

Investigating the Place of English as a Language of Instruction among Culturally-diverse Students in Higher Education

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Abstract

The study identified the place of English as Language of Instruction (ELI) from the perspective of Culturally-diverse Students (CDS). It was conducted to shed light on the neglected use and low proficiency in English. A Descriptive Research Design was employed. The 275 CDS served as respondents from Sultan Kudarat State University, College of Teacher Education, in the Philippines. Results revealed that CDS recognized ELI with prime significance. However, the support of Fil-English and Filipino language inevitably substantiating better comprehension of the subject matter. Though English was challenging to learn, CDS acknowledged English as a potent tool in learning content areas and as a language for intercultural communication. English was extensively employed inside the classroom; however, it was occasionally used in the school environment. It is recommended to conduct ELI among teachers and mainstream students, mechanize sustainable English usage, and include ELI in the faculty assessments.

Keywords: *English, language of instruction, second language acquisition, English language teaching, culturally-diverse students*

Introduction

Language of instruction (LoI) helps teachers and students construct meaningful explanations and make purposeful connections in the classroom (Hill & Miller, 2013). It is an integral feature of educational practices since contents and ideas are communicated. Through language, learners listen and meaningfully interact in the process of learning (Walter, 2011). Indeed, the indispensability of a language in all social environments drives people to understand the world and educate learners in school (Vela, 2011). Inevitably, the English language is employed in business, politics, education, and even media which continually boosts its position as a language for communication and modernity (Fang, 2017; Ondracek, 2011). Additionally, students have to be competitive globally, which has led to the rise of English as a lingua franca in tertiary institutions worldwide (Rogier, 2012; British Council, 2016).

The 1986 Philippine Constitution designates English as a language for communication and instruction. It provides an avenue for equipping college students with the knowledge and communicative competence to become good decision-makers and problem-solvers (Hurtado & Guillermo-Wann, 2013). Many college students struggle in class since the LoI differs from their local languages and cultural experiences. In addition, the linguistic, social, and cultural characteristics do not adequately prepare them to communicate in English (Lynch, 2011). In spite, Culturally-diverse Students (CDS) should be communicatively competent in English. Hence, the employment of LoI affects students' overall communicative competence and proficiency in English (British Council, 2018).

In Sultan Kudarat State University, the place of English as a language of instruction (ELI) is problematic due to neglected use and no adherence to using English that ranges from

informal to formal conversations. It subsequently resulted in students' low English language proficiency and low-performance rating in the licensure examinations.

Numerous studies illustrate the roles, functions, places, and even status of English as LoI (Borlongan, 2009; Canilao, 2015). However, literature is lacking among CDS. Hence, an empirical investigation was carried out to shed light on the problems of students in English. The study aimed to identify CDS viewpoints on English as LoI, particularly in the five dimensions (language, content, learning, culture, classroom, and environment) of the content and language integrated teaching and learning.

Statement of the Problem

The study identified the place of ELI among CDS in the College of Teacher Education at Sultan Kudarat State University, Philippines. Hence, it answered the question:

1. What is the level of CDS agreement on ELI in higher education classrooms, particularly in dimensions of language, content, learning, and culture?
2. What is the frequency of the use of ELI as experienced by CDS students in the higher education classrooms, specifically in dimensions of classroom and environment?

Review of Literature

The use of English enhances communication skills. It helps students to listen, understand the subject matter in the class. After listening and understandings, they can ask better questions with confidence and gain more knowledge (Sharma, 2017). Hence, teachers are expected to deliver insightful teaching. (Khan et al., 2017) stresses that teacher's communication skills have a significant role in students' academic achievement. According to Rellosa (2015), English should be the LoI to become multilingual and edge over other Asian countries since it is a universal and international language. It is an advantage when traveling abroad and makes students intelligent and capable of solving conflicting ideas. Although, Lavery (2018) acknowledges that getting students to use English in the classroom is one of the biggest challenges of teaching.

