Exploring the role of teacher identity in shaping pedagogical practices in multilingual classrooms

Jessica Marcel[1]

[1]*Department of Linguistics, English Language and Bilingualism, Bangor University, United Kingdom*

Abstract

This research investigates the role of teacher identity in shaping pedagogical practices within multilingual classrooms; specifically, the ways in which teachers' multilingual identities have consequences for student engagement and anxiety. The current pre-test and post-test design was undertaken with 20 secondary school students in England, with the application of identity-focused interventions at the level of multilingual storytelling and reflective journaling. Results indicated that students were more engaged (M = 23.3, p < .001) and less anxious (M = 22.25, p < .001). In so doing, these findings shed light on the role of teacher identity in promoting inclusive and emotionally supportive learning environments. The present study highlights the necessity for teacher education to embed the dimension of identity awareness and conduct curricular developments that valorise students' multilingual identities more effectively. It thus places the pedagogical practices alongside the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of students, therefore offering valuable input toward the improvement of language-learning outcomes within diverse educational settings.

Introduction

Identity has taken the lead in discussions on the shaping of educational practices and outcomes in the last couple of years; this is so in multilingual educational settings where linguistic diversity works at the crossroads with cultural and social complexities. A teacher in such a setting not only supplies the students with knowledge but also plays an out-and-out role in shaping the students' linguistic and cultural identities. The current study explores teacher identity that informs pedagogical practice in the multilingual classroom, highlighting the ways in which teachers' perceptions of multilingual identities drive pedagogical practices and students' engagement versus anxiety. By tapping into these vignettes, this research also attempts to contribute to the emergent body of literature about identity in education, specifically in language learning. It is very important that language learning helps develop in students an individual capacity for communication, but it is also an essential factor in societal cohesion. In England, however, students engage in language learning at a very low level, with less than half continuing beyond the compulsory stage. This reflects a far more widespread perception that language learning lacks relevance, especially in a monolingual community dominated by English. In contrast, multilingual classrooms often do not take advantage of their students' linguistic diversity; instead, they focus on standardised curricula. In any case, such curricula highlight linguistic skills at the expense of multilingual identities. Therefore, these approaches totally ignore that engaging students' multilingual repertoire can actually build engagement while reducing anxiety. That lacuna is addressed by Forbes et al. (2021), who suggest a pedagogical shift toward practices that involve identity-focused interventions which can help students connect their linguistic experiences to the learning within the classroom.

Teacher identity is an important element in the development of pedagogic content and knowing in education, especially in multilingual contexts. According to Norton (2013), identity speaks to one's positioning in relation to the world, as associated with social relationships, cultural possibilities, and salience of imagined futures. From an applied linguistics epistemological perspective, identity has been conceptualised in a variety of frames that include psychosocial, sociocultural, and poststructuralist approaches. While psychosocial approaches, as advanced by Erikson (1968), view identity as a result of developmentally driven processes, the sociocultural theories, which extend from Vygotsky's work (1978), base their emphasis on the role of such social interactions and cultural environments. As set by Norton (2013), the poststructuralist identities are dynamic since they are formed a new every moment by the power relation and structuring of society. These frameworks once more demonstrate that identity is complex both as a personal and social construction and, therefore, influences how teachers perceive and enact their roles in multilingual classrooms.

The identity of teachers is not a static entity but a dynamic construct through interaction with students and colleagues, taking in the larger educational context. Teachers who consider their multilingual identity an asset are more likely to use inclusive pedagogic practices that appreciate the linguistic and cultural values in their students. Such practices are supported by Wenger's 1998 theory of communities of practice, which purports that learning is inseparable from identity and determined through social interaction within specific contexts. Therefore, drawing on their multilingual identities, teachers can build learning contexts that promote students' multilingual awareness and allow them to regard their linguistic diversity as an asset.

Accordingly, students' multilingual identities rest on their experiences, self-assessments, and emotional relations to language learning as described by Forbes et al.'s 3Es model. In this model, multilingual identity is conceptualised along three interrelated dimensions: experience, evaluation, and emotion. The "experience" dimension refers to the circulation of students within linguistic and cultural diversity, including family, community, and media contexts. The "evaluation" dimension signals students' awareness of their language-learning ability through self-esteem, self-efficacy, and social relationships. Finally, the "emotion" dimension underlines the language learning rooted in students' emotional attachments to their linguistic identities. These dimensions map out the extent to which multilingual identities have been constructed so far and may influence students during language learning.

