012). This phenomenon is quite common in several regions of the world, for example, in Scandinavia. Furthermore, does the criterion of everyday usage encompass learners in less authentic contexts, such as in the language learning classroom, or are the definitions limited to use in authentic communication?

According to Cenoz (2013), the bilingualism versus multilingualism dimension refers to the number of languages a person needs to know to be regarded as multilingual. Most definitions require either proficiency in more than one language or proficiency in more than two languages. The term *bilingualism* is commonly used to refer to the first category, and research includes, but is not restricted to, the investigation of bilingualism in educational contexts (García 2009; Cummins & Swain 2014). The term is also used in a more general way to include all individuals who are not monolingual. Some scholars argue, however, that bilingualism (knowledge of two languages) and multilingualism (knowledge of three or more languages) should refer to distinct phenomena, as having previously learned a second language, the learning of additional languages is different in multiple ways, including increased metalinguistic awareness and cognitive flexibility (De Angelis 2007; Jessner 2008).

The Ungspråk research team takes a broad, holistic approach to multilingualism (Cenoz 2013), defining it as the dynamic and integrated knowledge and/or use of more than one language or language variety. Briefly, a holistic view on multilingualism considers the whole linguistic repertoire

of the learners as an integrated set of resources that are in constant interaction and development, both in their practices and in their language learning processes. Rather than focusing on one language at a time and looking into the acquisition of discrete syntactic, lexical and phonological items, a holistic approach seeks to relate “the way multilingual students (and multilingual speakers in general) use their communicative resources in spontaneous conversation to the way languages are learned and taught at school” (Cenoz 2013: 11). In order to achieve this, it is crucial that we gain a deeper understanding of the participants’ practices, their own beliefs and attitudes towards learning and using different languages and their self-identification as multilingual.

In the context of this project, we need to clarify what is meant by *language*. For example, should only official or national languages be included in studies of multilingualism, or can knowledge of dialects and other semiotic systems such as body language, sign language and iconography also count when deciding who multilinguals are? Many studies on multilingualism still seem to focus on standard languages such as English, French or German without problematising what a language is. More recently, however, several scholars have moved towards a broader understanding of language. Wei (2018: 26), for example, referred to language as “a multilingual, multisemiotic, multisensory, and multimodal resource that human beings use for thinking and for communicating thought”.

With this widened view of what constitutes a language, one might claim that, strictly speaking, we are all multilingual, as everybody uses various semiotic resources in communication on a daily basis. Considering different approaches to the understanding of language, in this project, we define language as any semiotic system used for communication purposes, and, as discussed earlier, the languages of an individual are not static, discreet entities. Instead, they are in a constant state of change and interact with each other in the multilingual brain (Herdina & Jessner 2002).

However, no matter which definitions scholars use in their research to determine a language or to classify someone as multilingual, we believe the individuals’ own perceptions to be equally relevant in the understanding of multilingualism, especially in educational contexts. Therefore, the concept of *multilingual identity* is of central importance in our study. Multilingual identity refers to a person’s explicit self-identification as multilingual because of an awareness of the linguistic repertoire one has (Fisher et al. 2018).

Fisher et al. (2018) suggested that people who explicitly identify themselves as multilinguals may have several advantages. First, to see oneself as multilingual may strengthen one’s self-esteem and motivation to learn additional languages. Second, it may foster an increased language awareness in and across the languages one knows and is learning, which again may result in better learning outcomes. In addition, research has suggested that being multilingual is positively correlated with certain personality traits that could allow for more effective intercultural encounters. For example, Dewaele and Oudenhoven (2009) and Dewaele and Wei (2012, 2013) indicated that there is a link between multilingualism and tolerance of ambiguity, cognitive empathy and open-mindedness.

In education and research, these traits are often associated with intercultural competence (Tiurikova *fc*). According to some recent studies (e.g. Dervin 2010; Dypedahl 2018; Hoff 2014, 2019), intercultural competence is often defined as one’s ability to deal (constructively) with diversity and differences, whether these are “within a society (differences due to age, gender, religion, socio-economic status, political affiliation, ethnicity, and so on) or across borders” (Deardorff 2019: i). In comparison to traditional approaches that emphasise ethno-cultural differences between participants during an intercultural encounter, more recent approaches stress the idea that one’s identity is always diverse and multidimensional (i.e., it is comprised of various facets, such as gender, class, language repertoire, interests and personal experience) (Dervin 2010; Dypedahl 2018). Therefore, intercultural competence is related to dealing with “diverse diversities” (Dervin 2010: 166), rather than ethno-cultural ones, and to the ability “to navigate conflict, contradiction, complexity and ambiguity” in contemporary societies (Hoff 2019: 444).

