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Fatiha Sadouki: Multilingualism among international students in Hungary
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Multilingualism among international students in Hungary

This study investigates the importance of multilingualism among international students in Hungary. It presents how knowing languages can be useful in multilingual contexts. One hundred and sixty international students in Hungary participated in this study. Two research instruments were used to collect the data: a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The results showed that most participants know the importance of multilingualism in the Hungarian context. The participants rated the importance of knowing different languages on a scale of 1 to 5, with 76% giving a rating of 5. The participants also emphasized the usefulness of language learning and the need for foreign language proficiency for successful integration into Hungarian society. The findings indicated that the participants had a positive attitude towards multilingualism and believed that being multilingual enabled them to better integrate into Hungarian society and build relationships with people from different countries.

Keywords: international students in Hungary, language learning, multilingualism, multilingualism in Hungary, social integration

1. Introduction

International student mobility has steadily increased in the last few decades, with the Institute of International Education (Project Atlas, 2004) defining an international student as one who pursues an educational experience or part of a study level in a country other than their home nation. According to a prediction by Böhm et al. (2002), the number of international students around the globe is expected to reach 7.2 million by 2025. Hungary is no exception, offering international students diverse scholarships and study programmes. As of 2019, Hungary's Central Statistical Office (KSH) reported 40,300 full-time international students enrolled in different Hungarian universities, hailing from various countries and continents such as Africa, Asia, South America, and Europe.

Hungary has a long-standing tradition of multilingualism. Hungarian is the national language, but many people are also fluent in other languages, such as English, German, and French. This is partly due to the country's past as a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which supported using multiple languages. Multilingualism is also encouraged in Hungary's educational system, with many students learning two or more languages from a young age. Multilingualism is becoming increasingly common among international students in Hungary. English is the primary language of education in most universities in Hungary, but international students from different countries can communicate with each other

in their native languages. This helps to bridge cultural differences and foster a sense of community and understanding. In addition, many universities have language courses that allow international students to learn Hungarian. These language courses are beneficial as they allow them to better integrate into Hungarian society and culture and enable them to communicate with locals in their native language.

According to Tucker (1998), the number of multilingual speakers in the world has outnumbered monolinguals, and many people nowadays use more than two languages daily and for different reasons, such as historical reasons. Multilingualism refers to "the ability to use three or more languages, either separately or in various degrees of code-mixing" (McArthur, 1992, p.673). Multilingualism can also describe societies and individuals (Cenoz, 2003; De Angelis, 2007). The importance of multilingualism among international students worldwide is evident, as it provides the necessary linguistic skills and knowledge to access educational resources and opportunities. Cenoz (2009) explored multilingualism in education when two languages or more are used in education and identified various factors that lead to the use of multiple languages in education, such as linguistic heterogeneity of a country or region, specific social or religious attitudes, and the desire to promote national identity. Learning languages serves various functions for international students, including enabling communication with people who speak a language different from their native language. Cook (2003) uses the concept of 'multicompetent speakers' to describe people who use two languages or more. The role of bilingualism in third-language learning can play a facilitating role in the learning process of third or additional-language learning contexts.

One of the challenges that students might face when abroad is communication as they encounter a new environment and sometimes new language(s). The increasing number of international students in Hungary makes it interesting to focus on language diversity in Hungary and study multilingualism among international students due to the number of languages that could be used in such a multilingual context. This paper will discuss the current literature on multilingualism and language learning experiences of international students in Hungary. Furthermore, it will explore the role of multilingualism in social integration and the implications for language teaching in the Hungarian education system. The research questions that will be addressed in this paper are:

- What is the importance of multilingualism according to international students in Hungary?
- What are international students' attitudes towards learning foreign languages in Hungary?

