

The Multicultural Experiences of English as a Second Language (ESL) Learners in a Multicultural Learning Environment

Marites Dulnuan Bumidang¹, Eilene Balenga- Bugnay²

^{1,2}Faculty Member- College of Education, Ifugao State University

Abstract

This study described the learning experiences of the English as a Second Language (ESL) Students in a Multicultural Classroom at Ifugao State University. Free writing through reflection papers and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) were used in gathering the needed information. Findings reveal that ethnic language has the greatest impact to their English learning and use. It affects their pronunciation and accent. Lack of vocabulary and grammar are also among their challenges. Positive learning atmosphere, objective assessment and constructive criticism and positive insights are some of the experiences that encourage learning and make the students appreciate their course and major. However, bullying, stereotyping, pressure from external and internal expectations, undesirable way of correction and misjudgments are also experienced by the students causing inhibitions and frustrations. The findings of this study will help teachers not only in strategizing their teaching to accommodate multiculturalism but also in managing their language classrooms to prevent negative experiences resulting from diversity.

Keywords

Diverse Learners, English Language Teaching and Learning, Edifying Experiences, Mortifying Experiences, Demotivating Experiences.

Introduction

Multiculturalism currently aims for the political accommodation of difference instead of the subversion of the resulting privileges of difference (Swartz, et al., 2014). According to

¹Corresponding Author, email: tessdbumidang@gmail.com

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²Second Author, email: bugnay13@gmail.com

Canadian political scientist Kymlicka (2005), the multicultural project aspires to accommodate 'ethno cultural diversity', protect 'individual rights', and promote 'non-discrimination'. These aims are achieved through enacting various policies and practices of multiculturalism that offer ways to achieve social harmony and integration in diverse societies based on just principles of egalitarianism and equality (Modood, 2007). Meer and Modood (2012) clarified this definition when they note that multiculturalism is understood 'in Europe [and] ... throughout the English-speaking world and beyond, as the political accommodation by the state and/or a dominant group of all minority cultures defined first and foremost by reference to race, ethnicity or religion. As Soudien and Biko, and also Fraser (1995) point out, multiculturalism's call for 'recognition' of harm and of those affected needs to be accompanied by redress and a vision for a future different from either assimilation or annihilation. It is within this context that Swartz and Scott (2012) speak of the restitution of personhood as a contribution to social transformation. Restoring humanity or personhood requires that actions of solidarity (Juul, 2010) taken in the areas of remembering past injustices, working towards human dignity, fostering active senses of belonging (including citizenship and equality) and implementing strategies towards physical and psychological flourishing.

Multiculturalism is present all institution including educational institutions. As Gay (2010) emphasized that "culture is at the heart of all we do . . ." in education, and that culture ". . . determines how we think, believe, and behave, and these, in turn, affect how we teach and learn". Researchers demonstrate that understanding the background and culture (and immigrant) of children is a necessary component for teachers to provide a more successful educational experience for these students (Banks, 2001; Gay, 2000; Olson, 1997; Sleeter and Grant, 1991). This can provide valid and thoughtful information about learning and may directly or indirectly influence teachers' instructional practices. Personal characteristics, structural factors that affect participation in courses, and sociocultural context may all influence learning (Barton, 1994; Caffarella & Merriam, 2000; Merriam, 1993; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991). In a study of adult learners, it was found out that their attitudes, efforts, and success in acquiring English skills are shaped by individual qualities, including cognitive changes with aging (Bialystok & Hakuta, 1999; Stevens, 1999), motivation, affect, and health (Ehrman & Oxford, 1995; Gardner, Tremblay, & Masgoret, 1997; Tsytsarev & Krichmar, 2000). Also, the location, scheduling, and other features of ESL courses may interfere with or promote elders' attendance and have an impact on learning (Skilton-Sylvester & Henkin, 1997). Finally, culturally influenced experiences and situations, including educational background (Chiswick,

1993, 1997), labor force involvement, living arrangements, and family roles (Chiswick, 1992,1993; Gold, 1997) can affect elders' opportunities and success in second language acquisition.

