

International Student's Language Learning Identities in English as a Lingua Franca Context in Indonesia

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Abstract

Indonesia has stipulated the implementation of the international program as one of its internationalisation's agendas. As a result, private and public universities strive to create international programs that would attract international students. This study focuses on an international program in a private university in Tangerang, which promotes English as a medium of instruction with little interference from native speakers. As many previous research have centred around study abroad in English speaking countries, this study offers a novelty of how identities are constructed in the context of English as a Lingua Franca where both local Indonesian and the international students are non-native speakers of English. Therefore, this research aims to discover how international students construct their language learning identity in English as a Lingua Franca context in Indonesia. There were eight participants from five different countries. They were interviewed using conversational narrative interview, and the data was analysed using narratives analysis. The findings were established in themes, and they indicated the positive identities constructions in many ways. These included reconstructing economic identity to religious identity, establishing Lingua Franca speakers identities, constructing global citizenship identities where all these constructions were supported by the acceptance and the zero pressure from the host.

Therefore, it is concluded that zero power inequality promotes favourable language learning and identity construction during study abroad.

Keywords: English as Lingua Franca, International students, Study abroad

1. INTRODUCTION

Internationalisation in higher education promotes high mobility, especially in the education sector. Students from around the world study abroad use English as the medium of communication and instruction. Interestingly, study abroad does not only occur in English-speaking countries but also in non-English-speaking countries. This condition flourishes the emergence of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). People converse to exchange meaning using easily understood English, without emphasising the accent and grammar alone. In this light, ELF has offered new ground to the recent use of English, in which English is now widely used even among those countries which are not the native speakers.

Several studies regarding the students' study abroad identities negotiation have flourished in the past decade in Indonesia. The studies have covered countries like Australia and the United States as the most desired countries to study abroad, with participants ranging from students in general, students of TESOL, and English teachers (Helnywati & Manara, 2019; Mardiningrum, 2017; Nanda, 2019; Sabaruddin, 2019; Ubaidillah & Utami, 2021). The findings generally indicate that identity construction is significant to English language learning regardless of who the participants previous identities were. Students in general, including graduates students, were found to negotiate their identities across time by moving from peripheral to full member of the community (Sabaruddin, 2019; Ubaidillah & Utami, 2021). The students were struggling and conflicting between their current and previous identities (Helnywati & Manara, 2019). Meanwhile, English teachers experienced a transformation in their linguistic self-concept as they defined themselves as inept and speaking very formal English (Mardiningrum, 2017). These findings add the importance of unpacking the identity negotiation process during the study abroad program.

Indeed, the process of study abroad as an international student includes the salient power struggle through language use. Many times, language learning experience might be inhibited instead of flourishing. The students' identities are confronted and required to either shifted or resisted. Therefore, a great deal of investment is needed if the students aim to get accepted into the community. Students bring lived stories before studying abroad of how they imagine study abroad would be, how these stories change over time through interaction and observation, and how their future stories are (re)constructed during their language learning and language use. Therefore, besides the numerous success stories in identities negotiation, there are painful ones, including students limiting contacts only with fellow home countries to protect their emotional identity (Situmorang, 2020).

Identity is defined as "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (Norton, 2000: p.5). Identity is negotiated through time and

context and being multiple. When a learner crosses a border, he is in the midst of the confrontation between his previous identity and current possible identity, considering how this current identity will support future opportunities. In many studies, participants are indicated to pick the current identities by adjusting their language use, their physical appearance, and their habit to fit in the context (Byram, M. & Feng, 2006; Gallucci, 2011; Shi, 2006). Further, a learner searches for the communities that support his identity development regarding their imagined identities in the future (Norton & Toohey, 2011). Identity is all about positioning and repositioning themselves within the context.

In language learning, identity re(construction) cannot be separated from the investment. Investment captures the multiple desire within the learners, which drives their attitude toward reorganising why they do something (Norton, 2000). The learner who sees something better in the future due to learning a language will likely invest in his language learning. He will challenge whatever marginalisation he faces through his language use. Therefore, investment is central to identity construction. In the context where English is not the first language, the students investing in language learning were found to reconstruct their identities as global citizens (Sung, 2020), struggle to rebuild their identities due to the demand for the use of English in their socio-cultural norms and community (Park, 2012), and see their future identities as the users of World-Englishes (Him, 2018).

