

Identity Development Through the Lens of Communication Skills: Revisiting Erikson's Psychosocial Theory in the 21st Century Classroom

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Abstract

This theoretical and conceptual paper presents a revisiting approach to Erikson's psychosocial theory through the lens of 21st-century communication skills. This paper also focuses on contemporary educational contexts, particularly International Baccalaureate schools, to examine how communicative agency and 21st-century communication skills can be used as a foundational ground for understanding how adolescent students express, negotiate, and reconstruct their identities. Drawing on Erikson's concept of identity versus role confusion, and using recent theorizations on communicative agency, competence, digital communication, intercultural communication, and reflection, this paper conceptualizes communication skills as a developmental space rather than transferable skills in which learners externalize possible identities, face various situations, handle different opinions, reflect on how they represent themselves among social groups, and reconstruct their sense of self. This paper further introduces a communication-identity development framework in which communicative agencies serve a mediating role. Through illustrative classroom-based examples from IB international contexts, communication and reflection seem to play a fundamental role in supporting self-expression, belonging, cultural understanding, self-awareness, and linguistic identity development. Therefore, this paper concludes that understanding communication as an integral part of identity development extends Erikson's framework to

multicultural and digitally mediated learning environments, offering valuable implications for classroom practice and assessment.

Keywords: Communicative agency, adolescent learners, self-expression, intercultural learning, reflection

Introduction

Students in contemporary classrooms belong to diverse communities and come from different educational backgrounds. This is typically evident in international schools, where diversity is reinforced and intercultural communication is extensively practiced and sought. Particularly, adolescent students exhibit multiple and profound physical and psychological changes, which makes them feel self-conscious and uncertain at the same time. These changes are often obvious in how adolescent students define themselves, experiment different interests and values, and exhibit various personalities and beliefs. Accordingly, the beliefs and values that are passed down by parents and caregivers during childhood are now placed alongside those they receive from social media, friends, and their own developing emotions for comparison in their minds. Such a process reveals that adolescent students' exploration of identity and self-expression pursuit can be accompanied by different conflicts that often result in confusion.

Developing an identity in the modern era and contemporary society is naturally complex and multidimensional. This stems from the fact that different factors shape this development, including family interactions, cultural background, and personal experiences. Adolescent students may start questioning their identities, mainly in diverse social contexts or in educational environments where different religion, racial, gender, sexual, and socioeconomic statuses intermingle. The ultimate outcome of this conflict may demonstrate as anxiety, confusion, or identity crisis about their true nature or character. If adolescent students attempt to maintain a balance between their individuality and external expectations, the hallmark of identity discovery and evolution to establish a balance involves questioning themselves, those they spend time with, and society in general. Hence, questioning identity plays a significant role as it allows adolescent students to open channels of communication and interaction with their surroundings.

On identity development, Erik Erikson's theory of Psychosocial Development represents the first theoretical foundation and conceptualization to affirm that identity crisis represents a significant stage to develop an adolescent's identity, and this theory provides the basis to comprehend adolescent identity exploration, especially in light of role confusion. As adolescent students embark on their journey to create a stable identity, they are expected to make decisions and commit to different choices

within the realm of their social context, and this may be associated with an identity crisis. If caregivers, educators, and parents motivate adolescent students to engage in self-reflection and self-awareness through open-ended questions and effective development of meaningful conversations about values, identity, and beliefs, negotiating identity can be facilitated. This is how adolescent students, in light of Erikson's theoretical framework, develop a sense of security as they feel accepted in a diverse society or learning community. Across time, adolescent students learn how to answer questions like: Who am I? Where do I belong? How do others perceive me? What values do I hold? How do I want to represent myself? While Erikson's theory emerged in a very different social, technological, and educational environment, it lays the foundational ground to understand how adolescent students develop and understand their identities in a continuously-growing communicative 21st-century environment.