Researches on language socialization indicates that language and literacy learning is part of a process of socialization through which the learner acquires particular values and relationships in the social context where learning takes place (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). Ochs(1986) further posits that children acquire a worldview as they acquire a language. Since the process of acquiring language is deeply affected by the process of becoming a competent member of a community, language learning is intricately linked to the construction of social roles, cultural affiliations, beliefs, values and behavioral practices (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). In addition, many sociolinguists acknowledge that language and culture are dimensions of each other, interrelated and inseparable. Language both reflects and shapes one's world view. Stress arises when people from different linguistic backgrounds cannot meet their everyday needs as they would in their own culture. They are unable, or find it difficult to communicate; they can not make themselves understood; they can not figure out why hosts speak or behave the way they do (Watkins, Razee, & Richters, 2012; Kuo, 2011; Ogbu, 1998; Krywulak, 1997). Watkins, Razee, & Richters, (2012), for example, found that lack of proficiency in the host language was the most frequently mentioned problem of adjustment by foreign students.

Intercultural research emphasizes that communicating effectively across difference requires not just cognitive knowledge, but more importantly, the ability to adapt to changing contexts and diverse values (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). Intercultural effectiveness is thus known to encompass not just the cognitive domain of learning, but the affective and behavioral as well (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006; Okayama, Furuto, and Edmondson 2001; Yershova, DeJaeghere, and Mestenhauser, 2000). While it is in daily interactions with diverse others that the outcomes of intercultural education are subjected to the most pertinent test, faculty can provide a basis for teaching in higher education in developing the skills, habits, and tools of intercultural effectiveness that will support respectful and substantive interaction (Deardorff, 2006; Paige 1993; Lee et al. 2012; UNESCO 2013; Yershova, DeJaeghere, and Mestenhauser 2000). Without the development of intercultural skills and awareness, Otten (2003) notes that intercultural encounters 'can even reinforce stereotypes and prejudices', which tends to happen 'if the experiences of critical incidents in intercultural contexts are not evaluated on cognitive, affective, and behavioral levels. The conditions conducive to acquiring intercultural skills are consistent with those advocated in classic theories of learning, such as Kolb's (1984, 2006)

conceptualization of the learning cycle. As Lee, Williams, and Kilaberia (2012) have argued using Kolb's (1984) terminology, intercultural learning requires a mixture of four ingredients: concrete experiences with diverse individuals, reflective observation on one's own learning process, abstract conceptualization of new rules of behavior, and active experimentation with the new rules in the course of interacting with diverse others.

In a language education classroom wherein the learners are from varied cultural background, differences in their learning styles and in their learning application are inherent because of their culture. As Vygotsky (1978) stressed, *"individual mental functioning can be understood only by going outside the individual and examining the social and cultural processes from which one is constructed"*. Vygotsky viewed mental functioning as occurring within the context of activity or engagement with the cultural tools of one's environment, namely *"speech, symbols, physical structures such as houses, works of art and writing for example"* (Lasky, 2005, p. 902). Thus the tools which enable action move beyond the remit of representational systems (Wertsch, 1995) and constitute resources with the potential to empower, constrain, or transform action.

Furthermore, Vygotsky noted that that speech is not a direct translation of our thoughts; rather, the words we use in speech are an attempt to express our understanding or the meaning we have made (Vygotsky, 1987). In the Irish multicultural classroom, various words may have different meanings both for the children and the teacher due to the variety of lived experiences resulting in the pupils' struggle to understand both the language and the concepts they strive to convey.

The English language classroom provides a multicultural context for learning, and teachers need to help students understand and appreciate the differences and similarities among the various ethnic, religious and cultural groups (Muhamad, n.d). For second language learners who are in two cultural worlds, the process of acquiring a language(s) may involve the intersection of multiple/different cultural values and beliefs and multiple contexts of socialization. For such learners, it is important to note that language practices do not exist in isolation from each other just as cultures and communities do not exist as discrete entities, but rather interact with each other in various degrees of complementarity or conflict (Lam, 2004). Historically, public education has concentrated on school knowledge and paid little attention to students' personal and cultural knowledge—concepts, explanations, and interpretations that students derive from personal experiences in their homes, families, and community cultures (Banks, 2001). Very few studies have addressed young minority and/or ESL children's

experiences, especially those of young Asian Pacific children, in their particular sociocultural and socioeconomic contexts (Banks, 2001).