Stemming from these recent theoretical views, we suggest that open-mindedness, understood

as open and unprejudiced attitudes towards diversity and differences in general, can be an indicator of one's predisposition to develop intercultural competence. Based on previous research, which shows a possible connection between multilingualism and open-mindedness (Dewaele & Oudenhoven 2009), it can be assumed that multilingualism is related to and can be a resource for the development of intercultural competence. However, research that has investigated the connection between these two elements in the school context is surprisingly scarce, although the fostering of pupils' multilingualism and intercultural competence are central aims in language curricula in Norway and elsewhere. Furthermore, to our knowledge, there have not yet been any studies examining the connection between multilingualism, intercultural competence *and* multilingual identity. Consequently, a main contribution of the Ungspråk project is that it investigates the intersection of these three elements using an innovative mixed methods design.

3. Why the Norwegian context?

To some extent, Norway can be called a multilingual paradise (Røyneland 2009; Haukås *et al.*). The official national languages are Norwegian and Sami, a group of indigenous languages spoken in northern Scandinavia. The use of local dialects and regional varieties are highly valued in Norway, and their use is promoted in all domains of society (Kulbrandstad 2018). At school, all children are taught the two written varieties of Norwegian, Nynorsk and Bokmål. They are usually taught one of the varieties in primary school, but from the first year of lower secondary school (Grade 8), all students learn to use both varieties in written communication. Receptive multilingualism is also quite common in Norway, as most Norwegians can understand standard Swedish and Danish. However, mutual understanding among young people seems to be declining, perhaps due to the increasing influence of English (Delsing & Åkeson 2005).

When children start school and begin learning Norwegian or Sami, they simultaneously start learning English, which is a compulsory subject during the 10 years of mandatory education. English is also mandatory in the first year of upper secondary school (Grade 11) and can also be studied in more depth if pupils decide to take English as a programme subject. Norwegians are well known for their excellent English-language skills, which are ranked among the best in Europe (Education First 2019), likely because of the omnipresence of English in the Scandinavian context. Recent research has suggested that many young Scandinavians' extensive use of the Internet (for gaming, social media, etc.) has positively impacted their English communicative skills (Sundqvist 2009; Sundqvist & Wikström 2015; Brevik 2016). Moreover, a growing number of pupils in Norwegian schools know and/or speak a host of other languages due to increased immigration in the last decades. According to Statistics Norway (2020), 18.2% of the total Norwegian population are immigrants or Norwegian-born children of immigrant parents. However, this number varies across demographic settings, as more immigrants and, consequently, more linguistic diversity can be found in urban centres.

When pupils start lower secondary school (Grade 8), they are offered the choice of learning an additional foreign language besides English. The most commonly taught languages are Spanish, German and French. Some schools also offer other languages such as Italian, Chinese and Norwegian sign language. In the 2018/2019 school year, around 77% of the pupils opted to take a second foreign language class, whereas the remaining group chose between extra classes in English, Norwegian, maths or the more vocationally oriented subject *arbeidslivsfag* (work experience), depending on the availability of the subject in each particular school (Foreign Language Centre 2018). In light of this linguistic diversity, Norwegian schools offer a rich groundwork for studying multilingualism and multilingual identity.

Lower secondary schools are a particularly interesting setting because starting in their eighth year, learners have the choice to expand their linguistic repertoires and begin learning a second foreign language in a formal educational context. This was the foundation for this longitudinal study investigating the development of pupils' beliefs and attitudes in relation to multilingualism and

language learning throughout lower secondary school.

Furthermore, investigating lower secondary school teachers' beliefs about multilingualism and related topics, as well as their preparedness for implementing a multilingual and intercultural pedagogical approach in their classrooms, provides a broader understanding of multilingualism in an educational context, as teachers play a key role in fostering pupils' multilingual awareness and identity (Haukås 2016; Fisher et al. 2018). In the following section, we present the Ungspråk project in more detail, focusing on the areas of interest, research questions and their relationship to the mixed methods design of the project.