Contemporary adolescent students develop their identities through various communicative landscapes. According to Ponikarovska (2019), today's communicative spaces, which involve group projects, multilingual interactions, presentations, social media, online communities, classroom discussions, digital learning platforms, intercultural interactions, and extracurricular activities, provide an authentic opportunity for psychological contact with peers, educators, and supervisors. The ability to face different psychological barriers that stem in the process of interaction identify the usefulness of interpersonal relationships, where personal communication is evident. When communication skills are ineffectively demonstrated or practiced, that can serve as a barrier to professional integration into learning and working environments (Ponikarovska, 2019). Moreover, social communications and identity development in the digital era have been extensively researched in the last few years. Developing information and communication technologies and the easy access to social media have significantly changed how students interact and develop their identities (Dudar & Liashchenko, 2024). With the emergence of social media platforms, self-representation in the digital space has been examined by multiple researches (Ruban, 2021; Skriabina, 2024). Those researchers found that social media plays a significant role in shaping young people's self-perception and how they develop their identity. The digital environment has offered those students valuable chances to express themselves, socialize, and develop social interactions, and this has significantly affected processes like identification and self-identification on the individual level. For instance, an IB international student may communicate at home in Arabic, with friends in English or French, academically in English, online with peers from various countries, and engage in collaborative international projects. Accordingly, communication in the 21st-century and in international schools is highly

shaped by sharing information, ideas, and feelings among individuals and groups from diverse cultural, personal, and linguistic backgrounds. Identity, in this sense, is continually expressed and negotiated through communication in diverse contexts. This form of communication remains underexplored concerning how it impacts identity development in adolescent students (Dudar & Liashchenko, 2024).

Although Erikson's psychological development theory has extensively illustrated how adolescent students form their identities, and educational research highly asserts the positive role of communication as a 21st-century skill or competency, little is known about how communication itself may significantly serve as a mechanism through which adolescent students explore, negotiate, and reconstruct their identities. As such, this paper argues that 21st-century communication skills do not merely represent a competency that adolescent students acquire throughout their learning phases but constitute a social and developmental space in which students' identities can be expressed, challenged, negotiated, and reconstructed.

The significance of this theoretical, conceptual paper lies in illustrating how communicative agency in contemporary society and education refers to the students' potential to make choices, cultivate a growth mindset, develop ownership and accountability, become confident, learn how to deal with change, and adopt a practical, human-centered open-minded approach to learning and life in general. Students' communicative agency embodies situating students in relation to others, adapting communication to various audiences, negotiating meaning, responding to feedback, participating in conversations, exercising voice, and reflecting and revising how they represent themselves (Xamzaev & Khaydarova, 2021). Rather than simply receiving knowledge, communicative agency allows adolescent students to set goals, make learning and life decisions, reflect on their development, and adapt as they grow, which are also critical phases to develop their identity.

In light of the aforementioned ideas, this theoretical, conceptual paper aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How can Erikson's adolescent identity development theory be analyzed through the contemporary application and understanding of communication in education?
2. How does 21st-century communication serve as a process of identity exploration, negotiation, and reconstruction?
3. How might communicative agency play a significant role in develop adolescent students' identity in contemporary international schools?

Methods

Conceptual approach

This study adopted a theoretical and conceptual approach to revisit Erikson's psychosocial theory of identity development through the lens of contemporary communication skills. Erikson's concept of identity versus role confusion was examined alongside literature addressing communicative competence, communicative agency, intercultural communication, digital and multimodal communication, and reflection. The analysis focused on identifying conceptual connections between communication processes and adolescent identity exploration, negotiation, and reconstruction.

Development of the conceptual framework

The identified conceptual connections were synthesized to develop the proposed Communication-Identity Development Framework. Classroom-based examples from International Baccalaureate educational contexts, particularly language acquisition settings, were used illustratively to demonstrate how the proposed relationships might appear in educational practice. These examples were not treated as empirical data, and no human participants, statistical analyses, or experimental procedures were involved.

Results

Erikson's Theory of Identity Development

Erik Erikson (1963) developed a lifespan model of development in which he highlights how social relationships impact individuals' sense of self. In his theoretical framework, he claims that individuals pass through eight stages, each distinguished by a major conflict or psychosocial crisis, that must be addressed adequately to promote healthy and stable personality growth (McLeod, 2025). This theory demonstrates how individuals pass from infancy to adulthood. During every stage, individuals face a conflict, which may be trust versus mistrust for instance, and this impacts their personality. When individuals succeed in resolving these conflicts, virtues such as integrity and hope are nurtured, while failing to address them may lead to despair or guilt (McLeod, 2025).