Gutierrez & Orellana (2006) confirmed that most of the existing studies concerning ELLs have focused on the problems students face in school rather than on their educational experiences. Unresolved issues that affect programming quality options and quality education for English language learners (ELLs) have existed for many years (e.g., Bilingual Education Act, 1968; Cummins, 1984; Moll, 1988; Wong-Fillmore, 1991). Deficit thinking (Valencia, 1997, 2010), which involves teachers focusing on students' weaknesses rather than their strengths, is probably one of the most pervasive of those issues, but other issues include the underrepresentation in gifted programs of ELLs from some ethnic and racial groups (Yoon & Gentry, 2009), as well as the overrepresentation of these students in special education programs (Ortiz et al., 2011; Sullivan, 2011).

Review of related literature shows no qualitative research on the multicultural experiences of ESL learner yet. The researchers believe that establishing a research-based mirror of the experiences of students in learning English as a second language will benefit both the teachers and the students. It could be very challenging for teachers to understand their students on a level beyond knowing their demographics, but it is also very rewarding. Understanding the students' background is also understanding ourselves as teachers. It makes us go beyond the traditions of teaching and beyond what is presently practiced. We will know how to redirect our teaching methodologies to accommodate the learning needs of all learners in consideration of their varied cultural background. Indeed, knowing who our students are, not only as a group but also as individuals is very important if we want the teaching-learning process to be really effective. In the same manner, the students learning needs will be met. Their diversity no longer hinders learning but instead promotes/ reinforces learning. As researches on English as a second language (ESL) practices concluded, literacy is a part of students' lives in and out of school, and that their learning experiences in and out of school need to be explored to inform educators about their particular sociocultural backgrounds and educational needs (Li, 2001, 2002; McCarthy, 1997; Nieto, 2002).

Teachers need to know and understand the impediments that learners experience in learning the four skills viz. listening, speaking, reading and writing in order to prepare effective lessons and to guide learners in developing their language proficiency (Bernardo and Gaerlan, n.d). Therefore, it is pertinent that learners need to be given the opportunity to express their views

pertaining to their learning experience to ensure teaching and learning are effectively carried out in the classrooms.

This study was aimed at describing the experiences of the English majors at Ifugao State University in learning English as a second language in relation to their diverse cultural background. Specifically, it identified and described both affirmative and undesirable experiences that impacted English language performance of students.

Methodology

Subjects of the study

The respondents of the study are the English majors taking Bachelor of Secondary Education at Ifugao State University. Ten of these students were later invited for the focus group discussion. The two most common manifestations of cultural differences in the University, which are ethno-linguistic group (Ayangan, Kalanguya, Tuwali and Ilocano) and gender were considered in inviting participants for the FGD. However, there was no Kalanguya available during the FGD.

The English majors were chosen as the respondents of the study because they have more subjects on the language. They are frequently exposed to the language and are expected to use it more often than the other students taking other majors.

Data Collection and Procedure

The method used was intentionally open-ended in order to invite students to self-select and actively reflect, thereby providing what Haines (2007) refers to as a 'clear window on emerging modes of thought.'

After explaining the purpose of the study, the researchers allowed the students to write their experiences in learning English in a blank sheet of paper. The students were encouraged to write anything about their experiences using the language they are most comfortable with. They were given the option not to write their names and to use codes when referring to a person in their narration to maintain anonymity.

Data Analysis

Qualitative approach particularly intensive text analysis was used in the analysis and interpretation of data gathered. It involves classifying data to make sense of the data collected and to highlight the important messages, features or findings.

The steps enumerated by Manen (1990) were considered.

a. Bracketing and Phenomenological Reduction

The information mirrored in the reflection papers and the additional data gathered during the FGD were bracketed in a repertory grid. This is to warrant that all information included in the study are from the respondents without any preconceived beliefs and opinions of the researcher.

b. Intuition

The researchers remained opened to the meanings implied in the reflection papers and responses of the students during the FGD to come up with common understandings about the experiences of the students in learning ESL in a multicultural classroom.

c. Analysis

A summative approach to qualitative content analysis goes beyond mere word counts to include latent content analysis. Latent level of analysis, a more interpretive analysis that is concerned with the response as well as what may have been inferred or implied was used. It is the process of interpretation of content (Holsti, 1969). In this analysis, the focus is on discovering underlying meanings of the words or the content (Babbie, 1992; Catanzaro, 1988; Morse & Field, 1995). The researches elicited common themes from the descriptive text and came up with a pure and a thorough description of the experiences.

d. Description

The researchers were able to understand and critically describe the experiences of the learners in the following section.