2. Multilingualism and linguistic diversity

Multilingualism is a key concept in applied linguistics that is defined by scholars in different ways and refers to the ability to understand, use, and communicate in more than one language by an individual "who can communicate in more than one language, be it active (through speaking and writing) or passive (through listening and reading)" (Li, 2008, p. 4). This phenomenon has been investigated from a variety of perspectives and is increasingly being recognized as a social asset that brings a range of benefits to individuals and societies. Specifically, multilingualism and linguistic diversity have positively impacted social cohesion, economic growth and intercultural communication (Cenoz, 2009; García and Lin, 2017).

Multilingualism is a term that is used to define societies as well as individuals who can use different languages in the same context and is related to "The ability of societies, institutions, groups and individuals to engage, on a regular basis, with more than one language in their day-to-day lives" (European Commission, 2007, p.6). In the context of education, multilingual education (Cenoz and Gorter, 2010; Cenoz and Gorter, 2015) is defined as "the use of two or more languages in education, provided that schools aim at multilingualism and multiliteracy" (p.2). While bilingual education is a common term used to describe the use of two languages in education, the term multilingualism better reflects the reality of modern education, which often involves multiple languages. According to García and Lin (2017), the term multilingual is preferable to bilingual, as it better describes the actual use of language in education due to the broadness of multilingualism as a concept to describe the use of languages in education.

Multilingualism and linguistic diversity are essential aspects of any culture or society. Multilingualism is the ability to understand, use, and communicate in more than one language, whereas linguistic diversity is the presence of several different languages in a particular context (Kecskes and Papp, 2000; Masthrie et al., 2009). Multilingualism can be seen as a positive social attribute, as it allows for a greater understanding of different cultures and communication between different people. It can also have a positive economic impact, opening various job opportunities and markets. On the other hand, linguistic diversity can be seen as a challenge, as it can create difficulties for people who cannot communicate in a particular language. In addition, it can lead to confusion and misunderstanding between people of different languages, which can lead to conflict. Therefore, countries must strive to balance multilingualism and linguistic diversity to ensure that all their citizens can communicate and understand each other.

3. Language learning and studying abroad

Learning languages has served various functions for international students, including communication with people who speak a language different from the student's native language (Tucker, 1998). Learning the language of the country you live in can help internationals have experiences and build relationships with individuals from various cultural backgrounds. Comparing the use of different languages has become a central topic in applied linguistics in the last decade to highlight multilingualism, as the number of multilinguals outnumbered monolinguals worldwide (Tucker, 1998). Various studies have been conducted on students' language learning experiences when studying abroad in different contexts (Payumo and Arasu, 2017; Carvalho et al., 2016; Binder et al., 2013; Ashton-Hay, 2016; Hellsten, 2004; Brown and Holloway, 2008)

Various studies on learning languages abroad showed that students who learn languages abroad and precisely in the country of the language they are learning have a better performance than those who learn it in their home country, especially as far as oral performance and fluency are concerned (Allen and Herron, 2003; Watson and Wolfel, 2015; Lafford, 2006; Freed et al., 2004). Additionally, the most effective programmes tend to offer two-way developmental bilingual education, followed by those offering one-way developmental bilingual education and the second language taught through academic content (Thomas and Collier, 1997). To further understand the language learning experiences of international students abroad, Hughes (2004) reviewed the cross-research literature on students' experience abroad, considering the linguistic and cultural challenges that students might face abroad.

When studying abroad, language learning can be a great learning experience. Depending on students' goals and time frames, there are a few different ways to learn a language. Taking a language course is a popular option, as many universities offer such courses explicitly designed for international students. Language exchanges with native speakers, such as those facilitated through websites like Conversation Exchange, are also helpful in practising a foreign language. Furthermore, immersing oneself in the language through films, books, and music is a great way to understand the language and its culture better. Finally, speaking with locals is encouraged, as it helps one become more familiar with the language and culture, even if one cannot understand everything being said.

Overall, language learning is a key component of the international student experience, and there are a variety of methods to consider when studying abroad. The most successful programmes offer two-way and one-way developmental bilingual education, and other methods, such as language courses, language exchanges, and language immersion, are also encouraged.