Other identity-based studies in educational settings support this issue of taking up identity in language learning, noting a change that occurs through interventions which link curriculum content to students' self-concepts. For example, Kaplan et al. (2014) describe an identity-based intervention motivating self-reflection and establishing relevance of learning leading to increased engagement and persistence. In this agreement, Perez et al. (2020) have shown that reflective journal assignments itemising course content to students' academic goals have rather positive motivations and task values; in fact, these instructional practices focused on identities may set possible significant learning experiences in contact with personal and cultural identities of the students.

This role of teacher identity rises in multilingual classrooms, as teachers must negotiate a great number of complexities emanating from linguistic diversity while fostering an inclusive learning environment simultaneously. It is the teachers who can identify themselves as multilingual who will be serving as role models for students and modelling values of linguistic and cultural diversity. This goes in line with the concept of a multilingual subject by Kramsch (2009), which advocates for the recognition and validation of students' multilingual identities as part of language learning. Teachers can provide opportunities for students to reflect on their linguistic experiences, thus helping them develop more profound insights into their multilingual identities and allowing them to feel connected in the classroom.

Thus, whereas there is an increasing awareness of the function of identity in education, little research has gone towards the role of teacher identity in the shaping of pedagogical practices, especially within multilingual classrooms. As Forbes et al. (2021) underline, there exists a certain gap in the literature since, though the field of identity-focused intervention appears to have been elaborated across research in other subject fields such as science-Chapman & Feldman (2017)-and mathematics-Heffernan et al. (2020)-it remains relatively under-researched within the context of language learning. The present study intends to fill this lacuna through its investigation into the extent to which teachers' perceptions of their multilingual identity influence their pedagogical practices and the consequences that arise for students in terms of engagement and anxiety.

Literature review

Integration into school curricula is important for fostering communications not only at an individual level but also for wider social cohesion and preparedness in global engagement. However, the participation in language learning tends to be low in England, with less than half of the students continuing beyond the compulsory stage, reflecting a perceived lack of relevance in monolingual communities. In such contexts, the learning of languages may not be seen as personally relevant for potential engagement. On the other hand, students from multilingual backgrounds may hardly recognise how the various languages interconnect with their sense of identity. Existing curricula are mainly designed to build on linguistic competencies and fail to capitalise on students' wider multilingual repertoires (Department for Education, 2014). Addressing this gap, Forbes et al. (2021) argue for a shift in pedagogy to include student investigation into their multilingual identities-an understanding of one's potential to deploy more than one variety-and propose that greater visibility of multilingualism within a classroom would, in fact, lead to an increase in students' engagement with the process of learning a language.

Research in identity theory strongly points to the place of language as a central factor in identity construction. Norton trains that the concept of identity may be described as someone's impression of one's relationship with the world; therefore, relationships configured over time and space, and an individual's conception of one's future possibilities. Working within applied linguistics, a number of models have been developed to understand the link between language and identity. While, for example, in psychosocial approaches identity is viewed as a process led by development (Erikson 1968), in sociocultural theories, it is an identity that is understood as socially constructed and context-bound. Through the post-structural approaches forwarded by the work of Norton (2013), identity is theorised as dynamic and constantly in flux. Further, Forbes et al. (2021) take up a multi-theoretical perspective, fusing these perspectives in their light of viewing identity as being individually and socially influenced, yet open to transformation. This is also the way other recent studies have demarcated language identity (Fisher et al. 2020).

While linguistic identity generally refers to identification within particular languages, multilingual identity is a more general concept that describes one's self-recognition as multilingual beings and naturally involves those who are just commencing their foreign language learning. Henry (2017) The operationalisation of multi-lingual identity is carried out by Forbes et al. (2021) through the following '3Es model': that of experience, evaluation, and emotion. These dimensions are based on data from more than 2,000 students and point to experiences with language, self-assessment as a language learner, and emotional ties with language learning as the basic elements of multilingual identity. The model's "experience" aspect includes multiple linguistic exposure: contact within family and community, and media (Aronin, 2016). Such contexts, according to the views propagated by sociocultural perspectives, are the most influential in shaping identity through emphasising the role of social factors that contribute to this process. According to Forbes et al. (2021), such classroom-based interventions tend to affect facets of 'evaluation' and 'emotion'. However, these authors themselves acknowledge that transformative effects can occur as a result of language-learning experiences.

