



“A steep learning curve”: Students’ Voices in Translanguaging Classroom Practice

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Abstract

This study exposes the students’ voices during the classroom instruction in Intermediate Structure course session. Narrative inquiry design is employed in this study. It focuses on understanding of students experiences including the personal and social contexts. The participants involved the 1st semester students taking Intermediate Structure courses of English Education department FKIP Universitas Islam Lamongan. The narrative frameworks are employed to gain the data from the participants. The findings demonstrate a steep learning curve during classroom interaction and instruction as well. In a nutshell, the students are still in the transition phase where they are still adapting the new English classroom atmosphere they have not previously experienced.

Keywords: *translanguaging, EFL students, narrative inquiry, students’ voices*

Introduction

In the context of English as a foreign language, EFL teachers expect their students are able to communicate English well as the ultimate objective. Practicing English as a medium of instruction in the foreign language classroom is considered challenging since the teachers focus on the course being taught. Meanwhile, the practice of bilinguals accessing different linguistic features or modes of various languages to improve communication, focusing on speakers' practices and identities rather than on language structures as so called as translanguaging is ordinarily employed by EFL teachers to reach that objective.

Many translanguaging studies are conducted in various settings across countries. Sulaiman, et.al (2021) mention the positive impacts of translanguaging as an ESL learning strategy in Kuwait context. Meanwhile, the same advantageous results also shown by Prasetya (2021) the international students’ progress studied by Pilipino teachers. The practice of translanguaging is also occurred in tertiary context (Ningrum

& Sahiruddin, 2023). Still, at the tertiary level in the Vietnamese context, Uyen & Dung (2024) assert positive impacts in translanguaging activity. Further, their study also reveal the challenges that the theories provide for both the instructor and the students in acquiring English. Those studies reflect the positive impacts on translanguaging practice across Asia countries.

Further, the study regarding the students perception toward translanguaging are immense in terms of both quality and quantity as well. Lewis, et.al (2012); Qashas,et.al (2023); Fang,et.al (2022); Marcevani & Julia (2023); and Riswanto (2022) comduct the study relevant to students perception on translanguaging, translanguaging in multilingual turn, and pedagogical strategy as well.

In addition, the different context of language instruction are also harnessed translanguaging practice in their classroom instruction respectively. Wang, et.al (2023) accouter translanguaging for their pragmatic class. Meanwhile, Styati & Irawati apparel their ELT writing classroom with translanguaging practice. This research is distinguished from the aforementioned studies since the teaching of structure have not been discussed yet. The students' experiences in enrolling Intermediate structure as the required course and the practicing of translanguaging in the classroom interactively should have given fruitful experience in attaining progress in language learning.

Method

The method employed in this study is narrative inquiry method. According to Barkhuizen (2014), a narrative frame is "a written story template consisting of a series of incomplete sentences and blank spaces of varying lengths." A narrative frame is considered as a story in the form of skeletal. The data were collected through narrative frames made by the researcher related to the research objective. There were 5 students took the role as participants. Each of them was given narrative frames to do honestly. The narrative frames were given to the participant at the end of the course. The narrative frames covered the participant own experiences through stories in a written form. Data or results were, then returned to participants to check for the accuracy and resonance with their experiences. This also functioned as data triangulation. The result of the narrative frames were then analyzed thoroughly to solve the research questions regarding the Intermediate structure course where the participants have joined in the translanguaging classroom mode.

Result and Discussion

Based on the results of narrative framework there are three major findings elaborated in this part. The researcher classified and categorized the results into three major themes. They are, the unhappy and confusion phase, the challenging phase, and the awareness and the learning phase. The researcher employs narrative framework to be answered by the students. The narrative framework can be seen in the followings:

Table 1: The narrative framework

| <u>No</u> | <u>Phase</u> | <u>Teacher's note</u> |
|-----------|---|-----------------------|
| 1 | At the beginning, I feelduring the teaching and learning process , because..... | |
| 2 | During the course (meeting 1,2,3,4,5) I feel.....because..... | |
| 3 | At the end of the course, I think.....the reasons are..... | |
| 4 | Mention 3 words describing this course and the activities you have experienced..... | |

The samples of students' narrative were collected and some notes were made to be further analyzed. During the completion of narrative framework, the researcher gave some guidelines and information, particularly for those who did not understand the completion filling. The followings are the samples of participants' narrative framework they wrote reflecting their experiences and feeling toward translanguaging practice in Intermediate Structure course.