Ethical considerations

The informants were informed about the purposes of the reflection paper and the focus group discussion. They were assured that the data gathered will only be for the purpose stated and that they may not write their names or mention names in their reflection papers and sharing.

Findings and Discussion

The findings show that the most common challenges experienced by the respondents are on oral communication and grammar. In oral communication, pronunciation, accent and lack of vocabulary to express themselves topped the challenges. This is not surprising considering their varied ethno-linguistic backgrounds and the ethnic accent associated to each group.

Major aspects of the language experiences were categorized in this study as the edifying, mortifying and demotivating experiences.

A. The Edifying experiences

These are the experiences that positively influence language learning and motivate the learners to do better in their language subjects. Equality amidst diversity within the language classroom is felt by them.

a. Positive Learning atmosphere

“Academic success for students begins with trusting and mutually respectful relationship between students and teacher. This extends to classroom order, and culminates in a safe and supportive school climate” (Cornel, D.G. & Meyer, M.J, 2010). Creating a positive learning environment in the classroom allows students to feel comfortable, safe and self-engaged, something that all students deserve. In a classroom where values and roles remain constant and focus is placed on positive aspects of learning, students are more open to active participation in class (Barge, 2014).

This is the atmosphere of the multicultural language classroom in IFSU as described by the informants. There is equal chance of participation and non-suppression of opinions. Also, some teachers sometimes allow code-switching to let students express themselves freely. The informants also feel that their performance are objectively appraised by their teachers.

b. Equal participation

The informants related that they do not experience bias in the classroom. They are given the same tasks or activities.

Lee (2005) describes classroom participation as students freely speaking in class which consists of answer and ask questions, make comments and join discussions by sharing opinions. Zolten and Long 2006 added paying attention, being on task, responding to questions, participating on group discussion, seeking help and making good use of class time as participation. This is also similar with O’Brein (2007) who stated that participation means completing the assigned readings, asking questions about anything in the readings or discussions that needs clarification or expansion, offering ideas and responses, listening to the ideas and responses of others, and paying attention and showing respect in the classroom to the teacher and to the students.

Non-suppression of ideas

Whenever informants encounter difficulty in explaining, the teacher helps them figure out the appropriate terms that may help them express their idea. They feel the support of their teacher in helping them speak using the English language.

“ Nu met munparesayt hi madam ya tulungan dakami an mun-english ” (When we recite, the teacher helps restate our sentences in English. ”)

Teachers' ability to support students' autonomy is viewed by many theorists as one of the hallmarks of good humanistic teaching (Ames, 1992; De Charms, 1976; Deci, Ryan, & Williams, 1996; Maehr & Midgley, 1991; Nicholls & Nolen, 1995). When students feel that teachers support their autonomy they are likely to value the task and experience positive feelings toward it (Grolnick, Ryan, & Deci, 1991; Grolnick & Ryan, 1989). Consequently they are also more likely to show considerable behavioral and cognitive engagement (Connell 1990; Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991; Deci et al., 1996; Grolnick, Deci, & Ryan, 1997;

Code Switching

When students are unable to conceive an appropriate word within a limited amount of time, code-switching, in some cases, allows them to express themselves more fluidly (Weinreich, 1970). It can be a useful tool in assisting English language teaching and learning process. Code-switching helps the senders transfer the information to the receivers effectively (Skiba, 1997). Thus, code-switching has positive effect on learning processes.

Although not all teachers allow code switching in an English language class, the informants are happy that some teachers allow them to use other languages whenever they cannot find the right term or vocabulary in expressing their opinion or idea as long as it is not frequent.

Constructive Criticism

Although it was also mentioned that some teachers way of correcting the students discourages them from reciting again, the informants also acknowledged that many of their teachers and classmates give constructive criticisms to help them improve.

Cole (___) states that student-faculty interactions, interpreted more broadly under the concept of constructive criticism would offer a more useful approach for understanding the complex nature of faculty feedback on students' educational outcomes. Constructive criticism within an educational environment of 'wise-schooling' could offer useful opportunities for faculty to enhance minority students' academic success and educational satisfaction. As teachers, we have an obligation to teach our students to conduct themselves properly, treat others as they would like to be treated, be respectful,

always do their best work, and hopefully, learn from their mistakes. This requires us to offer our students constructive criticism in order to help them accomplish these goals. When students make mistakes or do something wrong, we must take advantage of teachable moments and provide meaningful suggestions to correct or redirect them without deflating their self-esteem. Guiding and teaching students to do tasks or behave appropriately by setting examples or providing “tips” or clever information constructively sends the message that we care and want to help them succeed (Becky,)

2. Unbiased appraisal of academic performance

The informants trust that there is equal assessment and evaluation of their tasks and activities. They believe that there is no favoritisms or monopoly of leadership opportunities from the teacher and students.