In stage one, which represents infancy, children depend completely on caregivers to get support. If their needs, which include affection, comfort, and food, are consistently fulfilled, they develop a sense of trust, and the world becomes a safe place in their eyes. However, unpredictable and neglectful care is often associated with anxiety and mistrust. As a result, the conflict emerges and manifests in terms of trust versus mistrust. Ultimately, and if improperly resolved, the child becomes anxious and perceives the world as unreliable. Stage two involves toddlers' attempts to explore their surrounding world and assert independence in tasks such as selecting foods

and dressing themselves. When caregivers motivate children to undertake such tasks, children develop a sense of autonomy and become confident to address challenges. However, excessive control and criticism may make children doubt their potential, resulting in doubt, low self-esteem, and shame. During stage three, children develop new games, imagine various roles, and learn to play and execute activities. When children are encouraged to do these, initiative is development, and this is how they start trying new things. Any criticism or discouragement may lead to guilt, which makes children feel unaccepted or prevented from expressing or pursuing their creativity.

Stage four demonstrates children's entrance to schools, their attempt to compare their abilities with their peers, and their effort to exhibit competence. When students at this age receive support from teachers and parents, they develop industry or confidence in their productivity and skills. If this support is lacking, or if persistent failures remain prevalent, children can feel inferior and demotivated. In stage five, identity versus role confusion manifests itself. During adolescence, the emphasis is on exploring who individuals are. This period witnesses adolescents' exploration of various roles, goals, and values. When adolescents have freedom to experiment and try new things and receive support without pressure, they often develop a strong sense of identity (McLeod, 2025). The conflict emerges when adolescents feel extremely restricted, overwhelmed, or confused, which leads to role confusion (Ike, 2026). Experimenting with roles, self-reflection, and peer influence also shapes how adolescents develop their identity during this stage. Any confusion in such tasks may put adolescents under pressure to identify their purpose or path in life, resulting in an identity crisis. Erikson (1963-1968) also asserts that during adolescence, individuals strive to belong to society or fit in. They seek to develop a sense of self and try different behaviors or activities. This plays a significant role in creating a strong identity and forming a sense of direction in life. The role of this stage is to re-examine the identity and try to find out exactly who he or she is. Because of the significance of social relationships during the fifth stage, it is essential that adolescents have supportive social and communicative networks that promote healthy identity exploration (McLeod, 2025). It is equally influential that teachers and mentors provide support and adolescents navigate diverse social interactions and roles. The way an adolescent's peer group perceives them can significantly affect their sense of identity development and self, and this highlights the profound role of social acceptance and belonging.

According to Kroger and Marcia (2022), Erikson's identity is a psychosocial construct in which a subjective sense of ego identity shapes how the person becomes confident and adopts a mindset of change. Identity, for Erikson, involved adopting meaningful work, holding ideological values,

and being comfortable with one's sexuality. Context also plays a critical role in recognizing and being recognized while searching for meaningful identity commitments and interactions, as Erikson (1968) highlights. However, role confusion, if noticed, can serve as a barrier to emotional and social development, resulting in maladaptive behaviors in adolescents (Ike, 2026). The implications of role confusion extend to impact the social realm and academic environment, in which adolescents' peer relationships and social interactions are affected. Some adolescent students may exhibit social withdrawal or social anxiety, which increases their feelings of isolation and raises questions about the long-term impacts on emotional resilience and overall well-being (Ike, 2026). This form of role ambiguity can prevent adolescents from engaging genuinely with their peers, eventually promoting a climate of misunderstanding and stigmatization that can severely impact self-esteem and group dynamics. In addition, the interplay between cultural attitudes and social integration further reinforces the significance of peer relationships and effective communication for stable identity development.

As such, identity does not completely develop internally but is shaped by peers, family interactions, cultural groups, institutions, and communications. Such relationships offer recognition, feedback, and expectations. In this sense, identity becomes relational, and effective communication becomes the cornerstone for healthy identity formation in adolescent students. As students negotiate who they understand themselves to be and how others perceive or respond to them. Accordingly, communication becomes a process through which such dimensions meet. For an IB international school context, students entering a multicultural environment may perceive themselves through nationality, previous school identity, or family culture. However, through effective communication with their peers, their Eriksonian identity may become something they strongly negotiate as they interact with peers from different countries, participate in group activities, and encounter different beliefs and perspectives about world matters.