Table 2: The narrative framework sample (Participant -1)

| <u>No</u> | <u>Phase</u> | <u>Teacher's note</u> |
|-----------|--|-----------------------|
| 1 | At the beginning, <i>I feel I do not understand what teacher explain in the classroom, the teacher speaks English to explain the tenses and I get dizzy</i> (during the teaching and learning process), <i>because she speaks English too fast and I do not understand some vocabulary, the new words I do not really recognize also some terms in the course.</i> | |
| 2 | During the course (meeting 1,2,3,4,5) <i>I feel still confused but I have to face this situation in the classroom</i> in every course meetings. | |

- 3 At the end of the course, I think *I have used to “membiasakan diri dan memotivasi diri: untuk dapat memahami percakapan bahasa Inggris di dalam kelas. The reasons are because I am the student of English major, so I hve to be able to speak Englis well and also understand it.*
 - 4 Mention 3 words describing this course and the activities you have experienced *confused, challenging, always trying*
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Based on the table 1, the students showed mixed experiences in the translanguaging method where the communication occurred in the classroom employed the first language (bahasa) and English as the medium of instruction.

Table 3: The narrative framework sample (Participant -2)

| <u>No</u> | <u>Phase</u> | <u>Teacher’s note</u> |
|-----------|---|-----------------------|
| 1 | At the beginning, <i>I understand what the teacher said or explained, but I still find it difficult to respond the teacher’s questions and I am afraid to express my opinion</i> (during the teaching and learning process) , because maybe it is because <i>I never practice English for conversation purposes and I also have limited vocabulary to express my opinion.</i> | |
| 2 | During the course (meeting 1,2,3,4,5) <i>I feel insecure and shy to talk in English I always want the teacher to speak in Bahasa so I can get easily understand.</i> In every course meetings. | |
| 3 | At the end of the course, I think <i>I have to read more, study more because I feel ashamed my English is low compared to other classmates.</i> | |
| 4 | Mention 3 words describing this course and the activities you have experienced: <i>difficult, habit, study hard</i> | |

After the participants have done the presentations or tabular results.

1.1. The unhappy and confusion phase

The students' narration (Khoiroh, 2024) concerning with the activity in the course where the researcher as the teacher required the students to communicate dominantly in English and they might use *Bahasa* in a limited portion of time. In other words English is likely preferable used in the classroom. The students definitely looked unhappy and denial since this is their new experience attending the classroom using English as a means of communication. But, the researcher kept motivating and pushing them that they can do that. They should not feel afraid of making mistakes, since everyone in the classroom are language learners. Making mistakes are normal and everyone learn a lot from their mistakes.

1.2. The accepting and challenging phase

In this phase, the students were get used to with the translanguaging practice. At first, the students communicated in *Bahasa* but the teacher kept reminding them to speak in English. The reward system was also employed, the students who were actively presenting, discussing and delivering questions in English, the teacher would give them points as reward written in the teacher's notebook. This triggered the students to speak English no matter what challenges and the difficulties they experienced. This also built their confidence in speaking English. In this phase, the teacher aware that whenever the students got confused on the materials being taught, the bilingual modes the switching code into *Bahasa* is exerted.

1.3. The awareness and learning phase

At the last phase and at the end of the course students showed positive attitude when the teacher combined the use of *Bahasa* and English during the classroom instruction. This means the students have raised their self-awareness in improving English although they still compromised with barriers, such reluctant to speak English, limited vocabulary to express their ideas, and also psychological factors on being shy, afraid, nervous, etc as suggested by Wei & Lin (2023) that translanguaging pushing the limits and break the boundaries of language learners within the classroom instruction barriers.

In this study, the researcher used the idiomatic terminology *a steep learning curve* is as an expression that is often used in colloquial speech to describe the initial difficulty of learning something that is considered to be very challenging. This discourse is in line with Uyen & Dung (2024) study's which promote the students'

learning practice. The implication is that learning will be slow and arduous. The concept of a “steep learning curve” is more of a metaphor that most likely represents a common perception that going up a steep hill is slower than going up a long, shallow incline. Additionally, in this study, the students experienced a challenging phase, feeling inconvenience at the initial space at translanguaging instruction. They prefer to have the first language instead the use of English during the classroom instruction.

Conclusion

The exertion of translanguaging in EFL classroom instruction is a way more auspicious in provisioning students with supportive-language learning atmosphere. The students were positively exposed with the communicative and interactive language use as a means of communication unquestionably. In a real-life application of the term to the learning curve model, a steep curve on a learning curve actually implies that there is an initial period of fast learning – not slow learning.

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