Additionally, Alanshory (2014) underscores that English-medium students can comfortably read English books and efficiently acquire knowledge. It helps to obtain tertiary and advanced studies, and it offers admiration of people. Students can increase writing skills by adhering to text structures from books and other media. Thus, as students are imposed to English learning resources, mastery of the language becomes automatic. Van Der Worp's (2017) study revealed that students who took English medium instruction (EMI) in classes report higher oral skills in English and perform high-level tasks. EMI might help to prepare future professionals linguistically. In the Philippines, Sunio and Alico (2016) stress that student journalists immensely preferred English. Filipino and vernacular were least preferred due to lack of resources for reference, writing, lack of knowledge, and low efficacy in using the medium.

In contrast, Kirkgoz (2014) studied that ELI students' detailed acquisition of disciplinary knowledge was largely ineffective, while Turkish as a medium of instruction (TMI) students were largely successful. Hence, de Kleine and Lawton (2015) indicate that linguistically diverse students should have opportunities to draw on their native languages and varieties to develop academic English. This language-based diversity should be regarded as a strength and resource. Likewise, Al-Sharaeai (2012) stresses that students use the first language (L1) to explain and ask about ideas and concepts presented in English classes to feel connected to their cultures and when they feel difficulties searching for a correct word in English. The study of Dumatog et al.

(2003) had proven the effectiveness of the L1 together with English and Filipino, the Trilingual Teaching Approach (TTA) as an LoI among Filipino learners. The TTA model significantly improved student performance and parents' participation. Thus, it empowered the community and their culture.

British Council (2018) stresses that teaching content using English improves learning and language competence. Contents are primarily published in English. In technical fields, content and vocabulary are also in English, as are students' dissertations and research (Galloway, 2017). For Buri (2012), comprehensible input strategies like paraphrasing and recasting could be tried out before resorting to the use of L1. Hence, when teachers are using English in elucidating the contents, more straightforward and standard terms must be used for fast learning. Comprehension of the students is far more focused rather than vocabulary building. Mohr and Mohr (2007) reiterate that teachers can model academic language functions, such as seeking information, comparing, problem-solving, evaluating, and using classroom interactions to guide students' academic talk. The opportunity to speak the academic language before using it in written work is essential for English language learners.

Turkan and Schramm-Possinger (2014) emphasize that teachers need to recognize the central role language plays in teaching content and develop their teaching skills by understanding the role of language in teaching content. Accordingly, Chou (2018) suggests that formulating and presenting ideas at a linguistically appropriate level will help students understand input and sharpen their English skills. For Baker et al. (2014), teaching the contents using English should incorporate intensive academic vocabulary to help students make sense of the content area material and provide struggling English learners with high-quality instructional interventions in reading and English language development. Akbarov et al. (2018) indicate that students showed moderate attitudes, preferences, and satisfaction on content teaching using ELI. Students' English proficiency significant positive relationship with their preferences of math classes and other subjects taught in English.

Methodology

Research Design

The Descriptive Research Design, a well-suited design in construing the second language teaching practices in the classroom, was employed. The design is used to describe and interpret a phenomenon and its characteristics. It focuses mainly on explaining the phenomenon or unexplainable occurrences. It analyzes data quantitatively with the aid of descriptive, inferential, or relational statistics (Nassaji, 2015).

Research Locale

The study was conducted at four (4) campuses of Sultan Kudarat State University, namely ACCESS Campus (Tacurong City), Kalamansig Campus (Municipality of Kalamansig), Palimbang Campus (Municipality of Palimbang), and Lutayan Campus (Municipality of Lutayan). There are located in the Province of Sultan Kuradat, Philippines, during the Academic Year 2017-2018.

Research Respondents

Using the randomized sampling technique, two hundred seventy-five (275) or 79% CDS served as respondents about 3% margin of error and 95% confidence level as suggested by Martínez-Mesa et al. (2014). Additionally, there were four (4) content experts who validated the contents of the survey instrument.

Research Instrument

The Survey Instrument (SI) focused on determining the place of English as LoI in the teaching and learning of CDS. The SI was characterized by the six (6) main dimensions: language, content, learning, culture, classroom, and environment.