Communication as a 21st-century learning competency

Communication represents a multifaceted phenomenon essential for human interaction. It also stands as the bedrock of this interaction by serving a key part of professional, social, and personal spheres (Kugai, 2023). The concept of communicative competence involves different skills that allow individuals to convey and analyze messages within a particular context. This competence is often integrated into the effective use of language and non-language means. It is therefore perceived as the ability to form speech skills and analyze non-verbal forms of communication. Likely, it can be viewed as the potential to analyze and emphasize particular elements of contemporary

society by participating in debates, discussions, or social activities (Bondarchuk & Kugai, 2022).

The term communicative competence was first introduced by Dell Hymes in 1966, who emphasized the need to move beyond linguistic proficiency and focus also on the potential to use language adequately in different cultural and social settings (Kugai, 2023). This competence usually encompasses grammatical skills, sociolinguistic skills, discourse competence, and strategic competence (Kugai, 2023). In the contemporary globalized and digitized world, the importance of communicative competence is becoming more obvious to navigate diverse cultural landscapes. Students with proficient sociolinguistic competence have the potential to navigate cultural diversities and promote cross-cultural communication without feeling excluded or inferior. In current times, the challenges associated with intercultural communication have been highly examined due to the fact that interaction with others from different cultural or linguistic backgrounds has become a hallmark of modern reality, extending across social, socio-political, and business spheres (Dvorianchykova et al., 2022). When individuals acquire communicative competence proficiently, their interpersonal relationships are fostered and strengthened, as they can express themselves clearly, listen actively, and analyze non-verbal cues.

In language acquisition classrooms, language input plays an important role in the development of linguistic competence. Specifically, receptive skills are one area of communicative competencies in the modern age. They refer to the potential to listen and understand a language. Listening is the first stage before responding to an act in a communicating environment. Listening can also refer to the sustained effort to receive sound and make meaning of articulated expressions (Sreena & Ilankumaran, 2018). This creates more chances for deeper interaction and communication can be opened. Through the interest and search for knowledge, the student may reach the highest level of receptive skills. This is how the student can move to the second phase in which he can interpret perspectives and respond to feedback. Another area of communication competencies is the expressive skill which involves articulating ideas, presenting arguments in a structured manner, expressing values, and communicating personal opinions (Sreena & Ilankumaran, 2018). In terms of relational and interpersonal skills, they represent a fundamental aspect of communication competencies. Acquiring these skills is regarded as a progressive process that is nurtured through different stages (Lopes et al., 2012). Only after developing personal communication competencies do learners become professional in speaking, mainly outside the educational context. As such, through relational skills,

students develop the ability to collaborate, negotiate, manage conflicts, and show empathy while interacting with others in the classroom.

In the realm of international communication today, how language is used and expressed is very important. Developing intercultural communicative skills can significantly impact the development of critical thinking (Kostyrya et al., 2022). Students can also become creative, learn how to synthesize information, and develop the ability to easily integrate their ideas and backgrounds into the learning process (Jitpranee et al., 2020). Intercultural communication also involves developing cooperation skills, responsibility, and organizational skills (Gumenyuk et al., 2021). To be proficient at intercultural communication, it is essential for an individual to be aware of their own culture and the interlocutor's culture and show respect for the two cultures respectively. It is equally important to recognize the processes that take place between the individual and his surrounding society and develop the ability to analyze and interpret events from the perspective of their own culture and others' culture as well (Kostyrya et al., 2022). Updating one's knowledge about his own and others' culture is necessary to facilitate intercultural communication, become critical, and develop the ability to assess the prospects, actions, and results of a certain conversation or activity in a different cultural context (Gumenyuk et al., 2021). Hence, intercultural communication involves perspective-taking, cultural awareness, and adapting communication.

Furthermore, today's communicating environments are frequently embedded with more than one mode, as they include images, words, videos, 3D objects, and others (Reşceanu & Dragoescu-Urlica, 2022). The multiplicity of modes can significantly contribute to meaning-making, mainly in the classroom. Nowadays, applying several modes of communication at the same time makes communication more effective. Accordingly, the term multimodal or digital communication appeared in academic settings as an array of interrelated interdisciplinary research fields which highlighted that representing and communicating ideas involve more than linguistic exchanges (Boria et al. 2020). This term has been associated with different approaches in arts, humanities, social sciences, as well as engineering and artificial intelligence. Using different modes at the same time, supported by technological means, facilitates understanding the message and expressing oneself. In this sense, technology shapes how knowledge is represented and communicated. Whether using written communication, video, digital platforms, social media, or video, knowledge production in the 21st-century has attained several forms that play a key role in shaping how one expresses an idea.