“equal” “fair” “objective”

3. Intensified passion for teaching

“Those who feel the call to teach, who sense teaching is a profoundly meaningful part of their life, have a passion for teaching” (Garrison, Liston, 2004, p.1). Fried defines a passionate teacher as: “someone in love with a field of knowledge, deeply stirred by issues and ideas that change our world, drawn to the dilemmas and potentials of the young people who come into class every day” (2001, p.44). For a high quality student learning passion is indispensable. Olson states that “when we discover and explore our passions about teaching and learning, and begin to share them with others, doors are opened, and the possibilities are endless” (2003, p.305).

Inspired by the positive learning experiences, the informants realized that they did not make a mistake when they decided to take English as their major. Their passion to become teachers in the future was intensified. They want to become better than their present teachers.

“I took up education major in English because of the inspiration I had during my high school days. I was really inspired that I want to follow the strategies used by my teachers I'm teaching.”

“Learning English is not easy but enjoyable. I have to exert more efforts in improving my skills and qualifications by practicing, investing on time and effort to become good speakers.”

“There were unpleasant experiences that puts down my positive view about learning English but I promise not to give up and I do not want to kill the

inspiration that I had 7 years ago. The thing that keeps my passion for English to burn more was that I will never ever follow the characters of these teacher who I think never had a passion in teaching not only in English but even to other subjects. Now I found teachers who are truly passionate about teaching English and other subjects. My teachers today are restoring the inspirations and watering it to bloom one day.”

4. Constructive insights gained

The informants were able to gain the following insights through their experiences that will definitely help them through their studies and future careers:

a. Practice makes perfect

“The strategies used by our teachers are good because it practices our oral communication skills.”

“We are required to do reporting, through it we practice speaking in front of people even if we commit mistakes.”

“I often do reporting or discussing the lesson in front of my classmates in that way I am motivated. My performance improved and my self-confidence getting better I think that is the advantage of my future profession”

“Learning English is quite challenging. During my early days of learning the English language I find it difficult to engage with it but then as time goes on and through the help of teachers off course I was able to learn it and now I can speak the language and use it effectively. Learning English takes time and needs correct practice to be able to master it”

“is to practice and be exposed to the target language dahil learning without practice id awan silbi na”

As reflected in the above statements, the informants are aware that they need to practice and exert effort to become effective teachers in the future. As Rubin (1975) posited there are properties that will make a good learner: if s/he is a willing and accurate guesser, has a strong drive to communicate, willing to make mistakes, practice, monitors his or her own and others' speech, and pays attention to meaning. Practicing or doing variety of tasks will enhance language learning and can be considered as successful task completion. It also will increase the communication skill of the student. Language is practiced for learning communication and not for the sake of the language.

b. Time and Effort Investment

The informants were able to share the importance of exerting extra time in and effort in practicing the use of the English language. Learners, to become fluent in English must be able to involve themselves fully, openly, and without bias in new experiences. They must be able to reflect on and observe their experiences from many perspectives. They must be able to create concepts that integrate their observations into logically sound theories, and they must be able to use their theories to make decisions and solve problems. (Kolb, 1984: 30)

“There’s one thing I realized and that is in learning English language much time is needed, I need to invest time and likewise effort so I would be able to achieve my goal and purpose of learning it which is to apply it in my future career and in the real world scenario. I’m grateful that by learning English I’m educating myself on how to be an effective and competent individual.”

“I believe that the teacher cannot teach all so one must help himself to do the necessary catch up. We are now in the trend of OBE where in the students do the talking most of the time and the teacher to supervise. Sometimes when I get hard up with the lessons in English, what I do is just read and read. And of course I try my best to understand it. I take down notes of words I do not understand and look for its meaning. I really exert effort in trying to understand literary pieces in its own context and try to apply different approaches because that is stylistics. At the end of the day, learning English is tough and enjoyable at the same time.”

B. The Mortifying Experiences

Mortifying experiences in this study are the informants’ embarrassing and discouraging learning experiences with their teachers, co-students and even the community people in learning and using English as English majors. The experiences are described in details under the sub-classifications.