4. Areas of interest and research questions

The Ungspråk project is comprised of three main areas of research interest. The first concerns students' multilingualism and multilingual identity in Norwegian lower secondary schools. Despite the recent focus on multilingualism in the field of language education, many researchers and practitioners tend to assume that multilingual speakers are primarily students originating from ethnic minorities or who have migration backgrounds (Haukås *et al.*). The example of Norway, however, illustrates that this view has never been adequate in this society with its rich linguistic diversity.

Hence, in our research, we shift away from the academic and educational discourses that reproduce this bias. Instead of following certain criteria to identify students as mono/multilingual, we focus on students' own perceptions of multilingualism, their language habits and repertoires as well as whether or not they see themselves as multilingual. For this purpose, we address the concept of multilingual identity as central to our project, viewing identity as dynamic, contextual, hybrid, unstable and changing over time (Block 2009, 2010, 2013; Norton 2010; Fisher et al. 2018). Consequently, we also aim to investigate how students' views of their multilingualism change over time, and specifically what role language learning plays in these views.

The second area of interest relates to the intersection between multilingualism, multilingual identity and intercultural competence. Both internationally and locally, there is an increasing emphasis on the interconnection between multilingualism and intercultural competence, which is reflected in key official documents. For instance, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe 2001, 2018) considers individual multilingualism and intercultural competence as two facets of the same skill: plurilingual and pluricultural competence. In Norway, school subject curricula have recently been revised by the Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training (2017). Of particular interest to the Ungspråk project is the new emphasis on multilingualism, language awareness, intercultural competence and global citizenship in the core curricula as well as in the language subjects:

The teaching and training shall ensure that the pupils are confident in their language proficiency, that they develop their language identity and that they are able to use language to think, create meaning, communicate and connect with others. Language gives us a sense of belonging and cultural awareness ... knowledge about the linguistic diversity in society provides all pupils with valuable insights into different forms of expression, ideas and traditions. All pupils shall experience that being proficient in a number of languages is a resource, both in school and in society at large (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training 2017: 7).

The emphasis on these issues is particularly strong in the foreign language curriculum (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training 2019), which includes multilingualism and intercultural competence as two of its four core elements. This tendency towards connecting and emphasising the role of intercultural competence and multilingualism in education indicates a clear

need for empirical research that can shed light on the intersection between these phenomena. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the link between students' multilingualism, multilingual identity and intercultural competence, we also examined their relationship with other variables, such as gender, experience living or travelling abroad, migration background and number of languages learned in and out of school.

The third area of interest is grounded in an approach to research ethics that seeks to go beyond the general principles of procedural ethics (Christians 2005). Kubanyiova (2008) stated that the three core principles that serve as a standard for studies conducted with humans (respect for persons, justice and beneficence) should be followed in any research field, including language education and applied linguistics. However, the author argued that these principles are "by no means sufficient (and unambiguous) guides in making ethical choices in the actual practice of conducting research" (Kubanyiova 2008: 506). Therefore, there is a need for an interpersonal approach to ethics in research that sees ethical challenges as intrinsic and integral components of the whole research process (Guillemin & Gillam 2004; Haverkamp 2005).

In our view, such an approach to ethics entails expanding the scope from mainly doing research *on* to doing research *with/for* the participants. In our project, we seek to respond to the need for an increased interpersonal approach to ethics by sharing the research results with participants and establishing a dialogue with them. Through interactive sessions with students and teachers, we seek to investigate how research can be meaningfully presented to participants and in which ways a collaborative exploration of research can create new insights for all involved and for the research field in general.

With respect to these three areas of interest, the Ungspråk project raises the following main research questions:

Area 1: What does it mean to be multilingual for pupils in Norwegian lower secondary schools? Do their views on what it means to be multilingual change throughout lower secondary school?

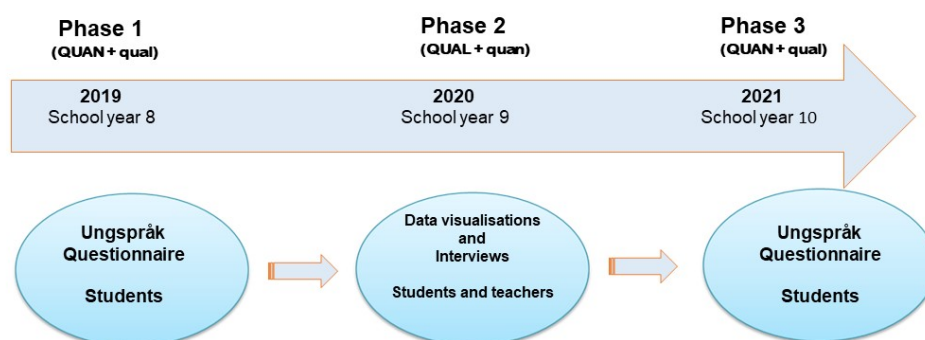
Area 2: To what extent does multilingual identity correlate with intercultural competence and a number of other variables, such as students' multilingualism, language use habits, gender, experience abroad and migration background?