Studies related to language and identities in SA have sky-rocketed owing to globalisation and internationalisation. Many countries send the students to SA hoping they develop global-minded identities and intercultural awareness (Antonakopoulou, 2013; Engberg & Wolniak, 2010), "which would enable them to embrace people whose values and beliefs differ from their own" (Jokikokko & Uitto, 2016, p. 16). At the same time, each country also improves itself by providing international programs to attract international students. In Indonesia, the internationalisation of higher education is stipulated in Acts No 50 the Year 2012. In conclusion, teachers, students, and policymakers believe that SA is the best medium to learn a language and develop intercultural and globalised personalities. However, some studies have painted the sojourner students' struggle to deal with the new environment given limited access to the discourses (Gieser, 2015; Jackson, 2008; Norton Pierce, 2000). Using Bourdieu's (1991) theories of field, habitus, and agency, applied linguists state that there is power differential found at SA's discourses to those at home.

In a nutshell, previous studies have indicated that SA is a complex and challenging journey influenced by the power structure and ideologies within (Kinginger, 2013; Norton, 2000; Jackson, 2008; Gieser, 2015). Students, teachers, policymakers, and program leaders need to understand the struggle encountered by the students – the inequality of the power faced and the choices available for them to negotiate their identity (Gieser, 2015; Jackson; 2008). In response, the ERASMUS body designed an intentional program to better support students' experiences of the 'while abroad' program. The project material was designed to help students define interculturality and make sense of themselves and others during SA. This program recorded that the reflective process had been much more manageable in their identity negotiation. Regardless, it is concluded that though given the 'while abroad' support, students experience a more personal struggle in finding a univocal definition to their identity, which is complex, multifaceted, and open to interpretation.

This research is unique as the international students and Indonesians are not native speakers of English. English is used for mutual understanding, and arguably there is less power inequality experienced than international students who use English against the native speakers. The international students will not be excluded from the community if they use different Englishes. They are assumed to be superior users of English because they are from abroad. Another novelty is that the international students in this research are educated under a robust theological foundation in Christianity. In this light, this study offers different perspectives from other research which have been done in the areas of language and identities. Therefore, this research formulates its research question as follows: 1. How do the international students construct their language learning identity in the English as a Lingua Franca context in Indonesia?

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This research was designed in a narrative inquiry framework (Barkhuizen, 2016) to find out the lived stories of the international students in an SA program in an ELF communication context. Eight participants from five non-speaking English countries (Nepal, Russia, China, India, Sri Lanka) participated. They were studying bachelor's degree in a private university in Tangerang, where instruction was English and fully funded. During admission, they were required to have a specific score on English Language Test and was provided with English language enrichment during their first year.

The instrument used was a conversational narratives interview (Barkhuizen et al., 2013). As the interview might lead to subjectivity, the process of data collection confirmed the triangulation to minimise bias (Denzin, 1973). The triangulation was established through investigator triangulation by employing more than one interviewer and data analyst in the study (Rugg, 2019). Three authors and one independent corroborated and verified the findings and the analysis without prior discussion. As a result, the findings of this study were established valid and balanced. In the process, the pool of data-rich with inductive reasoning (Barkhuizen, Benson, and Chik, 2015) was transcribed and analysed using narrative analysis. The steps of analysis followed Polkinghorne's (1995) model analysis included 1) focusing on the events, actions, happenings, and other data elements and put them together in the plot; (2) rereading the data in recursive movement from parts to whole and from whole to parts; (3) interpreting the gaps in the events and actions to make sense of what was beyond the surface of what was stated; (4) showing the evidence of the significance of the participants lived experiences in the final story; and (5) presenting the new story which congruent to the data while bringing the narrative meanings that are not explicit in the data themselves. The result was shown in a theme supported by the excerpt from participants' stories.