The last communicative competency emphasized in the 21st-century is metacognition. It refers to the act of monitoring and regulating one's own

thought processes (Sieck, 2017). This competency does not only refer to the ability to manage memory and comprehension but extends to play a role in undertaking difficult, complex mental tasks. This is how it becomes more consciously potent and controlled. When communication environments involve individuals from different cultures, substantial metacognitive engagement is required. In fact, cultural others' desires, beliefs, and behavioral norms may be shared among themselves, yet different systematic ways can be highlighted. Being aware of the ways to produce and express knowledge is based on how people interact, complete tasks, and develop strategies. Thus, this knowledge can be helpful in supporting communication planning, adjustment, monitoring, and reviewing processes that aim to facilitate intercultural communication (Sieck, 2017). In social psychology, metacognition is directly related to the concept of mindfulness, which maintains awareness of the distinct context of the situation along with every part's cultural background (Gudykunst, 2004). In cognitive psychology, metacognition serves as the executive control head. It is perceived as any concrete cognitive process in which language, categorization, and memory are managed. Therefore, planning, control, reflection, and monitoring are interconnected elements that are practiced in 21st-century communication. Communicators, if effectively employing metacognition, depict the ability to reflect on how one communicates, recognize communicative strengths and limitations, and adjust communication strategies.

For instance, in an IB context, the IB's Learner Profile emphasizes communication, reflection, international mindedness, open-mindedness, collaboration, learner agency, and intercultural understanding. This suggests that this international learning context supports students to express and articulate identity, encounter alternative identities or perspectives, interpret communicative experiences, experiment with voice and engagement, recognize others' opinions and beliefs, express values, and explore various perspectives of an issue. Thus, a communication-identity connection is established.

Re-Reading Erikson through Communication

By revisiting Erikson's theory on identity development, which is outlined in the fifth stage, analyzing the role of 21st-century communication becomes essential, mainly in multicultural contexts. As Erikson (1968) claims that identity exploration happens during the adolescence stage, it can be assumed that adolescent students learn how to express ideas and perspectives, and this allows them to externalize possible selves. Externalization is often perceived as a psychological practice in which one's internal, imagined visions of his future, including hopes, goals, aspirations, and fears, are taken out and made actionable, visible, and tangible in the

physical world. This also means that when adolescent students externalize possible selves, they turn abstract thoughts into concrete external representations, and is highly facilitated through intercultural communication or language acquisition. The gap between the current identity and what a person aspires to become is bridged. For instance, adolescent students who engage in writing and journaling to script a detailed narrative in the form of written communication, visual mapping to create visual boards or images of abstract ideas in their mind, verbalizing and role-playing to speak about future goals and express ideas through social reality, and micro-behaviors to practice small habits of the ideal self in the present time can significantly contribute to identity exploration and identification of what the student likes, dislikes, fears, and aspires to be on personal, academic, and social levels. An IB adolescent student who does not know whether they identify more strongly with environmental activism may start by contributing to a sustainability discussion, write a reflection, be part of an environmental project, or present an argument. This multimodal communication allows the student to externalize this position and explore his strengths in it. As such, an identity that remains purely internal cannot be socially negotiated and expressed. Communication therefore enables adolescent students to externalize identities and bring them to physical reality for further testing.

Moreover, Erikson (1968) highlights the importance of role experimentation. The communicative process that often governs this Eriksonian mechanism is communicating across contexts in which adolescent students test different social positions. The communication of students is different based on the person they are communicating with, whether it is a teacher, friend, group, formal presentation, or an online environment. This does not mean that because of the variety of communication ways that students have false identities. Rather, it signifies that students are experimenting with their identity in different ways and learning how to adapt to context, which are the core of effective communication in the 21st-century.

