Students' Identity in Multicultural Education:
Reflection on Communication Practice

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ABSTRACT
The lack of facilities and quality education in some rural areas has been a notorious problem in our education. Students sometimes choose to migrate to a new place to fulfil their human rights in getting a quality education that takes place in multicultural settings in order to gain a new identity construction. This study was done to examine the relationship between English as language learning in a multilingual context and identity in EFL classroom interactions. Furthermore, this study examined whether English as language learning and identity have a balanced contribution in EFL classroom interactions and how students are from different regions representing their identities in diverse groups' communication. Under the framework of a descriptive qualitative study, this study was conducted by observation, closed-ended and open-ended questionnaire. The result of this study is expected to show the balance between identity and English as students' communication language learning in EFL classroom interactions that students' identities reflect their home cultures and languages from diverse groups.

Keywords: Classroom interactions, students' identities, multicultural education

1. INTRODUCTION

The process of globalization gives consequence in increasing immigrant students – students are from different regions in the classroom. It is becoming a phenomenon that has recently increased in the education field. Students move from one place to another place to get a proper education that will help students to be a success in the future. Although many immigrant students cannot achieve the maximal academic target successfully (Orfield, 2001; Gibson & Hidalgo, 2009; Audelo, 2017), the presence of the immigrant students in the classroom can help other students to learn many cultures through classroom interactions.

Since immigrant students bring their home cultures as their identity, students' identities give an impact on language learning and classroom interactions. There are many positive impacts of having many cultures during learning process that one of the positive impacts of it is increasing students' knowledge about other cultures and also increasing performance of both immigrant students and other students by promoting or representing their identity with positive role models within their own cultures (Quiocho & Ríos, 2000; Wieher, 2000; Clough, 2017). It is in line with Flecha and Soler (2013)'s study that immigrant students have been considered to add

value and give an opportunity to other students to have more diverse interactions and, therefore, more intrapersonal development. Through the explanation above, it shows that language identity will influence someone's language when they start learning.

Based on Norton (2016) language is not only a linguistic system of words and sentences, but also a social practice in which identities and desires are negotiated in the context of a complex situation and often make unequal social relationships. Norton (2013) had explained identity as the way a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is across time and space, and how the person can recognize the possibilities for the future.

From that definition, the meaning of language is different from one to another based on the context of the situation that will be well received by connecting the language to the situation. There are two types of languages – majority and minority languages with students' identities in using the language that May (2014) has drawn on minority language situations mainly happened in local dominant migrant societies where students have to learn English, but they have been used to use their local language in interacting with other students in the classroom. Therefore, English is

called a minority language (e.g., Letsholo, 2009; Perlin, 2009; Ndhlovu, 2010). In non-English dominant societies, particularly in the developing world like Indonesia, English as minority language speakers often experience a different language situation that every individual should adjust the language in certain situations to get the idea of the language. To make students get used to use English or other minor languages, students have to learn the language for their integration into society.

Studies on students' language and identity in classroom interactions has currently attracted many researchers to further investigate this topic. Valero, Redondo-Sama, and Elboj (2018) found that having interactions in diverse groups gives a good result of students' learning. However, there is a challenge for both teachers and students due to the phenomenon of an increasing number of intercultural students in the classroom that needs teacher's skill to cover classroom's activity to enhance interactions through diverse cultures from different students' identities so that the learning process gives an impact on improving education. Students maintain their local language attitudes in relation to their identity and English as their language learning. Nguyen and Hamid (2016) argue that students' identities or attitudes alone are not enough to ensure L1 maintenance or identity empowerment because identities can be influenced by the utility of languages. How often students learn and use English in the classroom will give an impact on their identities.

Specifically, every individual's identity has a different characteristic including home culture, dialect, accent, and language. The identities are brought by immigrant students who want to continue their education at a higher level. Banks (2008) saw this kind of phenomenon in classroom interactions that was more intended in the context of multicultural education. Banks (2008) argues that the existence of multicultural education should be learned implicitly by other students during learning process so that every student can know and recognize other different home cultures and languages of other students from diverse groups, and Banks also contends that the reflection of student's identity can make other students having tolerated to attain structural equality in the education field.