4. The study

This study attempts to investigate multilingualism in Hungary by focusing on international students at Hungarian Universities and exploring international students' attitudes toward using languages in a multilingual context. We employed a mixed-methods research approach for our project, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques. The qualitative approach seeks to emphasize the participant's perspective, seeking to gain insight into the understanding of the phenomenon being studied, and the quantitative approach focuses on the description of quantifiable, objective data to make generalizations. We used a survey questionnaire and an interview to gather the data for this study. This allowed the researcher to understand the phenomenon under investigation more deeply through quantitative and qualitative data collected from a sample of international students in Hungary.

This study used two research instruments: a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The questionnaire consisted of 25 questions related to the language used by international students, the importance of knowing languages, the attitudes of international students towards multilingualism, and their experiences with language(s) learning in Hungary. The questionnaire is divided into three sections. The first section was devoted to biographic data of the participants, such as age, gender, nationality, and the languages they speak. The second and third sections included questions about their use of the languages they know in their daily communication and language learning experience. The questionnaire was conducted online by posting it on international students' Facebook groups. Here are some examples of the questions of the questionnaire:

- Have you taken any language classes through the university language center? If so, which language(s) did you take (Hungarian, German, French, Italian, etc.)?
- What motivates you to take the course(s)?
- On a scale of 1 to 6, how important would you rate having knowledge of different languages when it comes to communicating with the international community?

The questions were straightforward, and the researcher added a section in which they could provide a more detailed response to gain greater insight into international students' thoughts regarding the use of languages in a multilingual context, such as the following question:

- How important is being multilingual when interacting with people from other countries? (100 words max).

Semi-structured interviews were used to better understand the participants' attitudes towards multilingualism and language learning. The interview consisted of one section that explored students' perspectives on language learning and using

multiple languages in a multilingual context. These interviews aimed to gain an individual perspective from each interviewee, exploring the significance of their responses to the questions in depth. Our investigation aimed to uncover the distinctiveness of each participant's story regarding language learning and multilingualism.

A total of 160 international students from various countries enrolled in Hungarian universities participated in this study. The participants were either current students or had graduated one to two years prior and are now employed in Hungary. Specifically, the study included students from African countries (Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Ethiopia, and Kenya), Asia (Pakistan, India, China, Turkey, Iran, Jordan, Afghanistan, Palestine, Myanmar, Indonesia, and Vietnam), Europe (Germany, Poland, Italy, France, Russia, Spain, Serbia, and Romania), and Mexico. Following the frequencies of the number of participants for each country, it was shown that Jordan (15%), Indonesia (11.8%), and Pakistan (11.2%) had the highest representation. Algeria (8.7%), Tunisia (7.5%), and Morocco (6.8%) had substantial participation, while the remaining countries were represented by fewer than 5% of the participants. 58% of the participants were females, while 42% were males. Regarding educational level, the study included 52 BA, 70 MA, and 32 PhD students. There were also six postgraduates. Moreover, the participants spoke multiple languages, with the majority 37.5% knowing two languages, followed by 34.3% who spoke three languages, 20% who spoke four languages, 5.6% who spoke five languages, and 2.5% who spoke more than five languages. Table 1 presents demographic details about the five participants who participated in the interview.

Table 1. Demographic details of the participants in the interview

	<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Degree Pursued</i>	<i>Languages spoken</i>	<i>Length of the interview</i>
<i>P1</i>	Pakistan	BA	Urdu, Punjabi, Hindi, English, and Hungarian	32 min
<i>P2</i>	Morocco	PhD	Arabic, Berber, French, and English	28 min
<i>P3</i>	Algeria	MA	Arabic, French, and English	31 min
<i>P4</i>	Turkey	MA	Turkish, English, and German	27 min
<i>P5</i>	Jordan	PhD	Arabic and English	31 min

Data collection for this research occurred in the spring semester of 2022, from March to June. Quantitative data was collected using a questionnaire, while qualitative data was obtained through semi-structured interviews with five participants (n=5) of the total number of participants. The questionnaire and semi-structured interview were administered in English. The data was analysed using

descriptive statistical techniques such as mean and standard deviation were used to analyse the quantitative data. The qualitative data was analysed to gain insights into participants' attitudes towards multilingualism in the interviews.