Area 3: How can research on multilingualism and multilingual identity be designed to engage participants with the research processes and findings? How can participants' involvement in research contribute to a deepened understanding of multilingualism and multilingual identity?

5. Methodology: using a mixed methods design to research multilingualism

In order to integrate the three areas of interest, we opted for a mixed methods research design for our project. Figure 1 provides an overview of the Ungspråk project. It shows the timeline for data collection (2019-2021) in three different phases, the type of data to be collected in each year and the participants in each phase. Capitalisation of either QUAN or QUAL in the figure signals the predominance of either quantitative or qualitative methods, respectively, in the phases.

Figure 1: Overview of the Ungspråk project and its mixed methods design



The Ungspråk project assigns equal status to both its quantitative and qualitative components. This is based on an epistemological stance that sees the persistent dichotomy between qualitative and quantitative paradigms as unproductive, and sometimes even detrimental, to the overall quality of research (Hammersley 1992: 159). In practical terms, this means that in the Ungspråk research project, the qualitative and the quantitative components “take control over the research process in alternation, are in constant interaction, and the outcomes they produce are integrated during and at the end of the research process” (Schoonenboom & Johnson 2017: 123).

The research questions address multilingualism and the development of multilingual identity from a processual, longitudinal perspective and call for a sequential design in which the later phases of the research project are dependent on and emerge from the insights and findings gathered in previous phases. In other words, the broader scope of the design allows for the triangulation of data collected at different phases and the use of results from previous research components to develop and inform the subsequent components of the project (Greene et al. 1989; Schoonenboom & Johnson 2017: 4). Since the Ungspråk project is currently ongoing, our discussions are focused mainly on the first and second phases of the project.

5.1 Phase 1 – the Ungspråk questionnaire: the first round of quantitative data collection

To tap into learners’ multilingual identity and related variables and thus gather data to help answer the questions of the first two areas of research interest, we developed an online instrument, the Ungspråk questionnaire. The starting point for developing the questionnaire was a paper-based survey used in the Multilingualism: Empowering Individuals, Transforming Societies (MEITS) project at the University of Cambridge¹. However, a number of changes were made to adapt the Ungspråk questionnaire to the Norwegian educational context and our research needs. For example, whereas the MEITS questionnaire takes a special interest in pupils’ use of metaphors to describe language

¹ The cross-disciplinary project MEITS (2016-2020) has six strands and aims at fostering awareness of multilingualism and multilingual identity in a variety of ways. Our collaborators at strand 4 (with strand leader Dr Linda Fisher, Faculty of Education) take a somewhat similar approach to multilingualism as in the Ungspråk project; they are researching learners’ multilingual identity development in lower secondary schools in England.

learning, the Ungspråk questionnaire included statements on pupils' beliefs about multilingualism, their views as future multilingual speakers and their intercultural competence. Nevertheless, the two questionnaires are similar in several respects, which make them a solid foundation for comparing the results across countries.

In order to facilitate the data collection and analysis, we decided to develop an electronic questionnaire. The survey tool SurveyXact was used to design the layout and administer the questionnaire. It is available in two languages, Norwegian and English, and respondents were able to switch between languages during completion. English was chosen as an additional language for the questionnaire because all pupils in Norway study it from Grade 1 and usually have a good knowledge of the language. Besides, given the status of English as a lingua franca, we aimed to provide an opportunity for students who are not native speakers of Norwegian to use a language that can contribute to their better understanding of the questionnaire. We recognise that some of our respondents could benefit even more from the translation of the questionnaire into other (e.g., minority) languages. However, considering that the translation of a questionnaire into several languages is a time-consuming process and that the collection of the data in different languages would have complicated the analysis, especially in relation to open-ended questions, we decided to opt for these two languages.