In line with the explanation above, this study aimed to examine the relationship between language learning and identity in EFL classroom interactions, whether language learning and identity give a balance contribution to EFL classroom interactions, and how students from different region represent their identities such as home culture, dialect, accent and language in a diverse group. The findings of the study are expected to be one of the references for teachers giving a chance and support to students in using their local language as their identities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Concept of Students' Identities

According to Marcia (1980) identity is the more aware individuals appear to be of their own uniqueness and similarity to others and of their own strengths and weaknesses in making their way in the world. Moreover, Identity theory (Burke & Reitzes 1981; Stryker 1980; Stryker & Richard 1982) is an extension of symbolic interactions, in that it posits a reciprocal relationship between self and social structures. It means that identity can help and hinder students in building a good relationship among other people in their surroundings depending on how students bring their identity.

One of the components of identity that appears quickly in most universities is the process of students learning how to balance their identities and needs. Burke (2006) describes a dynamic view of identities as always changing even though it happens slowly in response to the exigencies of the situation. In so far as an identity cannot change the situation but it adapts slowly, gaining control where it can, and adapting where it must.

In this context, identities refer to the meanings associated with individuals who are in social situations (Markowski & Serpe, 2018). Through the theories above, the meanings of identity have three kinds of basic roles in social positions, such as: individual's occupation which individual shows her/his identity in a certain situation (role identity), the relationships of individual to others as a member of a group (group identities), or the individual meanings who associates with qualities is used to regard themselves as unique from others (personal identity) (Burke & Stets, 2009; Stets & Serpe, 2013).

2.2. Concept of Multicultural Education

Multicultural education is based on the factor situation of the presence of two or more cultures and aims at the recognition of commonalities and differences. Further, Kazancigil (1994) also explained that multiculturalism can be said as systematic and comprehensive response of students to cultural and ethnic diversity, with educational, linguistic, economic and social components and specific institutional mechanisms. Multicultural education can prevent antiracism in society, basically, it is important for all students, pervasive, education for social justice, a process, and a critical pedagogy. Bennett (1990) defines multicultural education as another approach in teaching and learning that has democratic values to foster equality of cultural pluralism. Through this multicultural education, students are faced with a new situation in which students are suggested to be able to deal with

other ethnics' groups among students, thus students are also able to achieve educational equality.

2.3. Intercultural Communication

The concept of culture and communication has strong relation, in the sense that an individual cannot learn or acquire any aspect of culture unless an individual goes through the process of communication. According to Lim (2002), intercultural communication is the significance of a context that varies from different languages and the use of the context to produce a meaning that differs from culture to culture. Therefore, to acquire a correct understanding one requires profound knowledge of a different group's culture and language.

Intercultural communication can be defined as interpersonal communication between individuals from different cultures (Rogers & Hart, 2002). In other words, the fundamental of intercultural communication is the belief that it is through culture that people learn to communicate. For example, there are three students from West Java, North Sumatra and Lampung who learn to communicate Sundanese, Bataknese and Lampungnese. Their behavior during communication conveys meaning because it is learned and shared. In other words, it is cultural. Thus, the ways of people communicate depend on their language patterns, style, and nonverbal behaviours that are all culturally determined communication (Klopf & Park, 1982).

3. METHOD

3.1. Research Design

In conducting the research, the descriptive qualitative method was chosen to conduct this research since the method was suitable to give a description of analysis data that consist of students' interaction behaviour underlying student's identity through the classroom activity. As stated by Creswell (2008), qualitative research was sites that could help the researcher to understand certain phenomena. This study was conducted in one of the private universities in Bandar Lampung.

3.2. Data Source

This study was conducted at one of the private universities in Bandar Lampung. This research was taken in one class that consisted of 43 students – they are mostly from Bandar Lampung and other provinces of Lampung such as Liwa, Way Kanan, Tulang Bawang, etc., and there are also students from Palembang, Java and West Java. There are two different cultures of Lampung then the cultures certainly construct different identities.

The reasons why researchers chose university students is because university as an additional higher level of education becomes the choice of every individual to continue their education, Therefore, the individuals want to find the best education for them even though they have to move to another place and make multicultural interactions in classroom interactions. The researchers can find this kind of phenomenon in one of the private universities in Bandar Lampung that many students are from different schools from senior high school, different ethnics and culture. Same as what Gibson and Hidalgo (2009) stated that students in university present a very diverse group, both in cultural and academic terms. Choosing the university level is believed to provide an active classroom interaction that covers a student's identity through their English as language learning. In addition, the reason why the researchers choose university students is that university is an appropriate place to get enough social context experience through cultural interactions. It is confirmed by Astin, (1984) and Chickering and Reiser (1993) that college offers a variety of settings in which students explore identity—residence halls, academic work, campus activities, etc.