Further, the indicators of the SI were gleaned from the notions of Cognitive Theory, Social Constructivist Theory, Theory of Communicative Competence, Content and Language Integrated Learning Model, and Theory of Multicultural Education. Likewise, other indicators were adapted from Borlongan (2009) and Canilao (2015) studies. The SI was also pilot tested on 15 university students. The results have undergone an internal consistency test using the Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Test (Bonett & Wright, 2015). The average rating in all indicators resulted in 0.12, which is higher than 0.9. The pilot testing of the survey instrument for teachers and CDS indicated that all indicators had gained *excellent internal consistency*.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher facilitated the data gathering himself. Permission to conduct the research was obtained from SKSU President, Vice-President for Academic Affairs, and Dean. Then, the distribution of the questionnaire followed. The gathered data were tallied, computed thru Descriptive Statistics like mean to generate descriptive information (Zikmund et al., 2013).

Findings

The CDS agreed that English improves students' communication skills, an essential tool for learning, improves linguistic competence, can be used as LoI with the Filipino language, and empowers students' unique individuality. ELI improves communicative competence necessary for employment and licensure examination. Then, there is significance and convenience of using English in education. Similarly, Fil-English codeswitching technique helps better understand the subject matter.

Table 1. Level of agreement on the place of ELI in the language dimension

Indicators	Mean Scores	Verbal Description
English improves students' communication skills.	6.12	Agree
English is an essential tool for learning.	5.96	Agree
English improves linguistic competence.	5.83	Agree
English and Filipino should be used as LoI.	5.78	Agree
English should be used as LoI.	5.49	Agree
English empowers students' unique individuality.	5.44	Agree
English should be used for conceptual thinking.	4.97	Somewhat Agree
A trilingual approach should be used as LoI.	4.78	Somewhat Agree
English and native languages should be used as LoI.	4.26	Neutral
Translanguaging should be used as LoI.	3.95	Neutral
Grand Mean	5.26	Somewhat Agree

Key: Strongly Agree ($M=6.14-7.00$); Agree ($M=5.28 - 6.13$); Somewhat Agree ($M=4.42-5.27$); Neutral ($M=3.56-4.41$); Somewhat Disagree ($M=2.70-3.55$); Disagree ($M=1.84-2.69$); Strongly Disagree ($M=1.00-1.83$)

In addition, English empowers students' unique individuality to grow professionally and competently. English boosts self-esteem, enabling them to communicate with other people without reluctance and anxieties comfortably. Hence, Gorgonio (2012) emphasizes that Filipino and ELI enhanced students' academic performance in Social Studies, but English showed high learning descriptively. Likewise, student-teachers preferred to utilize Fil-English in their courses, defying the LoI's official classification.

Topics taught in English are sometimes incomprehensible, hence, using Filipino scaffolds learning. The advantage of being bilingual is the opportunity to engage and be a part of two different and diverse communities without feeling excluded. Bilinguals are smarter who can resolve conflicts and issues. They are successful than monolingual students (Kalkan, 2014). For CDS, English can be used conceptual thinking, and the Trilingual approach (English, Filipino & native language) can serve as LoI. For multilingual CDS, conceptual thinking is done L1. Additionally, CDS consider Trilingual Approach. Irrefutably, the succeeding use of English, Filipino and L1 offers comprehension; and, when situation calls translations.

Table 2. Level of agreement on the place of ELI in content dimension

Indicators	Mean Scores	Verbal Description
As language use improves, the learning of contents also improves.	5.99	Agree
English provides a reliable model (like language accuracy and fluency).	5.98	Agree
English and content simultaneously work for academic success.	5.77	Agree
Practical learning of contents depends on comprehensible English language input.	5.60	Agree
English exposes students to language forms-function relationships.	5.53	Agree
English provides meaningful delivery of subject contents.	5.39	Agree
The contents of the subject provide context for English language learning.	5.27	Somewhat Agree
Content is best learned using English.	5.17	Somewhat Agree
English provides rich, comprehensive input.	5.08	Somewhat Agree
Teaching content requires high command of English.	5.00	Somewhat Agree
Grand Mean	5.48	Agree

Key: Strongly Agree ($M=6.14-7.00$); Agree ($M=5.28 - 6.13$); Somewhat Agree ($M=4.42-5.27$); Neutral ($M=3.56-4.41$); Somewhat Disagree ($M=2.70-3.55$); Disagree ($M=1.84-2.69$); Strongly Disagree ($M=1.00-1.83$)

The CDS agreed that as language use improves, the learning of contents also improves. English help improve language accuracy and fluency. English and content simultaneously work for learning thru comprehensible input. Result suggests that continuous practice of English can improve competence and understanding of subject matter. Hence, language and contents are significant elements in teaching-learning. English exposes students to internalize its grammar and features that are useful in communicating with English speaking people.