The evaluative aspect of identity within the 3Es model pertains to students' beliefs and attitudes about languages and their own capabilities as language learners. Vignoles et al. (2011) highlight that beliefs, self-esteem, and self-efficacy shape individual identity, and Fisher (2013) emphasises their influence in language acquisition as shown in Figure 1. Attitudes are further influenced by relational contexts such as family and peer evaluations (Taylor, 2013). When language learning is valued by significant others, students may, in turn, develop a positive self-evaluation as language learners. Emotional factors also play a vital role in identity formation, with Zembylas (2003) arguing that identity and emotion are deeply intertwined. This perspective is supported by Aronin and Laoire (2003), who note the emotional transitions involved in multilingual identity formation, and Dewaele (2011), who emphasises the role of teachers in fostering positive emotional connections to language learning. However, Henry (2017) observes that while emotions in language learning are well-studied, the specific emotions associated with self-identifying as multilingual remain under-researched.

Pedagogical interventions focused on identity within classrooms could provide a framework for fostering multilingual identities. Wenger (1998) posits that learning is intrinsically linked to identity, suggesting that schooling should support identity development by recognising social and cultural influences. Identity-based education is gaining traction, with researchers like Schachter and Rich (2011) advocating for educators' engagement with students' identity-related processes. Studies show that identity-based interventions encourage self-reflection, which is essential for identity exploration (Kaplan et al., 2014). As Kaplan et al. (2014) indicate, connecting curriculum content to students' self-concept enhances the relevance of learning. For example, small-group activities rooted in identity-based motivation theory have been shown to enhance student engagement and

persistence in academic tasks (Sorenson et al., 2018). Similarly, Perez et al. (2020) found that reflective journal assignments linking course content with students' academic goals positively impacted commitment and task value.

Identity-based interventions have also proven effective in specific subject contexts. Chapman and Feldman (2017) demonstrated that students' science identity could be developed through participation in authentic scientific experiences, progressing from performance and competence to self-recognition as scientists. Comparable positive outcomes have been observed in mathematics (Heffernan et al., 2020) and developmental writing courses (D'Antonio, 2020). However, Forbes et al. (2021) note a gap in identity-focused interventions within language learning contexts. This gap is surprising given the foreign language classroom's potential for fostering multilingual identity, a key component of investment in language learning (Kramsch, 2009). For adolescent learners, who are in a critical period of identity development, such interventions could be particularly beneficial (Taylor, 2013).
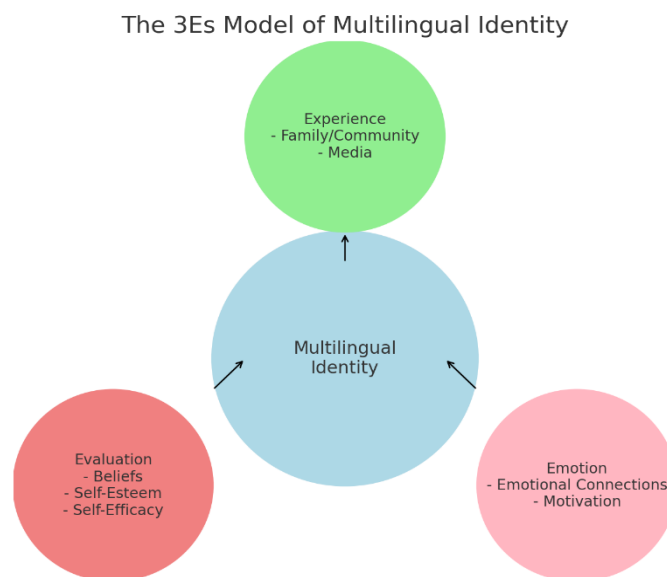

Figure 1. Showcasing the three main components—Experience, Evaluation, and Emotion—and how they connect to form a multilingual identity.