3.3. Data Collection

To gain data from the study, the researchers used some instruments. The instruments of the data collection were observation, close-ended and open-ended questionnaires. These three instruments were used for triangulation since a qualitative study needs multiple sources of data or data collection to enhance the credibility of the findings (Merriam, 2009).

3.4. Data Analysis

The observation of classroom activities and the notes from forum group discussion in a *WhatsApp* group were jotted down on the observation sheet. Any additional notes were written on the field notes and analysed descriptively. All classroom activities that happened in each meeting were transcribed as well in order to gain more comprehensive data during observation. To analyse the data of observation, it was gained from the observational field notes that used steps of analysis from Creswell (2012). The first thing that was done was getting the general sense of the data from the field notes and the transcription. After comprehending the data by reading the whole text, the next thing to do was coding. The process of coding involved segmenting the text data and labelling the segments using codes. The result of classroom observation was synchronized with the result of *WhatsApp* group that was obtained by highlighting the student's expression.

Then, the closed-ended and open-ended questions were also used to gain more data regarding the topic of

this research. The researchers distributed the questionnaire by sharing the link of Google Form. The questionnaire aimed to investigate students' responses through their personal experience during learning in the context of multicultural education. The participants could choose the options; strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), agree (3), and strongly agree (4). The participants could also put their opinion regarding the topic in the 2nd section of questionnaire.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. The relationship between language learning and identity in EFL classroom interactions

To see the relationship between students' identity and their language learning as a tool for daily communication during classroom activities, the researchers used observation sheets as their guideline to get background data about the kind of cultures that existed in the classroom. The researchers took the first semester university students that consisted of 43 students who came from different regions. The lecture was about the fundamentals of speaking that should make students practice their communication more. The researchers had done observation from the first meeting until the fourth meeting and for getting further data, the researchers also joined the students' group on *WhatsApp*.

Since the researchers took the first semester students where in the beginning of the class, the students needed to know their other friends in order to avoid individualism among students. Based on the observation, students had not been able to adjust themselves to the new environment. When students interacted with people of a different culture, the problem might arise. Their communications broke down because their cultural attitudes were fundamentally different from each other, and the results were often feelings of confusion and hostility on both sides. This situation was called 'culture shock' (Regents of University of California, 2011).

The atmosphere of the classroom showed diverse cultures that students had their groups based on the same culture as them. The group of students showed their culture at the first meeting. According to Gibson and Hidalgo (2009) students in the first year of the university presented a very diverse group, both in cultural and academic terms. Based on the data on the observation, the researchers found there was a dominant group in the classroom that students in the group came from the same cultures. Students who came from the same culture were easier to get close to and they seemed comfortable in the middle of the group. When students deal with people who share the same basic cultural attitudes as themselves, the system communication will

work well. Further, the differences in attitude among students, broadly speaking, are far more likely to be of the specific and personal kind than the cultural kind (Regents of University of California, 2011). During the learning process, the researchers found students tried to use English and used simple Bahasa Indonesia as their additional language. Since the researchers took Speaking, the class rules enable students to use and practice English during the learning process. Thus, the researchers did not find that the indication of students' identity was shown up dominantly in the class.

Another different finding was shown through the *WhatsApp* group that students felt more comfortable expressing themselves in communication with their other friends. The researchers found something different from the data observation. Based on the *WhatsApp* group, students mostly used Bahasa Indonesia and sometimes used their local language as their casual language. Furthermore, they used *WhatsApp* for making daily group discussions that they seemed enjoyable to communicate with each other. On some occasions, students also used their local language to make a variety of language in communication. Mostly, the local languages that they used were still common and easily understood, such as: *'Punten, Anah Kidah, Nuhun, Wat Wat Gawoh, Pedom* and mixing language. Students tried to use simple language in order to make their other friends easier to understand (according to the result of the questionnaire, 17 of 43 students say 'Strongly Agree' and 25 of 43 say 'Agree').

