English Education Journal

THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURAL IDENTITIES IN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: A PERSPECTIVE FROM SECONDARY PROGRAM (SEMARANG MULTINATIONAL SCHOOL)

Ali Mohamed Ali[1] , Yan Mujiyanto[2]

[1]AlMergib University, Lybia
[2]English Language Education Postgraduate Semarang State Univesity, Indonesia

Article Info

Abstract

Any student goes to the classroom with his/her own cultural identity. In other words, Every student comes to the classroom with a set of characteristics and behaviors that make him or her unique and that will affect his or her academic achievements in the future. The purpose of this study is to investigate the influences of cultural identities in second language acquisition (a perspective from secondary school) at SEMARANG MULTINATIONAL SCHOOL, Indonesia. Which known as an International Institution that presented International educational standers. This article covers a descriptive qualitative approach which used different methods to collect the data, they were (focus groups discussion for six students and conducting interviews with three of their teachers). The findings of this study revealed three main results. Firstly, there were several steps to enhance the second language learners and still there are some factors that affect Indonesian students entirely adaption for English as a second language which are: the fluency constraints and the fear that they still not qualified when it comes to communicate by using modern English language, also the grammar structure while doing common conversations. Secondly, the findings obviously showed the positive influence of cultural identities on the process of second language acquisition and students' academic achievements in the future. Thirdly, it was briefly revealed that to adapt English as a second language it is needed to exceed the negative intrinsic and extrinsic factors while taking place the positive factors, in general the negative factors which arose in the results somehow mislead them to achieve the completely adaption. Some pedagogical suggestions from the writer were recommended to students, teachers and institutions: For students to be more brave, open-minded and outgoing (no shyness in education). The necessity of teachers' conversant for culture diverse during learning context and finally, The Ministry of Indonesian Education has the choice to improve English language interest by involving it in all schools not only the International, but also in national institutions to be language of education.

✉Correspondence Address:
Kampus Pascasarjana Unnes, Jalan Kelud Utara III Semarang 50237
E-mail: zf19990@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Indeed research on culture and education is focused on distinguishing the factors that may report for the gap in advanced educational achievements of the students from different cultural backgrounds (Warikoo & Carter, 2009; Whitesell, Mitchell, Spicer, & The Voices of Indian Teens Project Team, 2009). Every student comes to the classroom with a set of characteristics and behaviors that makes him or her unique and that will affect his or her academic achievements in the future.

When learning a second language, learners cannot totally disconnect themselves from their cultural context where they rely on the knowledge source constructed from their home society. For long time and many years, exploring the relationships between cultural identity and language development have been existed in second language acquisition researches. This study explores the influence of cultural identities in second language acquisition, according to the spheres of data that explored in an international school in Semarang city, where all the process and policies done by English language, mainly learners being regarded from the perspective of the influence that is in school environment on their cultural identity practices.

This study clarifies that learners' cultural identity plays an fundamental role in L2 learning, particularly in developing oral communicative skills. "Culture and language are inseparable" (Hinkel, 1999, p.6). Understanding the culture of the text can be essential to successful second language learning (Tseng, 2002). Byram (1991) specified that the analysis of structural, sociological and cultural aspects of language enhanced the language awareness component of learning and contributes directly to learners' awareness of language and proficiency as a whole. In such cases of learning a new language, learners can consider or adapt the information from their knowledge base which assembled in their first language.

Terms such as the cultural identities are extremely popular in language acquisition and learning's history, and so many related researches and scientific papers that are published recently everywhere. This is not surprising, because that shows language is the central factor of expressing the self of somebody (Ochs, 2008). Learning a new language is sometimes achieved to mean learning a new identity (Lightbown and Spada, 2006; Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000).

Generally, as mentioned in a book entitled "Education in Indonesia: Rising to the Challenge" published by Asian Development Bank (2015) that private schools play an important role in Indonesia. While only 7% of primary schools are private, the share increases to 56% of junior secondary schools and 67% of senior secondary schools. So that this study as specifically examines the cultural identities in a selected sample of private school. However, foreign or second language teaching process in this selected sample cannot be segregated from the realization of many differences between the local and target culture. Making Indonesian L2 learners aware of their own culture and the target once may enhance their achievements in adapting English as a second language.