Regarding recognition, adolescent students receive and respond to feedback in their classrooms or while interacting with others. This means that they engage in evaluating social acceptance, which is directly linked to the idea of belonging, as Erikson (1968) asserts. Students start by communicating with others and expressing themselves or ideas about subjects or topics discussed in the classroom. Then, others respond to what they express, and this allows them to interpret the response. In this case, feedback can be produced, either in terms of disagreement, affirmation, encouragement, rejection, or reconsideration. Over time, feedback is transformed to become an integral part of identity development and facilitate belonging. When adolescent students participate in dialogue and develop

group affiliation, they discover whether they belong to a community or not. When they engage in a group discussion, participate in a collaborative project, share cultural experiences, be listened to, or be recognized by their peers, communicative participation is transformed to become a process within which adolescent students develop a stronger sense of belonging.

The concept of differentiation that was highlighted by Erikson (1968) also plays a significant role in supporting communication and identity development. Through differentiation, an adolescent student articulates his own perspectives and opinions on world matters, and this is a fundamental step to establish individuality. In fact, identity needs belonging to a group and being recognized as an individual. Through effective expressive and relational communication, adolescent students start saying, "This is my belief." This is, in turn, a way to maintain and develop student voice, autonomy, and agency.

Further examining Erikson's notions on identity development, it can also be highlighted that identity coherence is reinforced through communicative negotiation. To explain, identity coherence is directly linked to adapting while maintaining continuity. An international-school student might negotiate different aspects at the same time, including family identity, national identity, linguistic identity, school identity, cultural or religious identity, digital identity, and peer identity. Communication in multicultural contexts provides a chance to make these identities visible and coherent with the surroundings through valuable interaction. This could also mean that adolescent students develop the ability to integrate multiple selves together into a coherent self without feeling any confusion. Across time, and with further engagement with reflection on their own learning or thinking processes and others' as well, adolescent students engage in metacognitive communication in which they reconstruct self-understanding. They become aware of who they are, what they want, and how and why others are different from them. They also learn how to appreciate diversity and respect others' perspectives, which add an important layer of their identity development by imbibing important values such as empathy and respect.

Based on the aforementioned examination of Erikson's theory on identity development in light of communication in the 21st-century, it can be argued that communication can no longer be viewed today as a simple expression of an already-developed or acquired identity. However, communicative interaction, in all its modes and forms, plays a fundamental and active role in developing adolescent students' identities.

The Communication-Identity Development Framework

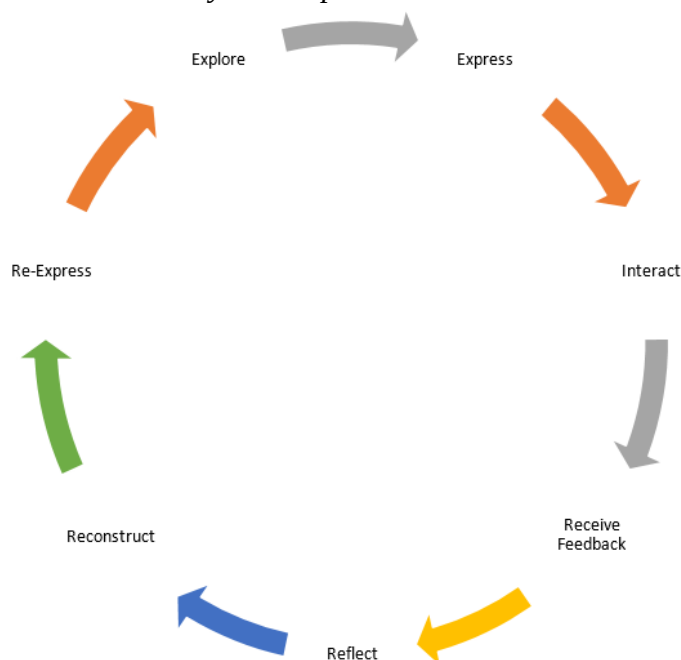


Diagram 1

The above diagram represents an illustration of the proposed communication-identity development framework.

The adolescent student encounters perspectives, values, roles, possible identities, and communities. Then, he externalizes a position through writing, speaking, presentation, discussion, or digital communication. This is followed by interacting with other people and sharing perspectives. At this stage, feedback can be received, and it can take different forms, such as verbal, non-verbal, explicit, implicit, supportive, or challenging. After receiving feedback, the adolescent student starts asking about the reason behind his communication in a particular way, how others responded to him, whether he agrees with their interpretation or not, and whether what happened through communication reflects what he wants. This comes under the stage of reflection. Only after passing through all these communication stages does the adolescent learner start reconstructing his identity. This happens either by reinforcing an existing identity, rejecting an external expectation, or integrating into a new identity. It is therefore time to re-express the re-constructed identity. Adolescent students are aware that their revised identity shapes subsequent modes of communication. This cycle then continues as the student grows.