According to the results of observation above, the researchers were able to recognize that the use of English students was dominantly used in classroom practice. However, in *WhatsApp* group students felt free to express themselves in group discussion. It was clearly seen in both observation and questionnaire that students gave space to their friends to express themselves and they listened and reacted to their other friends' arguments (according to the result of the questionnaire, 33 of 43 students say 'Agree' and 8 of 43 students say 'Strongly Agree'). Based on both data observation and questionnaire, the use of language and students' local language had a good significant relationship with each other even though the use of both languages was not balanced. Students could express their local language in order to interpret uncommon English language that helped students to understand the meaning of English language.

4.2. How students from different region represent their identities

After having done the observations, the questionnaire was also used to get more data about how students were from different regions representing their identities.

1. Being in the middle of many cultures makes me more enjoyable in learning.
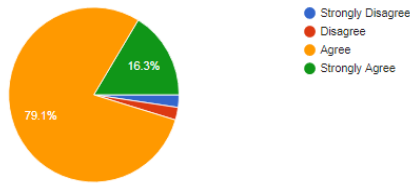43 responses

Figure 1 Different Culture Community

In some opportunities, the researchers found that some students showed their cultures in their group discussion. The questions of the questionnaire were mostly indicated to their perspective in showing themselves in diverse groups. There were two types of questionnaire that were 1-4 items role-identification scale, and another was to elaborate their opinion and feeling regarding their identities.

At the beginning of collecting data, the researchers found that students had little bit of difficulty in showing up in the new environment. They just made a block with their other friends and were just stuck together with their close friend. Students who had a group seemed to have the power to show themselves. By the time, the different atmosphere happened in the classroom, students started enjoying every activity during the learning process and they started adjusting themselves in the classroom. Talmy (2010), argues that identity will influence students' behaviours in the EFL classroom because making a block with other friends may cause them to be alienated.

The data in Figure 1 showed that 33 of 43 students chose to agree that being in the middle of many cultures makes them more enjoyable in learning. During the learning process, students got a chance to share their culture occasionally. The researchers felt there was a big tolerance among students in the classroom. All of the students agreed that having multicultural in the classroom made them learn something new and they were also happy to learn a new language style from their other friends' cultures. They tried to show and introduce their cultures to other friends both in communication and in the learning process.

The role of students' identities in the classroom was deeply investigated by using open-ended questions in the second section of the questionnaire. The students explained that they sometimes did not understand what their other friends said to them because they had a different culture's. Meanwhile, they still kept trying to understand when their friends used their local language in their daily communication. In addition, students also explained their opinions about having many cultures in class made students feel grateful since it gave students more knowledge about new cultures.

For the point of the students' process in presenting themselves in a diverse group, students preferred to observe their friends' languages and then they tried to practice it in interacting with them. Students also claimed that in the process of presenting themselves, they tried to get along to communicate with their other friends. After they could understand the new local language, students also introduced their local language to their friends by saying slowly and clearly in order to prevent misunderstanding.

According to the data above, the role of students' identities could enrich students' knowledge about culture. Mayes (2010) and Norton and Toohey (2000) argued that developing such identities that is associated with the type of backgrounds a person is associated with the impacts of the individual learning experiences. It means that showing or presenting students' identities can give various communications in the classroom activity.

5. CONCLUSION

To sum up the results above, their study indicated that students' perception about having multicultural in their daily communication in the classroom is beneficial. Students believed that being in the middle of new various cultures can make them learn from each other. Thus, it is a good way to recognize other cultures. Students reported that those who are from different cultures do not find difficulty in adjusting themselves in a new different cultural environment. They can learn and re-construct their identities in a new environment in order to build good communication.

Understanding of place in fact is the everyday life that evolves from the way people inhabit a space and this acknowledgment of the significance of people's identities for how they inhabit space. Students should be able to follow a culture in a community. Since the context of this study is also related to the use of English as language learning, it makes students easier in understanding a new language. If one of their friends uses a local language, they are able to translate the utterance into English or Bahasa Indonesia. Through this research, the researchers find the process of how students show their identities in the middle of various cultures. Students observe their friends' languages, understand and try to practice it as a form of adjusting themselves in the community. In another chance, the researchers find that students can show their identities if they have opportunities to show it up, such as: in the middle of group discussion or in the middle of close friends.

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