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CULTURAL IDENTITY AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING: NARRATIVES OF FILIPINO COLLEGE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how cultural identity influences the English language learning experiences of Filipino students. English, widely regarded as essential for academic and professional success in the Philippines, often contrasts with students' native languages and cultural backgrounds, creating a complex relationship between language acquisition and cultural identity. This study, conducted at Mindoro State University, examines how students deal the tension between their cultural roots and the demands of English proficiency. Using an exploratory design, the study gathers personal narratives through in-depth interviews with college students from diverse linguistic backgrounds, focusing on how cultural values, traditions, and beliefs shape their motivation, attitudes, and confidence in learning English. The findings highlight that while students view English proficiency as a valuable skill for social mobility, they also experience challenges in preserving their cultural and linguistic heritage. The themes emerging from the data reveal that cultural identity can both motivate and hinder English learning, influencing students' language use across academic and social settings. Additionally, the study observes a phenomenon of code-switching, with students alternating between English and their native languages depending on context. The research provides insight into the broader implications of bilingual education and advocates for a balanced approach that respects both English proficiency and cultural preservation.

Keywords: *cultural identity, English language learning, narratives, exploratory design*

INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized world, knowledge of English has become an essential ability, especially in areas where English is used as a second language or a medium of instruction. As the international language franca, English is required not only for academic and professional communication, but also for participation in global discourse. For many non-native English speakers, learning the language entails more than just picking up a new ability; it also entails directing complex intersections between linguistic competence and cultural identity. English language learners frequently find themselves juggling the demands of learning a new language with the preservation of their own cultural heritage. This tension can have an impact on their motivation, confidence, and overall attitude toward the language, making English acquisition a personal and social process.

The Philippines is one of Asia's largest English-speaking countries, giving it a distinct national identity. English has long been integrated into the country's educational system, media, and government institutions. The Philippines is well-known for its bilingual education policy, which recognizes Filipino and English as official languages. However, many Filipino students find it difficult to use English in educational settings since it sometimes contradicts their cultural and linguistic identities, which are based on local languages and traditions. According to Gonzalez (2020), while English proficiency is commonly seen as a means of achieving social mobility, it can also present difficulties for students who feel estranged from their own culture. This classification of English as both an empowering and dividing factor is particularly visible among Filipinos.

Locally, Mindoro State University (MinSU) reflects the broader national trends in English language learning, but with unique challenges and opportunities shaped by its regional context. Many students at MinSU come from diverse linguistic backgrounds, speaking local languages such as Tagalog, Mangyan dialects, and other regional tongues alongside Filipino and English. The process of learning and using English in this setting can create a dynamic tension between preserving one’s cultural identity and embracing English as a necessary tool for academic success and global participation. Research by Santos (2021) highlights how students in regional universities like MinSU often face difficulties in balancing their native languages with English, particularly in social and informal contexts, where cultural identity plays a more prominent role.

The purpose of this study is to look into how cultural identity influences English language learning experiences for chosen Filipino college students at Mindoro State University. The study's focus on personal narratives intends to investigate how students view the impact of their cultural backgrounds on language acquisition, communication practices, and attitudes about English. Understanding the complicated relationship between cultural identity and English language learning can shed light on the unique

issues that students encounter at regional universities, as well as contribute to the larger conversation about language education in multicultural contexts.

Numerous research have investigated the link between cultural identification and language learning. According to Norton (2013), language learning is inextricably linked to identity issues, as people invest in a language because they believe they are connected to the cultural and social capital it symbolizes. In the Philippines, Martin (2019) discovered that students' attitudes about English are influenced not just by its practical benefits, but also by their sense of cultural belonging. According to the study, students who have a strong connection to their local culture may be hesitant to use English in casual contexts because they see it as a symbol of colonial history and external influence.

Locally, Delos Reyes and Pascua (2020) investigated how Filipino college students negotiate their linguistic identities in educational settings, discovering that students frequently adopt a dual identity, embracing English in academic contexts but returning to local languages in social settings. This linguistic dualism reflects the greater societal notion of English as a tool for academic and professional achievement, whilst local languages are markers of cultural heritage and personal identity.

This study expands on these concepts by concentrating on students at MinSU, offering a more localized perspective on how cultural identity influences English language learning in a regional academic setting. By documenting students' personal experiences, the study hopes to gain a better understanding of how these students handle the challenges of language, culture, and identity in their daily lives.

Research Objectives

The goal of this study is to investigate the relationship between cultural identity and English language learning experiences among Filipino college students, with an emphasis on how cultural identity effects language acquisition, communication practices, and attitudes towards English. Specifically:

1. To investigate how Filipino college students evaluate the impact of their cultural identity on their English language acquisition.
2.To investigate the obstacles and opportunities that Filipino students have when balancing their native language(s) with English in academic and social settings.
3. To look into how cultural identity influences students' motivation, attitudes, and confidence in using English.
4. To examine how English language acquisition influences Filipino students' cultural identities.
5. To collect personal narratives that emphasize the impact of cultural values, traditions, and beliefs on students' approaches to learning.