Therefore, the proposed framework combines different dimensions: identity, communication, reflection, and agency. It should be noted that

communicative agency serves as a mediating concept. Instead of merely considering that communication facilitates identity development, this framework shows that identity exploration is facilitated through communication and social interaction, which support reflection and communicative agency, and finally lead to identity reconstruction. In this sense, communicative agency determines whether the adolescent student simply receives social messages or actively engages and responds to them, or whether he negotiates or reconstructs them. This could differ from a student to another based on their communication proficiency level. Despite this, adolescent students do not simply learn a communication skill, but they understand themselves in this process and recognize themselves as an active participant with a legitimate voice. This is the core of identity development.

Discussion

Classroom-based illustrations

Applying this framework to a classroom-based illustration from an MYP Arabic Language Acquisition Classroom at an IB school, several insights could be highlighted. While explaining the unit of Identity and Sports, the emphasis is on two major ATL skills (communication and reflection). Students start by exploring their personal interest and how they relate to their peers. They answer questions like: Who am I? What is my favorite sport? Why do I like this sport? How does sport express my personality? By expressing their ideas at their own pace and comfort, students use short statements in Arabic. This stage demonstrates how learners can explore aspects of their identities and start self-expression using an additional language. Moreover, students can make profiles or maps that reveal who they are and what interests they prefer. Using Arabic expressions to express their family, names, languages, personality, interests, and aspirations, they engage in oral presentations and paired interviews. The identity-versus-role-confusion stage is actually based on personal discovery, affiliations, and possible futures. When students decide to share their thoughts, they use their agency to represent their multidimensional identities. In this sense, students reflect on their personalities and acquire additional linguistic repertoire, allowing them to gradually communicate new versions of themselves. This act of revisiting and expanding identity profiles allows adolescent students to identify changes in their aspirations and interests and to affirm their perspectives among their social groups or peers.

In another activity, students in an Arabic language acquisition school might participate in an activity in which they compare their own cultural practices with those who natively speak Arabic. This involves an exploration of food items, clothing styles, greeting patterns, hospitality aspects, and celebration activities. In this regard, students often prepare a blog or a

presentation to compare how cultural traditions in front of their peers. This activity aligns directly with Erikson's emphasis on sociocultural contexts to develop the identity. When students compare traditions, this allows them to examine their cultural affiliations without the need to substitute an existing identity with an Arab identity. Therefore, students recognize patterns or practices that are meaningful to them, explore similarities and differences, and reconsider assumptions through active conversations. Repeated engagement with authentic examples and intercultural dialogue facilitates the understanding of different cultural affiliations and Arabic's relevance beyond the school context. As such, cultural self-awareness, belonging, and intercultural communication are reinforced.

In a third stage, MYP students often pair role-play daily routines, ordering food, describing houses, asking directions, and expressing interests. This involves dialogue recordings and the use of peer feedback and self-assessment. For young learners, and from an Eriksonian perspective, working successfully on communicative tasks is related to industry versus inferiority aspects and to the experience of competence. Adolescent students discover how they present their identities and interact with their surroundings using an additional language. Moreover, students in an Arabic language acquisition classroom often experiment with social roles and language choices. If a learner is confused about language use, he may engage in such communicative activities to discover that he is willing to speak as the competence becomes stronger. Through constructive feedback and reflection, students become more confident and aware of themselves and their capabilities, and they develop a sense of being able to use the Arabic language in an effective and clear way. Thus, linguistic confidence, communicative agency, and developing language-learner identity represent the most important and noticeable identity outcomes.

The last stage of this unit instruction involves an attempt among learners to write autobiographies, personal blogs or journals, memoirs about challenges and achievements, and a digital portfolio to document their progress over time. Developing a balanced identity, as Erikson claims, suggests that an individual experiences continuity across past experiences, present circumstances, and imagined futures. The narratives that allow adolescent students to recognize meaningful experiences and state how these experiences influenced their character development become clearer. Comparing earlier and later writing enables students to identify linguistic growth in Arabic and realize how their self-understanding has changed. Identity outcomes therefore manifest in terms of self-awareness, personal continuity, and the potential to express experience in Arabic. This is a form of reconstructing and re-expressing their identities.