5. Results

5.1 The importance of multilingualism in Hungary

The results of this study showed that multilingualism is highly valued by international students in Hungary, with most participants (94%) rating multilingualism as very important (mean = 4.9, SD = 0.3), as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Mean and standard deviation of the participants' responses on the importance of multilingualism

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>
<i>Very important</i>	4.9	0.3
<i>Important</i>	3.9	0.7
<i>Moderately important</i>	2.8	1.0
<i>Slightly important</i>	1.9	0.9
<i>Not important</i>	1.2	0.6

The interviews provided further insight into the importance of multilingualism for international students in Hungary and their motivations for learning languages. Most participants (n=4) stated that their primary motivation for learning a language was to increase their chances of finding employment in Hungary in particular and Europe in general. At the same time, the other (n=1) had a personal interest in learning languages. Additionally, most participants had taken language classes through the university language center, with the most popular language being Hungarian, followed by English, German, French, and so on. In the words of one participant, *Being multilingual has been invaluable for me in terms of developing a deeper understanding of the Hungarian culture and ways of communicating with locals.* Another participant shared, *Learning Hungarian has helped me to make friends more easily, and to have meaningful conversations with people from different backgrounds.* These comments demonstrate the importance of multilingualism according to international students in Hungary and the many benefits that it can bring for them.

Furthermore, the findings revealed that multilingualism is seen as an essential tool for communication and cultural understanding. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being very important, 76% of participants rated the importance of knowing different languages as 5. When asked to provide a more detailed response to the question on the importance of multilingual, participants shared that it allowed them to "learn and understand other cultures," such as the following:

- *Knowing many languages has allowed me to make friends from different countries and learn about their cultures and values.*
- *It has been very helpful for me to learn the language of the country I live in. I have been able to learn more about their culture, customs, and traditions, which has made me feel more connected to the people here.*
- *It gives me a better appreciation for the diversity of others' backgrounds and share my own culture, and build bridges between people.*

Participants also mentioned that knowing languages helps them "express their ideas and feelings more effectively" and "develop meaningful relationships" with people from various backgrounds as participants said:

- *I was able to better understand the opinions of people from different cultures and countries. I speak four languages and this allows me to make more meaningful conversations and interactions, which was very important for me since I was living in another foreign country.*
- *Knowing different languages helps me to explore some of the differences between different languages, which allowed me to understand and appreciate the subtle differences in the way people communicate in different languages.*
- *Speaking many languages enabled me to communicate more effectively with people from other countries and understand their perspectives and beliefs better.*

Most participants cited that their primary motivation for learning a language was to increase their chances of finding employment in Hungary. Some participants mentioned that:

- *Since this is my last semester, I have started looking for jobs here. I think it is very important for me to learn the local language, Hungarian, as it will give me an advantage over other candidates who don't know the language.*
- *I think it is essential to learn the languages of the countries you are living in because speaking different languages can open many doors in terms of employment opportunities.*
- *I speak Turkish, English, and German, and I am learning Hungarian so I can be a competitive candidate when I apply for jobs here. Knowing languages is an advantage, and I think it will help me stand out from the other applicants.*

- *Having the ability to speak multiple languages gives me an edge in the job market in Hungary, as many employers prefer candidates who can speak multiple languages.*

5.1.1 Multilingualism and social integration

Concerning questions focusing on the usefulness of multilingualism in social integration for international students in Hungary and the "social way of life" discussed by Rienties et al. (2011), 75% of participants indicated that knowing more languages makes it easier to settle into the local society. Furthermore, 85% of them stressed the importance of understanding the local language and culture to be involved in their host country. They provided examples such as being able to communicate more effectively with their peers, professors, neighbours, and other members of the local community, as well as comprehend the area's culture and customs. Participants reiterated these points during the interviews, and here are some examples of the participants' responses:

