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A COMPARATIVE AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF CLASSROOM INTERACTION IN INDONESIA AND THE PHILIPPINES: A REFLECTIVE NARRATIVE FROM THE SEA-TEACHER EXPERIENCE

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In this article, the author offers a comparative autoethnographic reflection of his teaching experience during the SEA-Teacher Program in two Southeast Asian countries—Indonesia and the Philippines. The research engaged with reflective practice in order to observe how classroom interaction app ears to differ among two distinct cultivating specific cultures and educational systems. Data were collected from the teaching journals and field notes recorded, as well as through the analysis of critical incidents during the one-month teaching practicum. At the MA Matholi'ul Anwar classroom in Indonesia, an English as a Foreign Language context, classroom interaction is typically a great deal more teacher-centered; as an example, classroom interactions featured code-switching in addition to being more teacher-centered practice. In the classroom context of the Philippine school at SLSU-LS Lab School, an English as a Second Language context, non-or low-confident actors seeking to employ spoken English permitted a considerable number of active participation instances were descriptive to a student-centered or dialogic style of classroom interaction. Thematic narrative analysis method captured and studied these cultural, language policy, interactional, contextual or reflective awareness in terms of what is important for classroom interaction when teaching English language in an EFL context in Southeast Asia.

Keywords: Autoethnography; Classroom Interaction; ELT in Southeast Asia; Reflective Practice; SEA-Teacher Program

1. INTRODUCTION

In multilingual contexts, including Southeast Asia, classroom interaction is governed not only by curriculum and pedagogy, but also by sociocultural practices, language policy, and identities of teachers and learners. Knowledge of English language teaching (ELT) operates with social status (as a foreign, second, or additional language), which will inform the expectations of teachers and the levels of student engagement. Thus, while the classroom context is globalizing, understanding how interactions are constituted across contexts will be significant for developing contexts that are responsive, equitable and culturally located.

This study is informed by a month-long teaching practicum, facilitated through the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO), SEA-Teacher Program which placed pre-service teachers in various ASEAN countries, to engage in cultural exchange and pedagogical development. The author was placed in two distinct educational contexts: MA Matholi'ul Anwar, a Madrasah Aliyah in Lamongan, Indonesia; and SLSU-LS Lab School, a laboratory school connected to Southern Leyte State University, the Philippines. The differences between the two schools are not only in their national context—in which they each occupy as a different - English as a foreign language in Indonesia, whereas, for the Philippines it is English as a second language—but also in the way English positions within their educational systems. The author utilized a reflective and autoethnographic approach to explore experiences within both schools, paying attention to ways that classroom interaction is constructed and how students are socialized toward English as a medium of instruction. In the Indonesian classroom the interaction was busy, structured, and respectful; however, it was predominantly teacher centered with a limited opportunity for extended student talk. The Philippines was distinctly different with students

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who were engaged in interactive classroom activities, who demonstrated high confidence in speaking and discussion, even at younger ages.

By critically reflecting on the experiences and interactions in both settings, the study seeks to articulate the different realities of ELT across Southeast Asia, and value reflective practice, flexibility and intercultural awareness in teacher education. In this comparative narrative, the research responds to two questions:

1. What sociocultural and institutional factors shape classroom interaction in Indonesia and the Philippines?
2. What pedagogical lessons can be learned from a reflective comparative teaching experience in Southeast Asia?

Within this work, the article contributes to the growing body of research that positions teacher reflection as a conceptual lens for thinking about practice and encourages the use of autoethnographic processes as part of pre-service teacher development.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research utilizes a qualitative research method framed by autoethnography and reflective narrative inquiry. As both the participant and the researcher, the author reflects upon the author's personal teaching experiences to reveal the ways classroom interaction is bounded by institutional and cultural contexts in the two Southeast Asian experiences. Barkhuizen (2021) explains that autoethnography is a way for educators to link their personal experiences with the wider educational experience, and reflective narrative analysis recognizes important ways in which educators make meaning through storytelling about their experiences (Farrell, 2021).

Research Contexts

Data were taken from two teaching placements:

1. MA Matholi'ul Anwar, Indonesia - A Madrasah Aliyah (Islamic senior high school) situated in Lamongan, East Java. The students learn English as a foreign language (compulsory). The classroom was large (N of around 30 students) and structured lesson plans are devised according to the national curriculum.
2. SLSU-LS Lab School, Philippines - A laboratory high school linked to Southern Leyte State University. Students learn English as a second language in English and across other subjects as well. The classroom was not as large (N of around 25 students). Lessons were more conversational and therefore less structured than the above Indonesian experience.