Moreover, English improves students' comprehension, increases participation, and gears toward quality performance. Then, they have positive views on Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) as they acknowledged that using English, both language acquisition and content learning take place. Content is best learned in English and requires high command of English.

Table 3. Level of agreement on the place of ELI in learning dimension

Indicators	Mean Scores	Verbal Description
English is challenging to learn.	6.41	Strongly Agree
English helps students gain knowledge and skills.	6.05	Agree
The use of ELI improves English language proficiency.	6.05	Agree
English supports possibilities for improvement and self-confidence.	6.02	Agree

English captures students' attention and interest.	5.63	Agree
The speed of speaking English should match students' level.	5.50	Agree
English maximizes students' learning.	5.46	Agree
English provides an appreciation of personal experiences.	5.25	Somewhat Agree
English should be the language of the teacher in teaching.	5.19	Somewhat Agree
English should be used in social interactions.	4.66	Somewhat Agree
Grand Mean	5.62	Agree

Key: Strongly Agree ($M=6.14-7.00$); Agree ($M=5.28 - 6.13$); Somewhat Agree ($M=4.42-5.27$); Neutral ($M=3.56-4.41$); Somewhat Disagree ($M=2.70-3.55$); Disagree ($M=1.84-2.69$); Strongly Disagree ($M=1.00-1.83$)

For CDS, English is challenging to learn. However, it helps students gain knowledge and skills, improves language proficiency, supports possibilities for improvement and self-confidence, captures students' attention and interest, and maximizes students learning. Likewise, the speed of speaking English should match students' level. Accordingly, students are learning to become competent professionals and language proficient. Students have opportunities to explore academic endeavors. Further, CDS acknowledged that English supports for empowerment, holistic development and self-confidence. Appropriate level of self-esteem support them to communicate efficiently in various forms.

Furthermore, English is an attractive language that many CDS wish to master. They are interested and attentive in the class when ELI is used. Hence, teachers must consider speed of speaking English matching students' level. Barnard (2018) recommends that varying the speed of a teacher's talk makes it more interesting for the students. They conceded that academic endeavors are maximized thru English. People in the world urgently need to master English in order to survive and compete with others. Today's knowledge comes to us in the English language (Alanshory, 2014). Peachey (2018) illustrates that students can develop a more comprehensive knowledge of the world through content teaching, improving and supporting their general educational needs.

Comparatively, this confirms the study of Prada-Arango (2015). Through the use of English in oral projects, the students were more motivated, confident, active and participative. Peachey emphasizes that the use language like English may fulfill a real purpose, making students independent and confident. CDS moderately acknowledged that English delineates appreciation of experiences. Many students express themselves on social media thru English language in today's generation. Hence, English supports their positive experiences. CDS do not only learn from English but also in Filipino and vernacular. Additionally, CDS occasionally use English in social interactions. Hence, language teachers use different techniques to build up positive attitudes among students to feel free to speak in the class using English. Indeed, in the learning area, English helps improve proficiency and self-confidence, and they acknowledged English to use in teaching.