Forbes et al. (2021) hypothesised that a classroom-based intervention explicitly engaging students in reflecting on their multilingual identities could positively affect their language-learning motivation and self-concept. They conducted a mixed-methods study across four secondary schools in England to investigate this hypothesis, implementing a participative intervention aimed at enhancing multilingual identity through a year-long programme. The intervention encouraged students to engage actively in discussions and activities about language

use and identity, aiming to make the process of language learning personally meaningful. Emphasising awareness and reflexivity, the researchers expected that by consciously exploring their multilingual identity, students would develop a deeper investment in language learning.

Research Questions

Q1: How does teachers' perception of their multilingual identities influence their pedagogical practices in multilingual classrooms?

Q2: In what ways do identity-focused interventions implemented by teachers affect students' engagement and attitudes toward language learning in multilingual settings?

Methodology

Participants

The study involved 20 secondary school students aged 14–16, selected from multilingual classrooms in secondary schools across England. These participants were chosen using purposive sampling to ensure diverse representation of linguistic backgrounds and language-learning experiences. The selection criteria included regular attendance in the selected classrooms, active engagement in language-learning activities prior to the intervention, and willingness to complete pre- and post-intervention surveys. This smaller, focused sample allowed for a detailed examination of the intervention's effects while ensuring the reliability of the quantitative data collected.

The participating students were taught by teachers experienced in multilingual pedagogy. Although teachers facilitated the identity-focused activities in their classrooms, the study exclusively evaluated student outcomes. This approach ensured that the research maintained its focus on measurable variables related to student engagement and language-learning anxiety.

Design

This study employed a quantitative pretest and post-test design that allowed the researchers to quantify an identity-focused intervention on changes in students' outcomes. Such a design allows the examination of levels of student engagement and anxiety before and after the intervention. In focusing on numerical data, the study had clearly set out a framework within which the effectiveness of the intervention could be judged. It involved a structured activity that was implemented over four weeks with the intention of enhancing students' engagement and reducing anxiety when learning the language. The nature of this study is purely quantitative since no qualitative data, such as interviews or observations, were used in the collection of data to make the results purely statistical in nature and

analysis. The whole process is divided into three phases: pre-intervention data collection, four-week intervention, and post-intervention data collection.

Materials

It also utilised two valid measuring instruments of the key variables at issue: engagement and anxiety. The students' language engagement was measured on a 0-100 scale; the higher scores mean the higher motivation and more active involvement in the language-learning activities. Anxiety was measured on a scale from 0-100 by means of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS); similarly, the lower the scores, the less anxious the students are. The FLCAS was originally devised by Horwitz et al. (1986) and since then has been extensively validated in empirical educational research; thus, it was chosen because it would be reliable for measuring students' language-learning experiences. Both scales were administered to participants before and after the intervention. These instruments assured that the data collected could be quantitatively analysed to assess the impact of the intervention with exactitude and consistency.

Procedure

All 20 participants responded to a baseline survey on their engagement and anxiety levels during the pre-intervention phase. This was done under controlled conditions in the classroom for standardisation, hence assurances of reliability in data gathering. These scores were useful in comparing the scores after the intervention.

In the intervention phase, identity-focused activities were undertaken over a period of four weeks. Multilingual storytelling activities involved students narrating stories in their home languages and English, focusing on how to connect their linguistic heritage with peer classroom learning. Reflective journaling encouraged students to write down their thoughts on multilingual identities and experiences in language learning. Group discussions encouraged class conversations that allowed students to discuss linguistic and cultural insights. Although the activities were designed to improve engagement and reduce anxiety, the focus of the study was to measure changes in student outcomes quantitatively through the pre- and post-test scores.

Participants responded to the same questionnaire in the post-intervention phase to assess their level of engagement and anxiety after the intervention. Data from the post-test were thus able to directly compare scores at baseline and as such indicated a clear suggestion of the intervention.

Data Analysis

The pre- and post-intervention questionnaires were measured by paired sample t-tests, one kind of statistical test intended to compare two matching groups on the same measure. The main aim of using this test was to answer

whether the intervention significantly influenced the students in terms of engagement and anxiety. The mean score comparisons for engagement were measured from pre-test to post-test levels. This was meant to find improvements in motivation and participation. Anxiety: Mean scores at pre-test and post-test were measured to assess decreases in language-learning anxiety.