This where the issues of cultural identity influencing second language acquisition occur. In general, students provide the cultural identities of their first language and where they come from.

METHODS

Reviews Of Related Literature

The theoretical and related literature in this study which related to the culture learning process in language education programs. The reviewed literature in this study focused on the attitudes and motivations below will address further more complex learning outcomes.

To participate in the world's economy and to benefit from the advances of science, it is believed, one must know English" (p.694). This observation about the global stance towards the English language and the benefits of learning it

is strongly reflected in Indonesian's perception about acquiring English, because English has become as global language, which dominates and controls science and business. In many respects it is hegemonic.

For instance, the students, predominantly Indonesians, are enrolled by Ministry of Education and culture which follows the use of English as a medium of instruction or having an international-based instead of the national one. The private schools in Indonesia only comprise 7% of the total schools number and implement a different school curriculum. This will most likely have an effect on the students as an'end product' of schooling.

As previously mentioned, the research topic is concerned with the ways that cultural identities influence in second language acquisition. More than often, the identity and culture of the first language are quite different from the culture of the second language. This may lead to the students identity (self, peer and societal) altering or leaving them feeling alienated. Some teachers are not aware of this effect and thus add to the problem. The curriculum contains cultural components and the teacher transmits this either knowingly or not. Learning a second language will theoretically require the learner to adapt his/her values and behavior (Jund, 2010). This implies that there is a strong connection between the language and culture and that it is represented in the culture of the speakers. It combines aspects such as beliefs, values and needs.

Perhaps it is the appropriate time to change the view of how native versus non-native speaking teachers are realized. If the teacher is from the 'local' context, then, they have the power hand of being knowledgeable in the native language and culture of their students, along with the unique concerns they have with learning the English language and culture (Holliday, 2009). This is a point to take into consideration as a feasible solution to the problem faced in Indonesia regards to second language acquisition, culture and identity.

Lambert (1973) raised some issues that appeared to be intertwined with and influence of culture but hard to distinguish. For instance, social class, types and amounts of schooling, amounts of travel experience and the like from what seemed to be attributable solely to cultural setting. He expected that cultural variations and provided sufficient opportunity for them to flourish, but few if any unambiguous ones did. Whilst nations are travelling more and further, the world is getting less significant and smaller. After all, whatever one desires, it is most probably no more than a few clicks away. All this mean, then, that national cultural identities and ethnic are vanishing? This seems hard to accept as true. Fairly I would definitely agree with Tomlinson (2003: 270-271) once he claims that "cultural identity is not likely to be the easy prey of globalization", but that "identity is not in fact merely some fragile communal psychic attachment, but a considerable dimension of institutionalized social life in modernity. Predominantly in the leading form of national identity, it is the product of deliberate cultural construction and maintenance"(emphasis in the original). In other expressions, identities–especially national and cultural are constructed and maintained to the point where they become almost like institutions; fixed, rarely changed ideas declaring that this is what it is like to be Indonesians (or any other nationality).

The teachers' training process in Indonesia: Many Asian countries including Indonesia have serious responses to the growing need to foster communicative abilities in English where English is taught as a foreign language. The population seeks to learn English as a Second or Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) has increased rapidly over the past decade (Liyanage & Bartlett, 2008). In Indonesia as a non-speaking country, English is a foreign language context.

Important factors such as the study of the dominant language, the maintenance of respectful and empathetic classrooms, and the creation of safe verbal environments as

critical when teaching students of various cultures. They shape the psychological and educational experiences of culturally diverse students. For instance, the study of a second language represents a big concern not just for teachers but also for the students who have to struggle with the learning of a language different from their native tongue.

In a study involving the creation of an intercultural competence measure in a second language classroom, Hammer et al. (2003) discovered "as one's experience of cultural difference becomes more complex and sophisticated, one's potential competence in intercultural relations increases" (p. 423). As an individual is exposed to diverse cultures, he or she has more opportunities to compare, and construct a more diverse worldview. When one adopts monoculture socialization, chances to change that perspective are almost nill as there is no point of comparison. Acceptances of various cultural perspectives lead a person to position his or her own culture as one of a number of equally valuable worldviews.