Data Sources

Reflective Journals - The author wrote reflective journal entries after each class to highlight immediate impressions, students' responses, classroom interactions and personal reflections. Prompts for the authors' reflective journal entries included, "What surprised me today?", "What was the students' response?", and "What were my challenges?"

Field Observations - Field observation record sheets were used to provide information about the frequency of teacher talk time, how much students participated, how many and what types of questions were posed, and any examples of code-switching.

Critical Incidents - Episodes of memorable classroom practices that shed light on hidden cultural and pedagogical acts that were deemed significant were purposefully selected for more in-depth analysis. The event would be what Tripp (2012) refers to as a "critical incident" which allowed for windows into the deeper meanings of education.

Peer Dialogues - Informal dialogues with peers who are SEA-Teachers with a mentor teacher were used as a means of member-checking and reflection.

Analytical Procedures

The analysis used thematic narrative analysis to analyze the data presented here. The first step was to code the journal and observations notes for patterns.

Patterns included examples of the dominance of teacher talk, how many times students-initiated talk, instances of use of L1 versus L2, fluency and willingness to communicate, any cultural references, and instances of student curiosity.

Next, the patterns were grouped into themes that framed the context with bigger ideas and constructs such as power in the classroom, language (type) in the classroom, and agency (student voice). It is important to note that we used Nowell et al., (2017) ideas regarding trustworthiness in qualitative thematic research through triangulation, member checking, and reflexively attending to ideas.

Reflexivity and Trustworthiness

Because autoethnographic research is inherently personal, the author engaged in ongoing reflexivity—recognizing positionality as a pre-service Indonesian teacher from other cultural, social and educational contexts. Trustworthiness was achieved using the following strategies:

- Triangulation of a variety of data sources
- Validation of the observations through informal discussions with peers
- Cross-checking of the reflections overtime, to identify changes in my interpretations

Ethical clearance was gained informally from permission from my school mentors, and students were identified using pseudonyms to uphold their anonymity.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section offers a comparative analysis of classroom interaction based on the author's teaching and observation experiences derived from the SEA-Teacher Program in Indonesia and the Philippines. The analysis, presented thematically, identifies key observations and reflections from both national contexts, revealing culturally and pedagogically determined aspects of English language teaching (ELT) in Southeast Asia.

Classroom Interaction in Indonesia: constraints of foreign language and centralized authority

During the Indic highlight of the practicum, the author was placed in a Madrasah Aliyah with both regular and "unggulan" (elite) classes. In an elite class (which was made up of selected students who had, in general, achieved a higher level of academic achievement than regular classes), we observed a relatively higher level of student participation compared to regular classes. However, participation tended to come from students deemed either highly competent in English or had a particular interest in English. This observation reflects what Ratri et al., (2024) and Pokhrel (2022) refer to as "limited engagement culture"

A most memorable occasion in one of the classroom sessions was when a student with low proficiency in English attempted to participate actively. His response had a particular accent, making some students laugh; however, it did, in fact, represent a moment of language risk-taking - a rare occurrence in the classroom. Humorously, this moment also highlighted how infrequently less confident students had participated, suggesting "selective interaction" (Zafarina, 2022) in which a few students dominated the classroom talk.

The author did not feel disheartened, but rather, the experience engendered a reflective process in the teacher's future role in building inclusive learning spaces. As discussed by Farrell (2021) and Haider & Yasmin (2022), reflection allows teachers to re-imagine the goals of teaching and to acknowledge that we do not have a naturally equitable space. Part of this is to engage students in active learning in subjects that students may not enjoy – such as English in an EFL situation – and this stood as a challenge.

Some patterns of classroom talk in Indonesia indicated that the discourse was teacher-centered; there was frequent code-switching between Bahasa Indonesia and English, and the teacher talk defined lesson delivery where little extended learner talk could be seen – consistent with the findings of Effendi & Triastuti (2022) and Pourhaji & Sadeghi (2021). The linguistic and structural characteristics of the classroom setting relate to wider sociocultural

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tendencies towards hierarchical communication and assessment-driven learning (Windle & Possas, 2023).

Classroom Interaction in the Philippines: Dialogic Engagement in an ESL Context

The experience in the Philippines was notably different. The author was assigned to a laboratory high school affiliated with Southern Leyte State University, and there, English was a second language with extensive use both in academic and non-academic, linguistic, and social contexts. The author observed only months into being there through informal research, a high level of fluency with many of the students, even at Grade 7, and some with speaking abilities that exceeded that of the author, which was humbling and inspiring.