METHODOLOGY

Exploratory research design is used to study unsolved problems, allowing for the exploration of new ideas and the identification of patterns without the limits of a formal framework. According to Saunders et al. (2014), this strategy is especially useful when the researcher is unsure about the exact nature of the problem or phenomenon being examined, as it allows for the development of more explicit research questions and hypotheses for further examination. It is frequently the beginning point for expanding knowledge in areas where existing information is scarce.

The study was conducted at Mindoro State University, Main Campus, Alcate, Victoria, Oriental Mindoro. The participants are the selected College students in the university. College students were chosen to participate in this study because they are at a critical period of both academic and personal development, with questions of identity and language acquisition being particularly apparent. As students enter higher education, they encounter more exposure to English in academic contexts while still navigating their cultural identities. Because of their combined involvement with academic obligations and cultural identity, college students provide ideal participants for studying how cultural identity effects English language learning. Furthermore, their experiences provide useful insights into the larger sociolinguistic processes at work in rural universities such as MinSU.

For the purpose of this research, in-depth interviews were done. The study utilized a researcher made interview guide with five parts as the main data gathering instrument. The first part dealt with questions investigating how Filipino college students evaluate the impact of their cultural identity on their English language acquisition. Second part composed of questions assessing the obstacles and opportunities that Filipino students have when balancing their native language(s) with English in academic and social settings. Then, the third part dealt with questions looking into how cultural identity influences students' motivation, attitudes, and confidence in using English. Fourth part had questions examining how English language acquisition influences Filipino students' cultural identities. And lastly, questions collecting personal narratives that emphasize the impact of cultural values, traditions, and beliefs on students' approaches to learning.

Thematic analysis was used in this study. In using the thematic analysis, there are different approaches to consider. The researcher decided to use the inductive approach as it involves deriving meaning and creating themes from data without any preconceptions. In doing a thematic data analysis, the researcher followed the steps: familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and writing up.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based from the analyzed responses of the respondents on the different questions assessing the five major objectives of the study, here are the generated themes:

How Filipino college students evaluate the impact of their cultural identity on their English Language Acquisition

1.Cultural Identity as a Double-Edged Influence

Many students argue that their cultural identification both facilitates and complicates English language development. For example, cultural values centered on respect and indirect communication (common in Filipino culture) can occasionally clash with the direct character of English, as indicated by one respondent, who stated that politeness conventions in Filipino sometimes provide difficulties when transitioning to English. Hsu (2021) found that learners' cultural identities might impact their communication methods, resulting in unique viewpoints and adaption issues when learning English.

2.Socioeconomic and Environmental Factors

Several responses show that a student's socioeconomic background and environmental circumstances influence their English learning experience. Those from non-English-speaking households or rural areas report having less opportunity to practice English and consequently struggling more. Rinehart (2022) discovered that access to English language resources is frequently limited in non-urban locations, impacting pupils' ability and familiarity with the language.

3.Motivation and Personal Goals Linked to Cultural Identity

Many respondents reported that cultural myths about success and opportunity inspire them to improve their English. For example, students regard English proficiency as a gateway to academic and professional prospects. This is consistent with Kim and Kweon's (2023) research, which found that learners from collectivist cultures frequently see English competence as a way to better themselves and their family, producing strong motivational forces for learning the language.

4.Code-Switching and Identity Negotiation in Academic and Social Settings

The concept of code-switching emerges strongly, as respondents switch between English and their home tongue depending on the circumstances and audience. They report speaking English in formal and academic settings and Filipino in more intimate or familial situations. According to Garcia and Wei (2020), code-switching is a typical approach used by bilinguals to overcome cultural and linguistic differences, facilitating

smoother communication and allowing them to keep their cultural identity while studying English.

5.Challenges of Balancing Linguistic Identities

Participants reported that academic English immersion gradually eroded their native language skills, particularly vocabulary and grammar. This validates Tran's (2024) findings, which revealed that continuous exposure to a second language might dilute native language proficiency, affecting cultural and linguistic identity.

Obstacle and opportunities that Filipino students have when balancing their native language (s) with English in academic and social settings

1.Balancing Native Language and English in Academic Settings

Numerous students face challenges in preserving their fluency in their first language while primarily using English in academic environments. Frequent issues include switching languages, forgetting words in their native tongue, and mixing languages during discussions. This illustrates the intricacies of bilingual identity within an academic framework, where regular engagement with English can impede the retention of the native language. Switching between languages often serves as a useful strategy, but it may lead to feelings of "linguistic insecurity" for students as they transition between languages to articulate their thoughts (Luo & Zhou, 2021). Moreover, extended immersion in English frequently results in a decline in vocabulary in native languages, which affects both language identity and fluency (Fang, 2023). Studies by Albirini (2022) and García & Wei (2021) highlight that code-switching aids bilingual speakers in expressing their ideas more effectively, preserving social and cultural ties while addressing linguistic demands.