- *Speaking the local language and understanding the culture helped me to develop a good relationship with my classmates and the local people, which in turn made it easier to integrate into the Hungarian society.*
- *Knowing the local language has enabled me to communicate more efficiently with my peers and professors, which has made it much easier to get involved in the local community.*
- *I took a preparatory year in learning Hungarian to understand everything related to the Hungarian history, language, and culture, and this has enabled me to participate in activities which I otherwise wouldn't have been able to take part in if I was not speaking Hungarian, such as traditional festivals and local events.*

Additionally, the participants highlighted the importance of multilingualism in social integration and pointed out the numerous advantages of understanding different backgrounds. They also emphasized the significance of language exchanges and other activities to foster social integration. They provided examples such as attending language exchange groups, joining multicultural clubs and societies, and participating in language classes. These activities help international students to interact with locals and other international students, and they mentioned:

- *I joined a Facebook group for language swap in which we set meetings weekly, and we can have the chance to practice the language(s) we know with native speakers. This allowed me to extend my acquaintances list including local friends to practice my*

Hungarian with, and other internationals to practice my Spanish and German.

- *Joining multicultural clubs and societies helped me to interact with international students and locals, and to learn more about the local culture.*
- *Participating in language classes has enabled me to learn more about the local language and culture, and to make friends with people from different backgrounds.*

The results of the survey indicated that the majority of the participants rated their language learning experience as positive. The most common motivation for taking language classes was the desire to improve their language skills. Additionally, the results showed that most participants considered knowledge of multiple languages important for communicating with the international community. The results of the semi-structured interviews suggested that the participants had a positive attitude towards multilingualism. They believed being multilingual enabled them to better integrate into Hungarian society and build relationships with people from different countries.

5.2 Attitudes of international students toward language learning

The questionnaire and interviews revealed that international students in Hungary generally have positive attitudes towards multilingualism. Most participants (76%) strongly agreed that multilingualism and learning languages are beneficial, and the remaining (24%) agreed. In the interviews, most participants (n=4) expressed that they enjoyed the process of learning a language, while the remaining (n=1) felt it was a challenge. When asked about the difficulties of learning a language, most participants (n=3) expressed that the most challenging task was mastering the grammar and pronunciation of the language, while the others (n=2) felt that memorizing the vocabulary was the most difficult. The following quotes present what some participants mentioned concerning the language learning process they are learning:

- *I think the language learning process is very gratifying and rewarding. It's like solving a puzzle, trying to figure out the grammar and how to make sentences. I also enjoy the challenge of learning a new language.*
- *I find the learning process kind of fun. It's a great way to exercise my mind and keep it active. I also love the feeling of accomplishment when I can express myself and understand others in a different language.*
- *I'm motivated to learn many language because it allows me to connect with people on a different level than just speaking English.*

- *I find language learning to be a great way to broaden my understanding of the world. Learning a language helps me to understand different cultures and people better, and allows me to appreciate the beauty of different languages.*

Participants expressed their attitudes towards the need to learn other languages in different ways. One participant shared their experience of needing to learn Hungarian since staying in Hungary after graduation was essential.

- *Well, before I came here...I thought we'll need English only to communicate with people in here, but in fact I found that learning Hungarian is also essential if you are planning to stay here after graduation.*

Another participant highlighted the importance of learning both English and Hungarian to be able to communicate with internationals and Hungarians, respectively.