3. FINDINGS

Several themes appeared from the lived stories of the participants in the data analysis. Indeed, most participants experienced three major language learning identities constructions, namely shifting, adjusting, and growing. The themes were grouped as followed:

3.1. From Economic to Religious Identity

The findings indicated that most participants chose to study abroad in Indonesia with a fully-funded program because they had limited economic backgrounds. SA became a privilege for them to seek change in their lives. Initially, SA students would choose countries in Europe and America. People around the world well-acknowledged these two continents. With that said, Indonesia was not a fancy country people, in general, would choose to study abroad. However, the fully-funded program offered a panacea for their current economic background and their future imagined identities. They believed that SA, regardless of the target country, would broaden their horizons and open more doors for them.

Most Chinese study abroad they may choose Europe or America or Australia first and but for me, I think I am just a normal family that is not so rich, but I think it's enough for me to go to Indonesia (Participant 1)

You can learn a lot from the Christian perspective, and they also provide financial assistance because it was the biggest issue for me when I was looking for a university because American universities are very expensive (Participant 9)

I never dreamt of studying abroad because of my family issues and financial crisis. Someone introduced me to this program. ... I will be able to serve God the way He wants me to. (Participant 4)

SA is good for my future because it can broaden my horizon and see the outside world because what I thought is connected with ... God's calling and God's commission. I don't know Indonesia. But I want to see new people new environment. (Participant 6)

The first reason why I studied abroad was that the need to study Christian Education ... (Participant 3)

The excerpts showed that the students came from the same economic background and thus shared the same purposes. They looked forward to changing their current economic identities and, at the same time, constructed their religious identities through the funded program awarded to them.

3.2. Lingua Franca speakers Identity

The findings indicated that students found themselves a new meaning of English when using it in Indonesia. They were not intimidated using their various accents and the urgency to speak one true English. English is used as a tool of communication. Though they made mistakes, they supported each other and clarified the meaning of their sentence in many ways to deliver the meaning and avoid misunderstanding.

What people think is like, if you go to a foreign land, and if you speak English, you will need to speak English, speak either like British way or American way, you can't talk like other people accent, Chinese or Chinese African accent. But coming here I understood that it doesn't matter until you can express your feelings and other people, they know you. When the other people understand you, I feel like it doesn't matter (Participant 5)

A challenge for me, but because I made a friend with Indonesia, right. There must be another way, and we must speak English. So, I think that was good for me because I get more chance to practice my English (Participant 7)

You know I am not a native English speaker, so I also speak broken English sometimes. So, we just try. I found it challenging to understand what Indonesian say; sometimes, you know they don't put the stress and those things you know, but now I like how Indonesian talks to me; it rings in my ears. (Participant 6)

Since we can communicate, it does not matter with what accent or how you speak. I think it's okay to speak just like your original, of course I believe the US is original, or maybe it's more sounds good, but it's okay, but I think our accent will be changed if we for example now I am studying in ITC I think in our faculty we have a special accent and maybe later after I graduate I will go to another country maybe my accent will also change (Participant 1)

When I communicate with my friends and classmates, they don't care about me if I am wrong or not wrong. They just say they understand if I have some grammar problems. They will gently tell me, "You can say like this next time," and I know if I don't open my mouth, I don't know where I am wrong, I don't know which side I need to improve. So, this is the way affects me how to learn another language (Participant 2)

During their interactions with the local Indonesian and their classmates from various non-English speaking countries, the participants internalised that speaking English was for communication. They were encouraged to learn and speak to deliver the meaning and thus develop their awareness as a part of the global community.

3.3. Global citizenship

This study showed that they constructed flexibility and mindedness after mingling with local Indonesians and other classmates from various countries. They became a global citizen. They absorbed the new language and culture and combined it with the ones they had had before. As a result, they reconstructed a hybrid identity.