Students were eager to engage, asked spontaneous questions, and reacted to cultural narratives shared with them by the author. The author's observations were consistent with dialogic pedagogy theories emphasizing serious attempts at cultural exchange as a catalyst for engagement (Chung & Fisher, 2022 ; Lewis & Santoi, 2022). It is worth noting that students were more animated with discussions around Indonesian customs, food, and social behaviors when being discussed. This speaks to the value of intercultural storytelling as a medium for authentic communication.

Discussions within the groups were very lively. There are a number of things that enabled this liveliness; namely, English language competence, a degree of openness in the classroom and a focus of student-centred lesson design would lead to genuine surprises through English language use, collective knowledge construction that is rarely seen in Indonesia. The author observed that the majority of the students in the Philippine context were able to elaborate, ask follow up questions or offer further insights based on their peers' responses. Walsh & Mann (2021), explain that this type of dialogic participation supports language learning and helps with critical thinking potential.

The whole experience was emotionally compelling. It was encouraging and professionally motivating. As noted by Bastabel et al., (2021) transformative moments in classrooms are often created, by a critical incident that takes pre-service teachers out of their comfort zone. This was one such moment and the arousal (whilst imagining) what classroom spaces in Indonesia could be if, dialogic, student-centred learning was afforded more space and scaffolding.

In terms of structure, the interaction entailed a balanced distribution of teacher guided versus student participation. When developing lesson plans with local mentor teachers, the lessons were designed to showcase instructional strategies that reflected a student-centered model with pair work, group discussions, and performance-based activities, and approaches reflective of communicative language teaching and CEFR aligned pedagogical practices (Foley, 2021) were incorporated. English was used as the instructional medium in each setting, however, it was much more salient in the Philippines environment. The implementation of this approach was made possible due to the current bilingual education policy of the country and the social acceptability of English (Ngoc & Barrot, 2023).

Comparative Reflections: Bridging EFL–ESL Interactions

The differences in the two contexts provided clarity with respect to how language policy and practice, cultural norms, and institutional expectations influence the interactional possibilities of teachers and learners. In Indonesia, where English is neither a second language nor a first language, the place of English is marginally situated in terms of a high-stakes testing context, and limits provided by teachers discourage innovative practice with the language, and discourage dialogue. In contrast, where English occupies a second language space, collectively institutional structures (curricula) are intended to promote the use of English as a means for communicating and relying on the role of the English language for purposes beyond academic performance.

These results support the view of Nguyen & Yang (2021), that intercultural practicum experiences help to construct adaptive teacher identities—those who can navigate pedagogical tensions. By shifting from active observer to intentional interrogator of their own

practice, the author is also using Halimi's (2024) "layered reflection" terminology, where teaching can engage with content while interrogating and reimagining it.

The pedagogical message is clear: the sustainable practice of classroom interaction in EFL contexts like Indonesia means teaching a lesson that has contextual relevance, is intentionally scaffolded, and allows for reflective practice. The experience in ESL contexts, like the Philippines, could provide a rich basis for pre-service teachers wanting to create a more inclusive and dialogic EFL classroom.

Limitations of the Study

While the comparative autoethnographic study is important for shaping classroom interactions in two Southeast Asian contexts, it is important to acknowledge limitations of the study that may have implications for the scope and generalisability of findings. Some limitations are methodological, while others are related to the design and bounded nature of the study.

The study is reflective and autoethnographic. Therefore, it is based largely on the lived experiences and interpretation of a researcher-participant. While there is the added richness of first order descriptions that enhance the boys' schooling realities, there are also problems of bias and subjectivity. The autoethnographic approach is interpretive in nature and thus requires the use of voice and emotionality, but it also sometimes requires selective memory or unintentional privilege or filtering of events that happened, or foreboding significance on particular events that had particularly strong affects on them. To help mitigate this, peer dialogues and continual use of my own journal to validate things has assisted in forming small levels of triangulation in this regard. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to consider the interpretations as personally-interpreted and contextually-situated, as opposed some sort of universal representation.

secondly, another limitation is the timing of the practicum experience, a one month period in each country. Classroom cultures and interactional styles develop and transition over time augmented by trust, routine, and habitual pedagogical practices. So prior to observations and reflections for a short-termed placement can only be limited (surface-level) interactional styles and/or rely on novelties of the guest teacher experience in the classroom. Longer practicum experiences would most likely create a more holistic perspective of classroom discourse, student-teacher dynamics, and the negotiation of the nuances of the curriculum.