Table 4. Level of agreement on the place of ELI in culture dimension

Indicators	Mean Scores	Verbal Description
Speaking English must be a culture of the academe.	5.47	Agree
Activities that use ELI must be culture-based.	5.47	Agree
Teaching using English requires knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds.	5.42	Agree
English provides equal opportunities to CDS to perform meaningful tasks.	5.41	Agree
English improves the mindset of understanding the culture of other people.	5.37	Agree
English enhances intercultural sensitivity.	5.36	Agree
English should be used as a language in a diverse-multilingual situation.	5.10	Somewhat Agree

The English language promotes cooperation among CDS.	5.05	Somewhat Agree
Using English fosters a dynamic relationship between diverse, multilingual teachers and students.	5.01	Somewhat Agree
English encourages peaceful dialogue between multilingual people.	4.94	Somewhat Agree
Grand Mean	5.26	Somewhat Agree

Key: Strongly Agree ($M=6.14-7.00$); Agree ($M=5.28-6.13$); Somewhat Agree ($M=4.42-5.27$); Neutral ($M=3.56-4.41$); Somewhat Disagree ($M=2.70-3.55$); Disagree ($M=1.84-2.69$); Strongly Disagree ($M=1.00-1.83$)

The CDS agreed that speaking English must be an academic culture. The pedagogical practices that use ELI must be culture-based, and it requires knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds and provides equal opportunities to perform meaningful tasks, improves the mindset of understanding others' cultures, and enhances intercultural sensitivity. CDS positively acknowledging sustainable use of English as lingua franca. Hence, teachers and students must enculturate the practice of ELI.

Additionally, the employment of activities among CDS must consider diversity and context of experiences. It can motivate CDS to improve their academic performance since their culture and backgrounds are acknowledged. The result demonstrates that teachers' pedagogical practices must include cultural sensitivities and orientation; thereby, establishing connections for better learning experiences.

Parallel to the discussion, equality is crucial in teaching using ELI. Thus, each CDS must be given chances and opportunities to perform meaningful task. Through this, CDS are explicitly given attention for effective multicultural education. When the academe is culturally sensitive, respect is nurtured. Thus, negative attitudes are eradicated. Samson and Collins (2012) emphasize that teachers' working knowledge and understanding of culture can lead to language development and academic achievement.

Meanwhile, the CDS somewhat agreed to use English in a diverse-multilingual situation. English promotes cooperation, fosters a dynamic relationship with teachers, and encourages peaceful dialogue. English may be used as the lingua franca in a multicultural situation. It can be used to avoid conflict due to cross-linguistic differences. English fosters rapport and collaboration between diverse students. Hence, a relationship is bridged together since they can negotiate meaning with their peers using English.

Further, CDS fairly recognized that English can be an instrument for a peaceful discourse when conflict arises. The inevitable presence of Filipino and local languages may support a diplomatic conversation. For Mahboob (2014), the English language used by speakers in some multilingual societies is quite distinct from each other and can be mutually unintelligible. It is not only the case with people who use English as an additional language.

Table 5. Frequency of use of ELI in classroom dimension

Indicators	Mean Scores	Verbal Description
Greetings	4.36	Almost Every Time
Checking the attendance	4.12	Almost Every Time
Teachers' lecture	3.87	Almost Every Time
Giving instructions/reminders	3.83	Almost Every Time
Discussions or discourses	3.83	Almost Every Time
Reviewing the previous lesson	3.80	Almost Every Time
Students' oral report/presentation	3.74	Almost Every Time
Giving assignments	3.73	Almost Every Time
Recitation	3.66	Almost Every Time

Giving explanation	3.64	Almost Every Time
Thinking or generating ideas	3.53	Sometimes
Asking for clarifications/questions	3.52	Sometimes
Group activities	3.39	Sometimes
Reprimanding others	3.30	Sometimes
Presenting arguments	3.25	Sometimes
Grand Mean	3.72	Almost Every Time

Key: Every time (M=4.60-5.00); Almost every time (M=3.60-4.50); Sometimes (M=2.60-3.50); Almost never (M=1.60-2.50); Never (M=1.00-1.50)

Overall, the CDS use English almost every time inside the classroom. It dominates communication and teaching practices, particularly in greetings, checking attendance, teachers' lectures, discussions, or discourses, giving instructions/reminders, reviewing previous lessons, students' oral report/presentation, giving assignments, recitation, and explaining.

Sniad (2016) underscores that English in the learning environment supports teaching-learning, sets clear, attainable learning goals, values students' contributions, and personalizes processes and targets. Hence, the place of English originates and flourishes inside the classroom, whereby the nurturing of students in language competencies is best done. According to Mansor et al. (2011), the environment is significantly associated with students' achievements at school.