Review Of Theoretical Studies

In the following, I will briefly present a few identity theories in communication from the interpretive perspective. Theories that covered are: Identity Negotiation Theory (INT), Social Identity Theory (SIT), and Cultural Identity Theory (CIT). Lastly, Communication Theory of Identity (CTI).

Identity Negotiation Theory:-

(INT) it was put forward by Stella Ting-Toomey in 1986 and later updated in 2009. This theory sees identity as "reflective self-images constructed, individuals within a culture and in a particular situation" (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 217). According to INT, people in all cultures feel the need for identity respect and approval (Ting-Toomey, 2005, 2009; Toomey et al., 13 2013). In addition, individuals possess multiple images of themselves, and these images are affected by cultural, social, and personal identity (Toomey et al., 2013). This theory stresses the importance of mindful communication, which means that while "the communicators attempt to arouse their own desired identities in the interaction, they also attempt to challenge or support the others' identities" (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 217). Therefore, identity or reflective self-conception is seen as the explanatory mechanism for the intercultural communication process" (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 217).

This theory is about intercultural communication competence and how we can reach it with mindful communication in an intercultural situation as it will be shown in the following figure in the framework. INT places identity in the centre of intercultural competence, which means that we first need to know who we are before we can understand who others are. When we know how we define ourselves and how culturally different others define themselves, it will result in more culturally sensitive communication. Thus, identity issues are important in intercultural communication, which is a notion that also provide support to this thesis. INT is a theory that has been recognized also outside the field of communication, which is something where also CTI aims at (Hecht et al., 2005).

Social Identity Theory:-

(SIT) has played an important part in the developing process of CTI, therefore, it is worthwhile to introduce it briefly (Hecht et al., 2005). From the SIT point of view, identities are developed through social categorization. These social categories can be, for example, ethnicity, gender and political affiliation. People belong to various social categories and form their identities based on their memberships to them. SIT emphasizes social aspects over individual ones. According to Suzuki (1998), the idea that belonging to a group is largely psychological state, which is distinct from that of being a separate individual, that gives the person social identity" (p. 157). Group membership is therefore important in this view of identity. This way of seeing identity has influenced CTI since it merges the social and individual aspects of identity.

Cultural Identity Theory:-

(CIT) that originated in the 1980's and was introduced by Mary Jane Collier and Milt Thomas (Collier, 2005, 2009b). These propositions–which form the core of the theory – are seen as the "early version" of CIT (Collier, 2009b, p. 260). It has later evolved to Cultural Identity Negotiation Theory (CINT) that combines critical and interpretive perspectives, and pays attention to contextual structures, ideologies, and status hierarchies as well as social equality and justice (Collier,2009b).

Communication Theory of Identity:-

(CTI) was improved by Michael L. Hecht during the 1980's and early 1990's and Mexican American ethnic cultures (Communication Theory of Identity; Hecht et al., 2005). The theory exposure its final form in the beginning of the 1990's (Hecht, 1993). This "new direction for theoretical development" introduced a communicative approach to studying identity (Hecht, 1993, p. 78). CTI does not concentrate only on the individual and society, as sociological and psychological theories tend to do, but takes into consideration also performance and relationship (Hecht et al., 2005)

This study adapted a qualitative descriptive methodology that involved both methods of collecting data, which were focus group discussion for six participants mixed gender and interviews with three of their teachers)

Subjects of the study

The subjects of this study were the six students and three of their teachers from secondary program, the students whose ages are between 11-15 years old with the majority being native Indonesians, some of them have had exposure to western cultures either via travel or due to living abroad. The criteria for selecting informants from secondary program is due to a condition, that is they are formed by adolescents (15 years old), a critical age at which they begin to develop and explore issues of identity.

Procedures of Data Collection

The data collection included focus group discussion of six participants from secondary program (mixed gender), ages range 11-15 years old and other participants of the study were three of their teachers, semi structured interview was conducted for each teacher. Parental consent done before any form of data collection proceeded. During the focus groups, students being asked to casually answer a few questions in order to extract information. The nature of the questions revolved around why they are learning English, what it means to them, what are the motivation mechanisms that they use to learn a second language, what are the personal strategies they use to help acquire a second language, and what are the obstacles and challenges they face when learning a second language.