Third, note this was conducted in two particular school contexts that had particular institutional cultures (one was an Islamic senior high school in East Java, the other was a laboratory school affiliated to a state university in Southern Leyte). The findings of this study represent the situated reality of the contexts in which they were conducted, and cannot be generalized any further to other EFL or ESL contexts in Indonesia and the Philippines respectively. Even within any one country, schools can be quite different to each other with respect to student demographics, teacher beliefs, administrative policy, and curriculum orientation. Therefore, generalizing findings beyond the particular contexts in which they were located must be done cautiously.

Fourth, while there were several different types of qualitative data, such as reflective journals, field notes, and peers discussing informal peer conversations, the research did not collect student voices. There are no students' voices in the form of interviews, focus groups, or feedback from the learners themselves. The analysis above is heavily teacher knowledge and practice oriented. If student voices were part of this study, it would have provided a more solid picture of how learners understood their experiences in the classroom environment, what their agency was, and how they interpreted instructional language.

Fifth, the purpose of this study was not to present a systematic account of non-verbal communication elements in the interactions. Non-verbal communication elements such as body language, gestures, positionings in the classroom, and eye contact played a significant role in the tenor and quality of the interaction and were likely not documented in the written field notes either. The use of video footage or multimodal representation to document all forms of communication could be an option for future studies.

The cultural backgrounds of the participants (including religion, languages, socioeconomic context, etc.) have also influenced the participants' classroom behavior in meaningful and complex ways and were also not elaborated on any detail in this study. This is another area with possibilities for future inquiry.

Recognition of these limitations serves not only the purpose of an honest description of the credibility of the research and conclusions, but also provides the research with a contextualization as a basis for future research. The findings can be contemplated not just as intercultural processes of one teacher, but they also serve as a basis for further comparative and collaborative research in more diverse contexts across Southeast Asia..

4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Through an autoethnographic and reflective lens, this study examined classroom interaction in Indonesia and the Philippines, two Southeast Asian educational contexts. The results highlight how English language classrooms are influenced by local language policies, culture-related belief systems, and institutional impetus. The modality of classroom interaction in Indonesia reflects teacher-centeredness and strict boundedness of student agency, indicating a lack of agency to duly socialise as an English language learner, in the ELT educational system that adheres to the paradigm of 'academic compliance'. In contrast, the Philippines classroom embodied a student-centered pedagogy and the everyday use of English, providing the opportunity for dialogic engagement and learner agency in an ESL context.

Using critical incidents, field notes, and reflective journals, this study provides a more granular account of interactional settings, as well as attending to spaces and how they are shaped by things nearby, and how these factors impinge upon teaching and learning. Importantly, reflecting on reflective practice serves as a powerful pedagogical practice. It helped the author to re-imagine their beliefs about the previous roles of English, partiality from some learners, and contexts; realised areas of learnings, and to begin imagining educational spaces that offer opportunities for dialogue, inclusion, and empowerment or agency as socially situated English language learners.

The findings of this research hold implications for teacher education, and in particular, teacher education in Southeast Asia. It is important to consider how pre-service teachers can engage in intercultural exposure, reflective practice, and flexible pedagogical thinking. Programs like SEA-Teacher can create situations in which future teachers can engage in a key aspect of their professional learning whereby they are presented with contrasting realities. The findings of this study have shown that effective English language teaching is not simply a matter of transferring knowledge but creating interactional spaces in which learners are able to find their voices.

Using the findings and reflections of this research, we can make a number of recommendations for stakeholders in English language teaching and teacher education: (1) **For Pre-Service Teacher Education Programs:** Curricula should incorporate reflective and intercultural education practicums like SEA-Teacher to unveil different classroom realities to future educators. Many SEA-Teacher programs need to be better funded, and promoted; (2) **For Practicing Teachers in EFL Contexts:** Teachers should be able to develop dialogic and student-centred approaches to their practice, despite their cultural context, and particular exam-oriented contexts. Teachers can reflect on promoting open-ended questioning, reducing teacher talk, and including Quinn's (2018) suggestion of active participation of all students in a unique, inclusive classroom , regardless of proficiency level; (3) **For School Executives and Curriculum Designers:** Provide intentional collaborative teacher reflection, collaborative cultural experiences, and adaptation of global ELT approaches into local contexts. Curriculum flexibility is necessary to support teachers implementing communicative approaches; and (4) **For Future Researchers:** Expand studies that analyze in-context classroom interaction in other Southeast Asian countries that provide broader regional insights. The designs of future research would benefit from incorporating autoethnography with video or student voice data..

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