As previously mentioned, the most common causes of embarrassing experiences in a language class are mispronunciation, different accent, lack of / inappropriate vocabulary. They also cautious of correct grammar when expressing themselves to avoid embarrassment. Verbal or

non-verbal reactions will definitely have an impact to the confidence and eventually the performance of a student.

I said, "Are we present it now ma'am?" and my group mate interrupted and said, "Are we going to present it now ma'am?" looking at me and stressing every word. I felt my blood rushing to my face, I said, "ah", and looked down, ashamed.

"Nu writing gamin mabalin nga icorect ngem nu oral gamin ya kababain te ibagada nga English majors pai met." (In writing we can correct but when it is oral, it is embarrassing because they (classmates and teachers) will sarcastically say, 'English majors'.)

"...kulang kasi ang koleksiyon ng mga salita na pwede kong gamitin kaya kahit maganda at tama sana ang sinsabi ko, nagiging "out of topic na ito, lagi na lang nakanganga ang mga tagapakinig ko"

To allay their embarrassment, some students would just say, "E kahit nga mga mayari sa wikang iyan ay nagkakamali, ako pa kaya?"

a. Bullying

Leach and Mitchell (2006) and Dunne (2007) posited that in the face of the international mandate for safe learning environments, the reality for many school students is quite different. Many experience bullying and many other forms of violence on a day-to-day basis within school.

Laughing at a classmate's mistake is common in a multicultural classroom as experienced by the key informants. And although most teachers may not react in the same way students do but their facial expressions and way of correcting sometimes make things worse for a student. These reactions may never been thought of as a form of bullying by those who are doing them but as Harris, Petrie & Willoughby (2002) emphasized bullying includes direct behaviors such as "teasing and taunting, racial, ethnic, and sexual slurs or harassment, threatening, hitting, and stealing".

Leach and Mitchell (2006) and Dunne (2007) consider this as the final category of bullying, educational bullying, when there is a power imbalance due to learning weaknesses; and mindless bullying, when the bully does not fit the bully profile and believes they are not causing harm when they are like teasers. This form of bullying is evident in most multicultural classrooms like IFSU as narrated by the informants of this study.

They mentioned that when they or one of their classmates, mispronounced, misused a word or committed wrong grammar while talking, the other students including themselves (when they are not the one talking) usually laugh.

“One of my classmates pronounced ‘honorable’ in a different way that caused all of us to laugh but then, our teacher got angry.”

They described the facial expressions of their classmates as unexplainable making them more conscious when talking.

“raising of brows”

“ismid”

“kunot noo”

When further asked how the teachers handles such mistakes, the common answers were:

“corrects us”

“laughs”

“tells us that we are English majors so we should pronounce words correctly”

It is observed that such incidents seem “normal” to informants. However, when asked how they felt when they were the ones who were laughed at, they accepted that it was embarrassing and traumatic. As a result, the respondents usually experience anxiety and are reluctant to speak in English for fear of being judged negatively. They lost confidence in themselves thus affecting their performance in the class.

“Tumakut ta mon munrecite uray inila answer te kababain nu munkamali ta tapos ibagadan nan teacher an, ‘You are an English major, you should be better in using English than the other students with different majors’ (I fear reciting even when I know the correct answer because it is embarrassing then teacher will say,...)”

“Everyone of us keeps his mouth shut for fear that he might speak that so called-carabao English.”

“I fear that I might get wrong in my grammar or in the words I chose.”

While it is true that moderate feelings of anxiety in second language learning could help students to build the desire to learn, to motivate or to get them to realize that they have to put more effort to acquire the target language (Hadley, 1992), bullying, aggression and other forms of violence in schools can blight student experiences of formal education and their abilities to make the best of the opportunities they have

(Commission on Children and Violence, 1995; Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2007; United Nations, 2005).

b. Pigeonholing

The informants often feel being pigeon holed by their teachers and co-student. There are two sources of pigeonholing, their ethno-linguistic background and their major-English.

Ethno-linguistic background

Braddock (1980) suggests that individuals with limited experience interacting across difference tend to approach all subsequent encounters with previously established narratives of who the 'other' is, and how 'different' they are from themselves. Hurtado (2001) also notes that 'merely' encountering differences can promote feelings of superiority or inferiority among students rather than growth and development.