- *It happened to me many times that I cannot understand people around me because when I go to groceries it is rare to find someone who speaks English, and that was one of the reasons why I am interested to learn Hungarian regardless it is an obligatory course for me.*
- *When you live here you do not need to be fluent in English only but you have also to learn Hungarian because they are both important to live here....to communicate with internationals using English and with Hungarians using Hungarian.*

Furthermore, a third participant discussed the importance of language learning as a tool for communication and how it can be an interesting and unique experience when speaking with people from different countries and with different accents. Lastly, it was noted that the process of multilingualism is crucial to understanding and interacting with various individuals from different cultural backgrounds.

- *You know learning languages is a key to communicate with people who speak different languages...As I came from a country in which three languages or more are used in the country on a daily basis.... I found it interesting to speak with people who speak the same languages...for example... I speak in Arabic with Arabs regardless of their different accents.....French with people who speak French and I usually go to the 'Francophone club' to practice my French with others... and English with all internationals.*

6. Discussion and conclusion

The results suggest that multilingualism is important in promoting social integration among international students in Hungary. The fact that international students can communicate in more than two languages and have a positive attitude towards multilingualism indicates the importance of multilingualism in promoting social integration. As Marácz and Adamo (2017) and Toyokawa and Toyokawa (2002) demonstrated, the inclination towards multilingualism among international students is inextricably linked to their sense of fitting in and being an integral part of the host country's society. Navigating various linguistic spheres empowers students to establish meaningful connections across diverse groups, thus serving as a bridge that spans cultural divides. The findings also resonate with the work of Brown and Holloway (2008), who highlight how multilingualism fosters identity formation, empathy, and the exchange of ideas. In this light, multilingualism's potential to nurture a shared cultural identity among international students becomes evident, promoting mutual understanding and enhancing their integration experience.

Furthermore, it is essential to underscore that the identified benefits of multilingualism reverberate not only within the realm of communication but also within the development of a multifaceted identity. The acquisition of multiple languages provides international students with a toolkit to navigate intricate cultural dynamics, leading to the cultivation of a nuanced sense of self as they perceive themselves as multilinguals. This aligns with the theoretical framework set forth by sociolinguists Marácz and Adamo (2017) and Toyokawa and Toyokawa (2002), who underscore the transformative nature of multilingualism in fostering social cohesion.

In line with this, multilingualism can be conceptualized as a catalyst for empathy and cross-cultural understanding. By acquiring multiple languages, international students develop a heightened sensitivity towards diverse perspectives and experiences, enabling them to interact more meaningfully with their peers from various backgrounds. This sentiment resonates with the findings of Brown and Holloway (2008), who highlight the symbiotic relationship between multilingualism and the sharing of knowledge and experiences, thus nurturing an environment conducive to social integration.

The findings of the study showed that the majority of international students had a good command of their native language, as well as multiple other languages, and had a positive attitude towards multilingualism. Furthermore, the results indicated that most international students could communicate in more than two languages and had a positive attitude towards multilingualism. Multilingualism is highly valued among international students in Hungary, and it can provide students with a variety of benefits. These findings suggest that multilingualism can be an important factor in promoting social integration among international students in Hungary. Furthermore, research has shown that multilingualism

fosters social integration and promotes a sense of belonging, identity, empathy, and understanding and sharing of knowledge and experiences. Thus, multilingualism can help international students to integrate into the local culture and to gain a competitive advantage in the job market.

However, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations. The study's findings may be influenced by choosing a specific context of the study in Hungary. Moreover, the research primarily focused on language skills and attitudes, allowing further exploration of international students' motivations, experiences, and preferences regarding multilingualism. An in-depth investigation in these areas could offer a more comprehensive understanding of multilingualism's role in the lives of international students and provide valuable insights to devise effective strategies for supporting their successful integration in Hungary.

To expand our comprehension of international students' multilingual experiences, future research endeavours should delve into the intricate nuances of their linguistic journeys. By exploring the intricacies of language use, code-switching, and the emotional resonance of different languages, we can refine our understanding and shape targeted support initiatives for the international student community in Hungary. This continuous investigation is pivotal in fostering an inclusive environment and facilitating the holistic integration of international students within the host country.

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