When recruiting the schools, we aimed for a combination of different socioeconomic areas with varying linguistic diversity, including schools from rural areas where pupils have Nynorsk as their first priority language. In total, 593 pupils from seven schools responded to the questionnaire in the first phase of the project during spring and summer of 2019. Of all respondents, 86% listed Bokmål as their first choice form of Norwegian, while 14% indicated Nynorsk. These numbers correspond to the proportions of Bokmål and Nynorsk users in Norwegian schools at the national level (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training n.d.). By adding this dimension of linguistic diversity (i.e., being a user of Nynorsk may be viewed as belonging to a minority), we sought to investigate to what extent students' different language constellations in and out of school (Aronin & Singleton 2012) influenced their language practices and multilingual identity.

The Ungspråk questionnaire includes a mix of multiple choice and open-ended questions as well as Likert scale questions to assess students' attitudes and beliefs (Dörnyei & Taguchi 2010: 5). The research instrument and the predominant type of data collected determined the primarily quantitative aspect of the first phase of the project. However, the textual responses generated by the open-ended questions added a secondary qualitative element.

The Ungspråk questionnaire is divided into four main sections. Section 1 was designed to examine pupils' language habits and contexts of language use. It contains six statements which provide an overview of what languages the participants study in school; what other languages they know; and how often, with whom and in which situations they use their various languages. In addition, four statements investigate learners' views related to each of the languages they know. In sum, Section 1 provides a general mapping of all the languages known and used by pupils in and out of school as well as an overview of the contexts in which these languages are used.

Section 2 is concerned with different aspects related to having a multilingual identity. In total, there are 25 statements in this section comprising three different constructs: beliefs about multilingualism, future multilingual self and open-mindedness. The answers to the statements use a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Section 3 has one open-ended statement in which pupils are asked to define what it means to be multilingual. After that, they are asked if they identify themselves as multilingual (by choosing yes, no or not sure in response to the question "Er du flerspråklig?/Are you multilingual?") and to provide an explanation for their answer. The first open-ended statement "To be multilingual means..." was designed to investigate a practical problem that is only partially addressed in the research literature about multilingualism in Norway: in institutional discourses, the word *flerspråklig*

(multilingual) is frequently used to refer to students with immigrant backgrounds who struggle to learn Norwegian (Sickinghe 2016; Haukås *et al.*), thus portraying multilingualism as problematic. By understanding what it means to be multilingual according to the students themselves, this statement calls for “the voices of individuals who have not been heard” (Clark & Baddie 2010: 10).

The following question (“Are you multilingual?”) constitutes our main dependent variable to assess what factors influence self-identification as multilingual. After marking either yes, no or not sure, students are asked to provide a brief written explanation for their answer. It is important to highlight that, apart from these two cases, the word *flerspråklig* does not appear in any other statements in the questionnaire to avoid that participants’ answers being influenced by what they read. However, by asking questions related to their language habits in the first section, we cannot entirely exclude that this has influenced their perceptions of what it means to be multilingual. Section 4 of the questionnaire asks for background information that can shed more light on students’ experiences with certain languages (for example, their experiences living in a different country, travel habits, languages that their parents or carers know and self-reported grades in each of the languages studied in school).

The questionnaire was piloted twice in two lower secondary schools in the same area during spring 2019. The validation process suggests that the final version of Ungspråk is a reliable and valid instrument for examining pupils’ multilingual practices, multilingual identity and related variables. An article discussing the validation processes adopted for the Ungspråk questionnaire is discussed in detail in an upcoming issue of *Language Learning Journal* (Haukås *et al.*).

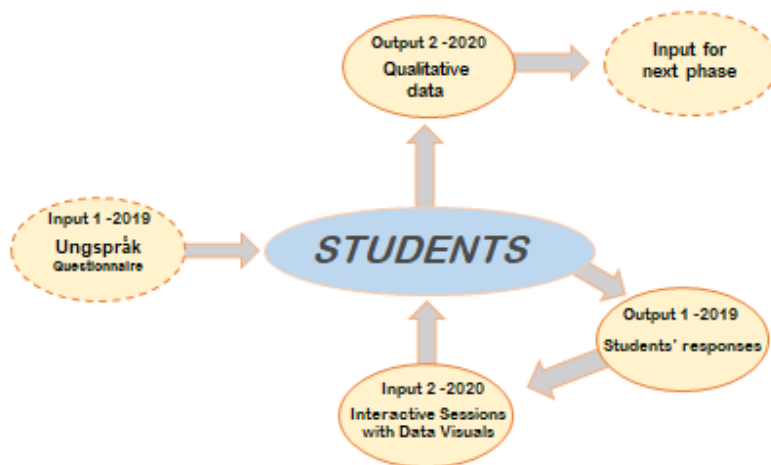
5.2 Phase 2 – interactive sessions: qualitative data collection