The informants related that their ethno-linguistic group even without them saying it is often identified through their speech. Even if a classmate uses another language like English, the effects of his native tongue will always surface so they will know if he/she is an Ayangan, Kalanguya or Tuwali. Strange (1995) term this in the international context as "perceptual foreign accent" to refer to the "significant difficulty" which adults have in "perceiving most (but not all) phonetic contrasts that are not functional in their native language" and she notes that this can interfere with learning an L2 phonology. It is referred to as ethnic accent in this study. This are marked differences in the norms and styles of interpersonal communication, leading to a range of individual uncertainties and anxieties associated with saving face and appropriate social interaction, influenced by varying perceptions and conventions related to differences gender, age and status (McSwiney 1995; Spencer-Oatey 2000).

The informants further related that when an Ayangan student recites, the classmates expects him/her to mispronounce ch as j or vice versa. The same is true with a Tuwali with r-l. Although no Kalanguya student was present during the FGD, it is commonly observed by the informants that they are recognizable because of their accent. As one student observed, "We have a Kalanguya classmate in other majors, every time she recites her being Kalanguya cannot be hidden and one of our teachers keeps correcting her."

These stereotypes are prevalent in a language class making them very nervous and conscious when they are the ones speaking.

“I accept that I am not good in pronunciation due the effect of our accent.”

“Para kasing pag Tuwali nagsasalita, may tendency na mamispronounce niya r and l, hindi lahat pero common, nakakaconscious tuloy.”

“May mga Ayangan kaming classmates na nagiging j ang ch at ch ang j, our teachers keep correcting them kasi nga daw English majors kami., oo nga naman”

“Iyong isang classmate natin kasi parang exaggerated lagi na lang napapagalitan, it’s irritating kasi.”

“If she talks, we are all waiting for the mispronunciation and we laugh.”

“Si student A, pag may na wrong grammar o wrong pronunciation, umiismid.”

External and Internal Expectations from English Majors

Compared to other students taking up other majors, the students feel the pressure of the expectations of their teachers, their co-English majors, schoolmates and other people in terms of English accuracy and fluency.

“My friend from another college, asked my help in their English subject because I am an English major.”

“They expect us to be very good in English.”

They fear committing mistakes because of being mocked or chastised by their listeners even outside the ESL classroom. Krashen, in his interview by Young (1992), stated that one of the causes of speaking anxiety among students is due to teachers who expect them, usually beginners, to perform beyond their acquired competence. This can cause detrimental effects on learners’ motivation and confidence.

“daan bo English major” (but you are an English major)

“you are an English major, you are suppose to...”

“I better not recite even if I know the correct answer for fear of mispronouncing a word and be laughed at or embarrassed by my classmates and teachers.”

“It’s irritating gamin, English major, dapat lang nga correct grammar.”

They also have their own expectations from themselves which when not realized results to frustration and loss of self-confidence.

“We are English majors, we must speak with correct pronunciation.”

“I don’t take the corrections of my teacher negatively because they are for my improvement. It is embarrassing to commit mistake being an English major.”

“Well we are English majors, so it is expected.”

These expectations adds to the pressure of having to be better sometime causing inhibitions among them.

“I feel very conscious when speaking because I don’t want to be mocked or scolded by my teacher, tuloy nakakalimutan ko sasabihin ko.”

3. Demotivating Experiences

Demotivation refers to a state or conditions that hinders a person from doing his or her best in achieving a specific purpose (Soureshjani & Riahipour, 2012). These are conditions that hinders a student from doing his/her best. According to Küper (2001) “demotivation is not just a reversal of motivation. Demotivation refers to more than just non-acting or unmotivated behaviour. It can also refer to an engagement into ‘wrong’ or contraproductive directions. Dörnyei (as cited by Tabatabaei & Molavi, 2012) also has defined demotivation as “specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioral intention or an ongoing action.” These negative external forces include the teacher, the inadequate school facilities, the reduced self-confidence, the negative attitude towards the L2 and L2 community, the compulsory nature of L2, the attitude of group members and course book.

a. Manner of Correction

The informants acknowledge that they have still many things to learn about ESL. They expressed that they welcome corrections by their teachers, however, they don not appreciate the manner of correction of some teachers. The research of Moll, Estrada, Diaz, and Lopes (1980) poignantly delineated the pain and frustration that English language learners struggling to learn English sometimes feel when taught in all-English settings. Students may fail to understand what the teacher is talking about, and may become frustrated when they have an idea but cannot adequately express their thoughts in English. Moll et al. found that teachers tended to correct pronunciation errors (e.g., seyed for “said”) or interrupt passage reading with attempts to define simple English words (e.g., “surprise”, “guess”), thereby breaking the flow of the story.