Some other questions to the students were: what do they think about the language they are learning in a variety of ways; what is the image of a "perfect English speaker" (including details on the physical appearance of the person, professionalism, and personality features). Also, questions about embarrassment with the level of English language spoken by their friends. Finally, a question on cultural relevancy and attractiveness of the advertising through English and or Indonesian billboards.

Several steps included in the data collection process. The students and teachers as well as the school management were informed on what the research focus is. In regard to participating teachers, information on the purpose and questions as well as their role in the research will be explained in the analysis. Two phases for student focus groups were held. One prior to observations, then I met them again at a later point in time to see if their answers changed and to possibly asked some new questions. This is to pose as a follow-up to see what they are experiencing for each teacher.

Then the interview has been conducted. Some of the interview questions to teachers referred to their perceptions of student identity, their sense of belonging to a community, the language strategies they use in the classroom

that are culturally appropriate, their encouragement strategies to learn a second language, and the motivation factors to learn a second language. Additional questions asked related to how they deal with Indonesian second language learners? How they perceive the language/identity issues?

The focus groups discussion was video-recorded what the participants responded in relation to the issues. At this focus group process, the researcher has presented a few questions and has allowed the students to express themselves without limitations. The final set of video- recording have served to record teachers' responses to the semi structured interview. The teachers have been asked the same question, but they had no limitations to freely express their professional opinions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section provides the results of both participants, the group discussion and interview.

The first question for the group discussion was for all the informants Why do you learn English Language? Three(3) out of six(6) informants announced that, because in this school English is a standard language and every communication either with the security, teachers, classmates or the management

"What make me motivated to learn English as a second language is that I feel I should be able to continue studying English classes, diligently learn new vocabulary and often read the dictionary to take enough knowledge of English vocabulary." (Ellen, 14 years) (1)

"Because I feel that nowadays more and more people are able to learn more than one language, so it motivates me to be able to speak English and I can learn English from anywhere, with watching movies frequently, using the English language, and often open English dictionary." (Jeremy, 13 years) (2)

"The motivation step that force me to learn English as a second language that is I am motivated to get high grades and in this school almost all students are fluent in English. My parents also want me to get highest scores, so that I have the spirit to be able to

speak English then I follow English language courses outside the school." (Diana, 14 years) (3).

A question was a broad question, character when he stated that he can speak like his foreign teachers whose English is a first language. In regards to his response and during the group discussion, the researcher noticed that well-achieved learner who can act like native speakers is the appropriate learner to adapt English as a second language.

"Some teachers in this school are foreign teaching staff (from abroad) so that they mastering English language fluently, I can follow their ways in speaking." (Kevin, 14 years) (6).

As a fact that the influence of cultural identities in the process of the second language acquisition it was proven while the interviewer asked what are the Indonesian characteristics that you find about their sense of belonging to a community? The informants either Expat or local teacher stated mostly the same response. For the Expat participants they noticed some stranger things, when the teacher give the students a task or homework and demanded them to work individually they found that most of the works are the same. For the only local teacher she did not find it something stranger as she is an Indonesian by birth. This reflects the co-operation work which known as a tolerant attitude in Indonesian culture.

"The characteristics of students that I noticed as a foreign teacher, the nature of mutual cooperation which causing a tolerant attitude among others. For example, if there is an assignment, the students show a sense of Responsibility to be able to work personally to do a task, then I found them being co-operators (almost the same work). I think this happen only in Indonesia["(Danni, 38 years).

"Indonesian students' characteristics that I found are greater mutual understanding between people.[...] For example in this school, the students understanding between each other, if there is a friend in trouble, they will help each other,[...] if there is a sick friend then students will pay attention to him or her and have a sense of empathy for others." (C. Parker, 33years).

The last concerned question concentrated on the Expat interviewees' attitudes towards the Indonesian culture and students of being Indonesian. The idea was to find out students' attitudes and perceptions at this International school throughout their lives, and how the cultural identities has affected those perceptions; from the time before their first contact with the English language until they have become secondary students. The significant objective beyond this question is, not only the English language, but also on being Indonesian and the Indonesian aptitudes. To start off, the question was: Do you think that the culture of Indonesian students affects Language learning? Since the question was presented to the interviewees, the second one announced that "Students curiosity sometimes great" referred to positive curiosity which is completely accepted in learning. Students' eagerness will guide them to acquire luxurious knowledge.