Accordingly, explicit ATL communication and reflection skills can make all the above identity outcomes more valid and recognizable. They also support learners on their way to express their opinions more reasonably and firmly, allowing them to negotiate meaning. Reflection also allows students to consider how being confident, willing to communicate with others, and understanding their potential have progressed or changed over time. Communication and reflection thus help connect classroom experiences to developing beliefs, perspectives, values, and affiliations. Using Erikson's notions on identity development, it can be argued that Arabic language acquisition contexts provides chances for self-expression, self-awareness, cultural understanding, social engagement, and reflecting meaning-making processes. These potential development achievements reveal how identity can be shaped through linguistic development and psychosocial awareness.

Implications for contemporary education

Several implications can be considered when transforming the conceptual model into an educational practice. Teachers should be aware that classrooms extend from being a place where students learn and write only. They should consider classrooms as spaces where students, mainly adolescents, speak, listen, become recognized, experience rejection or affirmation, negotiate belonging, and develop autonomy and voice.

Collaborative learning could be a cornerstone in adolescent students' development of their identities. Group work can offer chances to experiment roles, negotiate, be a leader, resolve a conflict, and take a perspective on a current or global issue. However, emphasis on group work should be on the fact that group work could be supportive for student identity development only when meaningful communicative participation is reinforced. Through structured dialogue, debates, and peer dialogue, students learn how to actively reflect, and this helps them challenge existing identities or beliefs.

Multilingual communication should also offer opportunities for students to negotiate linguistic and cultural identities, as they are key components of their identities. If students receive more chances to communicate, this does not mean that they develop stronger agency. However, multilingual communication should be meticulously and carefully designed to avoid conformity pressures, self-presentation pressures, exclusion, or role confusion.

Beyond teaching and learning, the proposed framework can be used as a foundational ground to revise traditional assessment methods. Educators are invited to move beyond testing students' abilities in pronunciation, grammar, writing, or other areas. Educators should focus on whether the student expressed an independent opinion, whether they responded to alternative perspectives actively, whether they can adapt communication to

different audiences, whether they demonstrate perspective-taking effectively, whether they reflect on their communication, if they practice meaningful choice, if they actively make informed decisions, and whether they negotiate disagreement in a constructive manner. In Arabic language acquisition classrooms, it is essential that educators realize how explicitly teaching ATL communication and reflection skills can support learners to develop their communicative competence, explore linguistic, personal, and cultural identities, and exercise their agency as students and as individuals living in society.

It is thus essential that educators nowadays emphasize expressive agency (the potential to express a perspective or position), dialogic responsiveness (the ability to listen and respond), contextual adaptability (the potential to adjust communication), reflective awareness (the potential to assess one's communication mode), and identity awareness (being aware of how one's experiences and opinions shape communication with oneself and others). Therefore, educators should not evaluate whether students' identity is confused or coherent or acceptable; rather, they should examine communicative processes and provide support where needed.

Limitations

The proposed framework is theoretical and has not yet been empirically validated. The classroom-based examples are drawn from learning experiences and sequences of learning rather than from data collected through a participant study. Therefore, the framework should be examined in future empirical research across different educational, linguistic, and cultural contexts.

Conclusions

Communication in the 21st-century is not always liberating. Students have the right to adjust their communication when they face peer pressure, cultural expectations, social exclusion, fear and anxiety, linguistic insecurity, social-media norms, and teacher authority. The proposed conceptual model in this paper has not been empirically validated but provides a foundational ground to consider the role of 21st-century communication skills in supporting identity development in adolescent students.

Erikson's quest for exploring who the individual is remains relevant. However, in contemporary academic environments, this quest is refined to be more focused on how students communicate who they are and how communication with others changes the way they perceive themselves and their identities. In this light, communication should be viewed not only as a transferable 21st-century skill but also as a developmental process through which adolescent students externalize, negotiate, reflect, and reconstruct

their identities. Communicative agency plays a mediating role in shaping this development. It refers to the students' ability to shape identity through communicative choices and modes. The proposed framework reveals how communication should be perceived as part of Erikson's identity development mechanism.

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