On the contrary, the CDS showed occasional use of English in thinking or generating ideas, asking for clarifications or questions, group activities, reprimanding others, and presenting arguments. It could be difficult for them to think in English straightly since they do not have the mastery of the language. Similarly, they do not always use English to ask questions or to clarify ideas. It is because Filipino, to some extent, vernaculars are used. The latter serves an essential role in assisting CDS to comprehend the lesson.

For example, in group activities, CDS naturally use their local dialects in negotiating meaning among their groupmates. Interestingly, the presentation of the group is done in English. Hence, the presence of translation is evident among the students. For Ismaili (2015), teachers and students have a positive attitude toward using L1 in English classes. However, this attitude depends on teachers' ability to speak the students' L1 as, on the contrary, it will be disrespectful toward the students.

Table 6. Frequency of use of ELI in the environmental dimension

Indicators	Mean Scores	Verbal Description
Writing letters	4.23	Almost Every Time
Conducting flag ceremonies	3.46	Sometimes
School programs and activities	3.41	Sometimes
Visiting college offices	3.28	Sometimes
Attending meetings	3.27	Sometimes
Discussing school matters	3.21	Sometimes
Talking with school visitors	3.20	Sometimes
Teacher-student talk	3.17	Sometimes
Talking with friends	3.05	Sometimes
Talking with school administrators	2.98	Sometimes
Conversation with student leaders	2.91	Sometimes
Student-schoolmates talk	2.90	Sometimes
Visiting the library	2.87	Sometimes
Talking with school staff	2.82	Sometimes
Visiting school canteen	2.31	Almost never
Grand Mean	3.14	Sometimes

Key: Every time (M=4.60-5.00); Almost every time (M=3.60-4.50); Sometimes (M=2.60-3.50); Almost never (M=1.60-2.50); Never (M=1.00-1.50)

The CDS frequently use English in writing letters. They acknowledged that English is used as an official language for communication. By using ELI, a student will gain two advantages simultaneously. They will obtain knowledge and improve their skills in writing English (Alanshory, 2014).

However, outside the classroom, English is occasionally used in conducting flag ceremonies, school programs and activities, visiting college offices, attending meetings, discussing school matters, talking with school visitors, teacher-student talk, talking with friends, talking with school administrators, conversation with student leaders, student-schoolmates talk, visiting the library, and talking with school staff. Similarly, in attending meetings, discussing school matters, CDS are comfortable using vernaculars and Filipino languages. However, talking with school visitors manifests students' contextual use of English, Filipino, or vernacular, and may depend on the language used by the visitors.

Additionally, English is sometimes used when CDS talk with their classmates, friends, school, student leaders, and schoolmates. Hence, the preference of using vernaculars for intimate and close communication comes naturally is inevitable (Canilao, 2015). Similarly, English is still occasionally used when talking with school administrators, teachers, and school staff. CDS feel comfortable using any language even in visiting the library. English is not used but when it is only necessary and rarely used in the school canteen.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, CDS strongly recognized the place of English as a significant language in teaching and learning in higher education. However, English supplemented with Fil-English and Filipino inevitably hold special functions in instruction, communication, and linguistic repertoire. English language supports CDS' comprehension of the subject matter, enhances students' linguistic accuracy and fluency, provides comprehensible input, and generally boosts academic achievement. Though acknowledged to be challenging to use and learn, the English language provides meaningful experiences in learning. English is engaging, stimulating, and essentially a potent medium for language proficiency.

Similarly, CDS also recognized enculturating English as a language of the academic community. They believed that teaching with the use of ELI adheres to students' diversity in culture and language. English has maintained its vital role as a language for instruction in the pedagogical practices inside the classroom. However, the English language is rarely used outside the classroom. Hence, Filipino and vernaculars dominate the environmental dimension in higher education.

Suggestions and Recommendations

Based on the findings, the researcher suggests conducting a similar study to the teachers and other mainstream students in higher education. It is further suggested to sustain the significance of English in the classroom, mechanize a program or movement which can promote English usage, and ELI can be added as a criterion in the faculty assessment rating.

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