"Students curiosity is great [ ] they are trying to become the best among other classmates so it raises the motivation and their eagerness to learn new things by keep asking.... because I think.... education in Indonesia including various kinds of beneficial lessons..... So it requires the students to be more diligent and eager to receive knowledge for each subject." (C. Parker, 33 years).

Depending on the findings, there were some intrinsic and extrinsic factors affect Indonesian students. Extrinsic factors are probably the social communication at home which sometimes done with their parents and families, and in the same time with their close friends which frequently use the Indonesian language. "Although identity is conditioned by social interaction and social structures, it conditions social interaction and social structures at the same time. It is, in short, constitutive of and constituted by the social environment" (Block, 2007, p.866).

Further, this study proved that when the students back to the school environment again, they entirely use English Language, this kind of communication has done since they still children and that lead them to be more motivated in adapting English as a second language. As a suggestion from the researcher's point of view, the researcher supposed that significant ways in which the teachers have to positively arrange for parents' educational objectives, which are principally during the adaptations to the education program not only in the school, but also practice them at home and encouraging families' contribution in the program, in addition, making desired and visible learning strategy. The adaptation to the teaching environment is obvious regarding to the opportunities of structured teaching, which many families and teachers desired as well.

As previously mentioned, the research topic is concerned with the ways that the influence of cultural identities in second language acquisition a perspective from secondary program. Furthermore, in order for education to be more positive and effective, educators must put in consideration to respect and integrate the cultural identity of those secondary program students at Semarang Multinational School within the academic settings.

CONCLUSION

Firstly, even thought their fluency still not perfect and non well-structured grammar, the students at Semarang Multinational School believe that it is required to use English in all their communications. Either between friends, teachers or other community members, so they have by away or another to adapt English as a second language. To almost all of the informants the English language played also an vital part in getting information. As it turned out, being able to access information in another language besides Indonesia gave them whole new views

Secondly, the results of this study found that the cultural Identities have direct impact in second language learning process and students' academic success, which was revealed from the analyzed transcript of the teachers' responses during the interviews.

Thirdly, the findings of the current study have shown that there still some intrinsic and intrinsic factors that affect students' entirely

adaption for English as a second language. The intrinsic factors which are the restrictions or difficulties in learning English grammar while doing casual conversations. The extrinsic factors are largely the environment impact, started from the family, relatives, friends, daily person's needs and teachers. All those which mentioned prevent the exclusively adaption for English as a second language. For a brief time, depending on schooling system totally is not the perfect notion that lead to English adaption as a second language.

REFERENCES

Block, D. (2007). The rise of identity in SLA research, post . The Modern Language Journal, 91 pp 863–876.

Byram, M. (1991). Teaching culture and language: Towards an integrated model. In D. Buttjes & M. Byram (Eds.), Mediating languages and cultures: Towards an intercultural theory of foreign language education (pp. 17-32). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters

Collier, M.J. (2009b). Cultural Identity Theory. In S.W. Littlejohn & K.A. Foss (Eds.), Encyclopedia of Communication Theory (pp. 260–262). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Hinkel, E. (1999). (Ed.). Culture in second language teaching and learning. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press

Holliday, A. (2009). The role of culture in English language education: Key challenges. Language and Intercultural Communication, 9(3),144-155.

Jund, A. (2010). Toward a pedagogy of intercultural understanding in teaching English for Academic Purposes. The Electronic Journal for English as a Second Language, 14 (1), pp 1- 13.

Ting-Toomey, S. (2005). Identity Negotiation Theory: Crossing Cultural Boundaries. In W.B. Gudykunst (Ed.), Theorizing About Intercultural Communication (pp. 211–233). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Warikoo, N., & Carter, P. (2009). Cultural explanations for racial and ethnic stratification in academic achievement: A call for a new and improved theory. Review of Educational Research, 79(1), 366-394. doi:10.3102/0034654308326162

Byram,M., & Morgan, C. (1994). Colleagues. Teaching and Learning Language and Culture.