Here, the application of a paired sample t-test was realised by the use of SPSS software, which allowed for the proper calculation of test statistics, which included means, standard deviations, and significance levels. It was considered that a probability value of less than 0.05, or $p < 0.05$, showed statistical significance, meaning observed changes in-engagement and anxiety could not be a matter of chance. This strong analytical approach brought clear evidence of effectiveness, indicating a validation role of teacher identity-focused practices regarding improvement in student outcomes.

Ethical Considerations

The research design has been carefully carried out, adhering strictly to the ethical guidelines surrounding the protection of participant rights and welfare. Informed consent was sought and received from all the students, which, where applicable, included parental consent for participants under the age of 18. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and the students were advised of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without detriment. All data became anonymised for confidentiality and safely stored. Data collection of this study was first approved by the appropriate Institutional Review Board. Ethical standards, therefore, when dealing with human participants in research were met because the concepts of transparency and accountability were woven into it.

Results

The findings showed the strong influence of teacher identity on effective pedagogical practices in multilingual classrooms. Those teachers who felt a stronger sense of their multilingual identities could manage classes that supported identity-driven activities, linking linguistic experiences to classroom learning. Table 1: Means and paired t-test results related to student engagement pre- and post-intervention. Engagement levels increased significantly post-intervention ($M = 55.10$, pre-engagement; $M = 78.40$, post-engagement). Anxiety decreased significantly, with the mean pre-anxiety score ($M = 67.20$) and the mean post-anxiety score ($M = 44.95$), $p < .001$, which again denotes the role of activities in building a supportive atmosphere. These are in line with Norton's identity theory (2013) that teacher-initiated identity integration will contribute to more motivation and lower levels of anxiety for language learners.

Table 1.

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pre-Engagement	55.10	20	5.180	1.158
	Post-Engagement	78.40	20	4.147	.927
Pair 2	Pre-Anxiety	67.20	20	3.334	.746
	Post-Anxiety	44.95	20	4.298	.961

Correlational analysis further supported these findings, as detailed in Table 3, which demonstrated a strong positive relationship between teacher-facilitated activities and improvements in student engagement ($r = .941$, $p < .001$). A similar correlation was observed for reductions in anxiety ($r = .827$, $p < .001$). These results suggest that the identity-focused interventions were deeply rooted in teachers' multilingual pedagogical practices, amplifying their impact on student outcomes. Additionally, Table 2 highlights the significant paired differences for both engagement and anxiety, with mean differences of –23.30 and 22.25, respectively. These statistical outcomes provide robust evidence that teacher identity directly influences the success of multilingual classroom interventions, supporting the hypothesis that teacher identity is a critical component in shaping effective pedagogical practices.

Table 2.

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences								
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df		
Pair 1	Pre-Engagement - Post-Engagement	-23.300	1.895	.424	-24.187	-22.413	-54.999	19		.000
Pair 2	Pre-Anxiety - Post-Anxiety	22.250	2.425	.542	21.115	23.385	41.030	19		.000

Table 3.

Paired Samples Correlations

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	Pre-Engagement & Post-Engagement	20	.941	.000
Pair 2	Pre-Anxiety & Post-Anxiety	20	.827	.000

Discussion & Conclusion

The present study explores the extent to which teacher identity influences pedagogical practices in multilingual classrooms and resonates with students' levels of engagement and anxiety. These investigations within the present study provide convincing evidence that teacher identity is one of the leading factors which significantly influences language learning since individual identity-focused interventions have been seen to shape the classroom environment. The discussion that follows portrays the findings in the light of the research questions and the available literature, describing implications seen both from a theoretical and practical point of view.

Teacher Identity and Pedagogical Practices

This pertains to the first research question: the self-concept of being multilingual and how teachers with this identity forge ahead in building appropriate pedagogical practices. Evidence is seen that the stronger the multilingual identity generated for self, the more capable a teacher can be at planning and conducting interventions in a manner that honours students' linguistic experiences. This also agrees with Norton's claim that identity is dynamic and contextually constructed, shaping not just how one perceives oneself but also how one interacts with others. Teachers who identified multilingualism as an asset within themselves were then able to project this into pedagogical approaches of inclusion, such as multilingual storytelling and reflective journaling, which allowed students to investigate and relate their linguistic experiences to classroom activities.