When you SA, especially very abroad, different cultures are fighting in some ways. So, as the results, like either, you stick on your thinking or start to adapt others and combine them. So, I am just like to combine them. So, that's the biggest thing I learn that affects me (Participant 3)

I switch on and off as I am aware of the different cultures I am facing. How I act with people, I think they change a lot. I become more polite than I used to. I realise that there are so many nice people (Participant 9)

After coming here, I know how the international community like, how one can interact with the international community in English, how to use it. If I have studied in India, I would probably use my mother tongue. Though I might read an English

textbook, I might think in my language, making a huge difference. Now, if I go back to India, I would be thinking in English (Participant 4)

I changed my stereotype mindset because of the culture I grew up in, but I came to understand that nothing is wrong, but it is different. It's just different, not wrong. I try to understand and try to understand the different cultures, how they do things, and the other things. So, I think the way I used to see the perspectives, I change them. (Participant 5)

And one thing that I come here, and I realise that I improve, is to think in others' shoes because we all different. We might think they should not do some behaviours in my culture, but in their culture, it is just normal. So, we cannot think only from our way (Participant 3)

The above excerpts showed that the participants were no longer their old selves. They have changed through their language use and their cultural practices. Students came with an original culture which tended to judge other culture now transformed into understanding and flexible personalities who considered differences. Besides, they have combined their culture with the new ones creating a new global identity.

3.4. Identity Construction Supported by Host

During their study abroad in Indonesia, the participants' identity construction was facilitated by the support and the welcome from the local Indonesian. The participants felt accepted and thus experienced favourable language learning and acculturation. The supports they received varied from flatmates, churchmates, sellers, or even strangers.

I met her in church. She treats me good. We have a good relationship. ... They treat us closer, more like full of love, and care (Participant 1)

When I go to the mall, I want to buy something, and the people are really friendly they always smile at you. Even though I don't buy ... and I just check, ... they are gentle, so I feel good (Participant 2)

The first thing that I am interested to is the people here. They like to smile even though later on I realise that culture, at the beginning I thought like the people are so nice here, they smile whenever we see you (Participant 3)

... When we get the food from the grab the Grab drivers, even though they are a little bit late, they will say sorry ... it's so different in China ...like they are so friendly to each other. ... I thought Christian could not befriend Muslim like that, but they can get along with each other, and they are so friendly to each other (Participant 7)

People are welcoming, and they're also kind and positive all the time. The fact that they are willing to do something and how everyone is nice whenever you go. People don't stare at you because you're speaking a different language. In Indonesia, I haven't met anybody who is rude to me because I was a foreigner (Participant 9)

The positive experiences they had during their interaction with local Indonesian contributed to the success of the identity negotiation. Their impressions of the people

supported them to feel good and accepted. As a result, they were able to develop their new identities and succeeded in their language use.

4. DISCUSSION

This research highlights the identity constructions of the international students studying abroad in English as a Lingua Franca context in Indonesia. The findings indicate the identity constructions done fluidly and in many ways. Support also appears as the lubricant in how the identity constructions have been successful. Four main themes are established through the findings include 1) economic identity to religious identity; 2) Lingua Franca speakers' identity; 3) global citizenship; and 4) identity construction supported by the host.

The participants in this research are unique students who the Christian university financially supports. This background gives a novel contribution to the analysis of study abroad. Generally, those studying abroad are students with a decent financial condition and thus seek better education. However, the students in this research experience difficult economic conditions choose any available chances to go for further study and, in this case, study abroad. The participants believe that many other countries should be the target country of study abroad but impossible due to the financial crisis. Therefore, they feel grateful for the chance and at the same time strengthen their religious identities. Numerous studies have talked about the religious identities construction, and the results have been various as well. While some students question their religious identities regarding sexualities, feminism, and knowledge during their study in Australia (Mulya, 2011), other students increase their religious identities to create a strengthened bond due to being a minority (Situmorang, 2020).

This theme reflected the students' identities construction through their personal lives' story and choices. The students express that they are grateful for the privilege of studying abroad regardless of their economic background. One student points out that he is making his family proud as he lifts his family dignity to study overseas. Another student points out that this opportunity has been an open door for him to reach his future dream. One most striking point is that the students explicitly express that this opportunity has been a set-up for them to know more about their God and thus serve Him further. Indeed, there has been a heightened religious activity construction within the students and favourably support their study abroad time in Indonesia.