Interactive sessions are actions through which researchers and participants in a study can engage with the data and each other in a dialogical manner. The interactive sessions correspond to the qualitative components of the mixed methods design of the study and are built on the findings from Phase 1 of the project. They will be implemented in two forms. First, we will conduct facilitated discussions with students based on data visualisations that present the research results from the Ungspråk questionnaire. Second, we will interview the teachers regarding their perceptions of multilingualism and the potential benefits and outcomes of the study for participating schools and teaching practice. Below we discuss the interactive sessions in detail, focusing on their ethical, epistemological and pedagogical implications for the project as a whole.

5.2.1 Interactive data visualisation sessions with students

In order to integrate the quantitative and qualitative components of the study and to promote participants’ engagement with the research findings, the Ungspråk team developed data visualisations for use in the interactive sessions in the autumn of 2020. Figure 2 below presents the development of the sessions and their timing (Guest 2013: 148).

Figure 2: Development and timing of the interactive sessions with students



As shown in the image, some of the responses to the Ungspråk questionnaire (Output 1) were converted into data visualisations for future use in classroom discussions during the interactive sessions (Input 2) with the participating schools. The procedure will create a feedback effect whereby qualitative data (Output 2) will be obtained based on the participants' interactions with the quantitative data they helped generate via the Ungspråk questionnaire. The interactive sessions are designed to offer participants the opportunity to reflect on their reflections by giving them tasks that are open to their own explorations and interests. Thus, the sessions address ethical concerns that are usually overlooked in research in education: the fact that, more often than not, participants do not get much feedback from researchers once data is collected and are rarely invited to interact with and give feedback on the data themselves.

The purpose of the sessions follows the epistemological rationale of mixed methods research. The sessions are the result of a point of integration (Guest 2013: 146) that combines qualitative and quantitative approaches with the aim of achieving “heightened knowledge and validity” (Schoonenboom & Johnson 2017: 4). First, one dataset (quantitative answers to the Ungspråk questionnaire) will provide input for the design of subsequent research instruments, data collection and analysis procedures (Guest 2013: 148; Schoonenboom & Johnson 2017: 8). Second, the sessions will provide valuable complementary data to answer the research questions related to the first area of research interest, and the second dataset (qualitative data from the interactive sessions) will enhance the results from the first dataset.

The Ungspråk research team opted for data visualisations for two interrelated reasons. The first reason was determined by a practical challenge that can be summarised in the following question: How can we present and make students interact with quantitative data in a way that is both accessible and engaging to participants? The second reason introduces a current pedagogical concern related to the development of visual-numeric literacy among schoolchildren as a consequence of the widespread and increasing use of data visualisations in contemporary societies (Lankshear 2003; Shield 2004; Bhargava & D'Ignazio 2015; Tønnessen 2020).

The data visualisations designed for the Ungspråk project include three graphs (a pie chart, a bar graph and a multi-layered icon crowd) representing participants' responses to the question “Are you

multilingual?”. Each graph explores different affordances of data visualisations (Kress & Van Leuwen 2002). A fourth visualisation groups the participants’ responses to the open-ended comment “To be multilingual means...” into different categories. Participants will create visual data using a sorting task and later compare their categorisations to those of the researchers. In addition, each category contains a brief comment and a set of questions to be answered by the participants. Here, the pupils will be free to choose the categories that interest them the most, thus giving them more autonomy to explore their own questions and interests. Their written answers and visual data will be used as qualitative data for the analysis. Altogether, the interactive sessions have the overt aim of promoting further discussions on multilingualism among students and the covert aim of practicing visual-numeric literacy, thus partially addressing the pedagogical need outlined before.

5.2.2 Interviews with teachers

The second type of interactive sessions that will be implemented in the Ungspråk project are interviews with teachers. In order to provide consistency between the two phases of the project, the language teachers will be recruited from the same schools that participated in the first phase of the project. Interviews will be conducted with foreign language teachers (i.e., teachers of Spanish, German and French) in the autumn term of 2020. We chose to introduce this method into our research design primarily to expand our knowledge in relation to the second area of interest in our project, which concerns the intersection between students’ multilingualism and intercultural competence. Foreign language teachers’ views are of special interest given the particularly strong emphasis on multilingualism and intercultural competence in the new curriculum for foreign languages that will be implemented beginning in August 2020 (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training 2019).