This becomes even more important given the fact that there is a correlation between teacher identity and student outcomes, as indicated in Table 3. There was a very strong positive correlation between teacher-facilitated activities and engagement, which corroborates the critical role that teacher identity plays in the success of classroom interventions. That aligns with Wenger (1998), who says that learning is inextricably tied to issues of identity and that it is part of educators' tasks to diligently work with their identities to create meaningful learning experiences. Besides, the 3Es model by Forbes et al. (2021)-experience, evaluation, and emotion-carried an application in this regard since teachers used their own experiences to impact the emotive and evaluative aspects of students' multilingual identities.

Identity-Focused Interventions and Student Outcomes

The second research question is whether the application of identity-focused interventions supports or influences the engagement and attitudes of learners toward language learning. Results indicate that these interventions were effective in significantly enhancing the engagement of students while reducing their anxiety, as represented by the paired sample t-test results summarised in Tables 1 and 2. The average engagement score increased from 55.10 to

78.40, while the anxiety scores decreased from 67.20 to 44.95, both at $p < 0.001$. These findings are consonant with other research evidence highlighting the transformational potentials of identity-based educational interventions.

Such effectiveness of these interventions may be partially explained by how they appealed to students' identities. Vignoles et al. (2011) insist that self-evaluation and emotional involvement are the core constituent elements in the construction of identity. For example, multilingual storytelling or group discussions let students construe their respective linguistic diversity as a positive feature, thus developing a positive self-concept and minimising. edge feelings of alienation that generally arise during language learning. These findings also correspond to the argument of Dewaele (2011) that emotional factors lie at the heart of language learning and that, therefore, interventions into emotional dimensions are likely to lead to more authentic engagement and decreased anxiety.

Theoretical Implications

These findings extend the theoretical discussion on identity and language learning by providing empirical support for the integration of identity-focused pedagogies in multilingual classrooms. Most striking, however, were significant decreases in anxiety and increases in engagement that underlined a transformative potential aligning educational practices with students' multilingual identities. Such findings support the poststructuralist view of identity as dynamic and influenced through social and cultural interactions. These interventions provided ways for the students to reflect on and articulate their multilingual experiences, which in turn created space and opportunities to negotiate identities in ways that encourage and foster investment. This thus reinforces the relevance of Forbes et al.'s (2021) 3Es model, especially an emphasis on the evaluative and emotional aspects of multilingual identity. The strong correlations in Table 3 between teacher-facilitated activities and engagement and anxiety reductions underline the significance of these dimensions in shaping outcomes among students. This agrees with the general literature on identity-based education, which claims an approach of curriculum content connection with the students' identity amplifies motivation and persistence (Schachter & Rich, 2011; Sorenson et al., 2018).

Practical Implications

It also practically points out that awareness of identity should be one of the core parts of training programs for teachers. Teachers have to be prepared to recognise and use their multilingual identity in providing an inclusive classroom that respects students for their linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The results indeed form a significant contribution to the fields of engagement and anxiety, and this might have a great effect on training regarding students' outcomes, especially in multilingual settings where students face complex identity negotiations. Furthermore, the discussion emphasises that identity-focused activities are to be included in the language curricula.

Other activities, such as reflective journaling and multilingual storytelling, are also employed to further engage students in this process of discovering and relating about their multilingual selves. Such activities could then be put into practice and adapted into other educational contexts and would therefore be provided with a framework for raising multilingual awareness across relevant classrooms.

Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

Though the study gives valuable insights, there are certain drawbacks in this study. The sample size is only 20 students, although this number is definitely a reasonable-sized group for detailed analysis. This would mean that there is limited generalisability of findings because studies involving larger and various samples need to be done to validate the results and investigate a range of possible variations in different educative settings. However, in this study, whereas only quantitative data were drawn upon, adding some sort of qualitative approach, given the nature of the factors under consideration-for example, interviews or classroom observation-would perhaps better insightful results in regard to the relationship between teacher identity and pedagogical practices.

Another future avenue might be the long-term effects of such identity-focused interventions. Although four weeks of intervention duration in this study were able to maintain changes in engagement and anxiety, longitudinal studies may be able to confirm whether such an effect is maintained for longer and how those changes interfere with broader academic outcomes. Finally, further research is needed to tease out the specific mechanisms through which teacher identity influences pedagogical practices, particularly in contexts where teachers may not consider themselves very strongly as multilingual.

Acknowledgment

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest related to this study.

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Page | 337

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