“It’s embarrassing when the teacher will repeat a word you mispronounced then start lecturing that as English major, we should be so and so...”

“I get lost when the teacher suddenly corrects me while I am still talking”

“Urayen na kuma nga malpas ak before agcorrect tapnu tuluy tuluy flow jai ibagbagak” (The teacher should wait for me to finish talking before correcting me so that the flow of what I am saying will be continuous.)

b. Misconstructions

To practice what they have learned, some students speak in English even outside the classroom, in their homes, church, with their peers, social gatherings and others. While some are praised for their using English some experienced being judged as:

“mayabang”

“kay hiya hiya”

“feeling foreigner”

While a few of them do not mind this misjudgments others shared that they stopped speaking in English outside school to avoid being judge as such.

Conclusion and Implications

The findings of the study reveal that everything that happens inside and even outside a language classroom either negatively or positively affect the learners. Courses taken early in students' college career are especially impactful for students' development related to diversity (Bowman 2010). While it is true that teachers cannot totally control the attitudes of students towards their classmates who are different from them, they can minimize this by practicing tolerance and open mindedness themselves. The lives of the learners are shaped and influenced in the classroom through attitudes and values which are embedded in both the content and the process of learning. Positive values, for example, an acceptance and conceptual understanding of difference, are important to success (Gardner, 2001). All students, including culturally diverse students, work better when they feel that they are secure regarding who they are (Winch-Dummet, 2005). Personal characteristics, structural factors that affect participation in courses, and sociocultural context may all influence learning (Barton, 1994; Caffarella & Merriam, 2000; Merriam, 1993; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991).

It is evident that the roles of teachers in a multicultural classroom is very important. According to Gurin, Nagda, and Lopez (2004), 'Faculty can play an important role by facilitating effective skill development related to intercultural communication and interaction by bringing diverse students together in meaningful, civil discourse to learn from each other'. The way the teachers handles mistakes of students in a language classroom will greatly affect the students self-esteem and over all performance. It is then of paramount importance to respect students' possible concerns relating to saving face and interpersonal issues (including differences of gender, age and status) by taking care not to create situations likely to cause personal stress or highlight perceived ignorance or inabilities (Ballard & Clanchy 1997). Moreover, Gorski

(2000) and Nelson (2001), confirms that that to be an effective multicultural educator, a teacher must continue self-examination and transformation. They argue that having a socially held belief system and valuing racial and cultural differences are the keys to improving equal opportunities for all students. Schlosser (1992), also mentioned that most effective teachers have learned to understand the cultures of students and their students trust them. Culture affects the way we teach and therefore we really cannot engage in bias-free teaching (APA, 2003) cited in Kluck (2005). It is emphasized that teachers must remain mindful of their values and seek to identify and address ways in which their biases interfere with their ability to engage in culturally competent teaching (Davis, 1993). Johnson, (1999) also mentioned that teachers' experiences or memories of their days as students may include a repertoire of teaching strategies, assumptions about how students learn and a bias toward certain types of instructional materials.

Costa (1997), also opined that formal education depends upon the attitudes and professional preparedness of teachers. Pena (1997) also noted that analyses related to teachers' perceptions, indicate that educators spend little time getting to know their students and, therefore, have very little knowledge about them. In terms of training, teachers are very aware of the lack of their preparation in multicultural education, and yet some of these teachers do not consider training in multicultural education a high priority (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Intercultural effectiveness is not singularly achieved in one context or point in time, rather, it is developed continuously across multiple time points and experiences (Bowman 2010a; Deardorff 2006; Gurin, Hurtado, and Lopez 2004; Hurtado 2001).

There is also a need of multicultural education in the mainstream course work of pre-service teachers for them to be able to understand the experiences and developmental needs of culturally diverse students Wallace (2001). Therefore, multiculturalism must be infused in the curriculum (Tiedt et al., 2005). Successful intercultural learning requires curricula and teaching pedagogies whose impact extends beyond the classroom (Eisenchlas and Trevaskes 2007; Lee et al. 2012).

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