The choice to interview foreign language teachers was selected as one of the main research methods for the second phase of the project for several reasons. First, we aim to enrich the research findings by introducing the perspective of teachers, who are central actors in the implementation of the new foreign language curriculum. We want to investigate how teachers conceptualise multilingualism, multilingual identity and intercultural competence and determine if they see an interconnection between these phenomena in their students’ development. By gaining a better understanding of teachers’ perspectives, we hope to contribute to the implementation of the new curriculum.

In addition, the interviews with teachers will also address the third area of interest, which concerns the meaningful presentation of research results to participants and stakeholders. As a research method, interviews engage participants in a meaningful discussion with researchers and can serve as a platform for collaborative exploration of research findings.

In order to provide a meaningful discussion on the research results, the teachers will have the opportunity to explore and discuss the same visualisations on multilingualism and multilingual identity that were presented to the students. In addition, they will explore the questionnaire data obtained on the construct of open-mindedness, which is used in the study as the main indicator of students’ intercultural competence development, and its interrelation with multilingualism and multilingual identity. By inviting teachers’ perspectives and views on the intersection between students’ multilingualism, multilingual identity and intercultural competence, we aim to provide a diversity of views (Bryman 2006; Schoonenboom & Johnson 2017) that will contribute to a deeper understanding of the research results. Moreover, discussing and exploring the findings with language teachers will help us to assess the usefulness and potential benefits of the study outcomes for teachers and language education in general.

5.3 Phase 3 – the Ungspråk questionnaire: the second round of quantitative data collection

The main purpose of the third and last phase of the Ungspråk project is to provide data for a longitudinal assessment of pupils’ opinions and beliefs about multilingualism and their multilingual

identity. In order to do so, the research instrument envisaged for this phase is similar to the one used in Phase 1 (the Ungspråk questionnaire). However, the design of the Ungspråk project leaves room for the final questionnaire to be adapted to explore unexpected outcomes that emerge from and are dependent on previous phases of data collection and analysis. Therefore, at the current stage of the project, the final design of this research instrument is yet to be determined.

6. Conclusion

The main objectives of this article were to discuss the theoretical background and rationale for developing the Ungspråk research project, to present the research questions and to explain how they will be answered using a mixed methods design. Prior to designing the study, several gaps in the existing research on multilingualism and multilingual identity were identified, resulting in three areas of interest. First, research on learners' own definitions of multilingualism, their multilingual habits and self-identification as multilingual in a lower secondary school context is limited both in Norway and internationally. Findings from this part of the project will contribute to scholarly discussions in several ways. Understanding how multilingualism is perceived and practised by young people may add new ideas on how multilingualism can be conceptualised and used as a resource in the classroom. Moreover, the longitudinal design of the project will provide new insights into young learners' multilingual identities as dynamic and emergent phenomena. These contributions may impact how languages are taught and how learners' multilingualism is explored in education.

Second, research on the correlation of young learners' multilingual identity with other variables is limited. Among these variables, exploring learners' open-mindedness has received particular attention given the increased emphasis on intercultural competence in the school curricula and the need for educating flexible, empathic, global citizens in a rapidly changing world. With insight into the correlation between learners' multilingual identity and open-mindedness, the study aims to contribute to research on the intersection between multilingualism and intercultural competence in the field of education.

Third, although ethical principles of research recommend that findings are shared with participants and should ideally be of benefit to them, the number of studies in applied linguistics that have reported doing so is minimal. In particular, studies that share the results from quantitative research with young participants are largely missing. In response to this gap, the Ungspråk project aims to examine how the research results can be shared with pupils and collaboratively explored. In addition, the project will pay attention to the key role of teachers in deciding how languages are taught and how topics related to multilingualism, multilingual identity and intercultural competence are approached in the classroom. For this reason, the sharing and exploration of research results will also include interviews with lower secondary school language teachers. An increased understanding of their beliefs and practices, as well as a collaborative exploration of data, may lead to new and innovative research-based teaching approaches. Moreover, our goal to meet fundamental ethical principles by presenting and exploring our research with the participants will create new questions regarding how research can be meaningfully shared.

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