The second theme established has been about constructing the Lingua Speakers Identity. This theme indicated that students had heightened awareness that speaking English should not be about one type of English but English that delivers meaning. In this relation, the students accept various accents from various background cultures that were new to them and were hard to understand. They reposition themselves as learners who are prone to make mistakes; thus, practice is very much needed. Besides, support from their partners who do not look down on diversities highlights their success in learning to speak English. Context and environment that does not impose power difference in people who speak English positively encourage their language use and promote engagement. A similar finding has also been reported by Lee & Kim (2020) that engagement in ELF context is not simply based on individual behaviour but also on social performance, including acceptance, social

expectations, self-esteem influencing intentions, and sense of control over linguistic knowledge.

This theme also emphasises the existence of ELF in the context where English is neither spoken as a first nor second language. ELF facilitates the communication between local Indonesian and international students who do not speak English as their mother tongues. Therefore ELF has facilitated communication among different people culturally for other purposes using communication strategies (Chacón-Beltrán, 2021; Matsumoto & Canagarajah, 2020). As a result, this research argues that ELF users in this context can use the language without the intervention of the native speaker or any single English that is usually claimed to be the one true English. The accuracy of the language core of the inner circle country is not assessable and therefore is unreasonable to expect the ELD students users to use them perfectly (Jenkins et al., 2011; Pennycook, 2014). In this light, this research calls for the attention of the program provider to take this finding into account of how they could best support the language use among the students by providing the suitable mean for assessment and continue to provide support to them during their language practices.

ELF teachers, further in this case are local Indonesian professors, are expected to use various sources so they could balance the class instead of being a judge of the English use during the language production and thus discourage the students' self-esteem. This step is important as the promotion of each of the students' sociocultural identities creates successful communication beyond accuracy (Dewey & Pineda, 2020).

The following theme raises the issue of the global identity constructions. Through their language use, the students have been found to stretch their identities. The participants find it hard to adapt; through their time in Indonesia, they adapt flexibility and open-mindedness in multifaceted ways, personal and related to others. The students find themselves more flexible persons who adjust with the local cultures to mingle with people. One student points out his ability to express himself and build his confidence in his behaviour. Besides, they also experience the change in how they think, how cultures are diverse and that they should be able to see from different perspectives. In this respect, they have been able to turn the switch on and off flexibly regarding what community they are involved in (Seidlhofer, 2001; Situmorang, 2020; Sung, 2020).

Further, the students have also developed their flexibilities concerning other people. Several students in this research have found that they know that they live with other friends of different nationalities. Thus they try to think in other's shoes of why some cultures may define right or wrong regarding a particular action. They change their previous stereotyping mindset as they try to understand different cultures, including different methodologies in in-class delivery. These findings are inclinedly positive and highlight zero self-retraction. The participants here can grasp the values and the belief of others (Jokikokko & Uitto, 2017).

Finally, the last theme highlights the support received from the host. The participants of this study have been continuously receiving from local Indonesian acting as their churchmate, flatmate, classmate and even strangers. These conditions have been the lubricant to how favourably their identities formation occurred. Though they were afraid of the people's reaction to them being a foreigner, they gain confidence from the friendliness shown. These positive experience has been many times highlighted in the study abroad

research (Duff, 2002; Heller, 1992; Kinginger, 2013; Pellegrino Aveni, 2005; Situmorang, 2020). The many research only verifies that support is prominent to language learning; thus, the availability needs to be maintained.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This research discovers that the international students participating in the study abroad in English as a Lingua Franca in Indonesia succeed in negotiating and constructing their identities favourably in many ways. These findings add novelty to the identity research in the Lingua Franca context of how zero power inequality is evidence of the successfulness of language learning and identity construction. Language use has been more fluid as the participants use English as a communication tool rather than validate their identities. Therefore, universities in the Lingua Franca context should not doubt creating a study abroad program. The students will opt more to go into programs that pose a minor threat to their identities but support their personal and intercultural development. As this study only employ limited samples in one university, a study with larger sample may provide various Lingua Franca context to unpack more evidences from the field.

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