2. Adaptation and Social Contexts in Language Use

Students modify their language based on the social environment, employing English in formal or academic situations and their native language when communicating with family or friends. This concept illustrates "translanguaging," whereby students change their language depending on the social context, facilitating effective communication and honoring cultural norms (Wei, 2022). This flexibility supports the preservation of cultural connections, as students use their native tongues in casual situations to remain close to their heritage (Flores & Rosa, 2021). Research indicates that adjusting language according to social contexts contributes to cultural preservation and social cohesion (Cenoz & Gorter, 2023), a vital practice in bilingual settings that enables students to celebrate their cultural identities

3. Cultural Pressures and Expectations in Language Proficiency

Since English proficiency is seen as a means of success, some students feel under pressure to concentrate on it because of perceived academic and social expectations. This is a reflection of the internalized cultural hierarchy surrounding English, where competence is frequently connected to opportunity and prestige. Students may

emphasize English over their native tongues as a result of these pressures, which could affect their cultural identity and cause them to gradually lose proficiency in their original tongues (Escudero & Vidal, 2023). This scenario demonstrates how bilingual students could experience conflict between their academic goals and cultural identity (Schmidt et al., 2024). English competence is often viewed as a sign of financial advantage, according to research, which can lead to "language shifting" away from native tongues and affect students' self-esteem regarding their cultural identities (Kachru & Smith, 2023).

How cultural identity influences student's motivation, attitudes and confidence in using English

1.Cultural Identity as a Motivator for English Proficiency

Participants discussed how cultural identity may inspire and hinder learning English. Since they see fluency in English as a gateway to possibilities around the world, many students find inspiration in their cultural values of ambition, hard work, and a desire for success. Some participants, for example, mentioned that their Filipino cultural background encourages hard effort, which motivates them to learn English in order to improve their scholastic and professional prospects. This is consistent with previous research showing that cultural identification has a major impact on linguistic motivation, particularly in situations where a person wants to blend in with the world (Kim & Lee, 2021; Lin et al., 2023). Students also pointed out that sharing their own background with others is a part of their cultural pride in learning. Some, however, claimed that the extensive usage of English in the classroom occasionally forces them to put it ahead of their mother tongue, resulting in a delicate balancing act that needs to be handled with care. This is supported by the phenomenon known as "cultural ambivalence" among English language learners, in which pupils experience both pride and anxiety when adopting the language (Garcia & Lau, 2022).

2.Influence of Cultural Expectations on Confidence

Participants' levels of confidence in their ability to use English differed according to their social and cultural contexts. Due to less English-language encounters, those who grew up in more traditional Filipino homes or in rural areas where English was not as valued first expressed difficulties in their confidence. Students from areas or social circles that support English, on the other hand, expressed greater self-assurance and cited cultural pride as a major confidence boost. According to research, exposure to and familiarity with a language through one's cultural group can boost confidence (Park, 2023). A number of participants made the observation that, although cultural identity tends to boost confidence in casual contexts, formal expectations of "perfect" English can undermine self-assurance, particularly when non-native accents or grammatical nuances are present.This aligns with studies that show students from non-native backgrounds often experience performance anxiety in formal English-speaking contexts due to perceived expectations (Tanaka, 2022).

3.Balancing Cultural Identity with English Language Use

While cultural identification encourages the use of English, participants often mentioned that it also presents difficulties in retaining proficiency in their mother tongue. Many expressed concerns about losing contact with their own linguistic identity and described having trouble switching between English and Filipino. Findings of Al-Momani and Al-Serhan (2022), who noted "cultural-linguistic duality" among multilingual learners, where managing dual language identities becomes a strategic ability, are similar to the necessity to balance English fluency without sacrificing one's native tongue. In a similar vein, participants acknowledged their pride in Filipino values but also expressed concern about striking a balance between their cultural background and fluency in English without compromising their use of their native tongue. Cultural-identity theories, which emphasize the difficulties bilingual students face while navigating multilingual environments, are reflected in this difficulty (Santos et al., 2023).

How English language acquisition influences Filipino students' cultural identities

1.Broadening Cultural Perspective and Global Connection

Learning English, according to several participants, has broadened their perspective and enabled them to interact with people from different countries. Students saw English as a means of comprehending and valuing cultural diversity, and they reported feeling more receptive to and conscious of various cultural viewpoints. This is consistent with recent research, including that conducted by Kim and Liu (2021), which discovered that language acquisition frequently results in bilingual students experiencing an extended cultural identity. Students may develop a "hybrid cultural identity," in which elements of both Filipino and international cultures are combined, as a result of these experiences, which cultivate a sense of belonging to a global society (Mendoza et al., 2022).

2.Balancing Native Culture with English Identity

The delicate balancing act between preserving one's local cultural identity and being proficient in English is another major issue. Participants had conflicting feelings about this balance: knowing English allows them to share Filipino culture with a wider audience, but it also occasionally causes them to become less connected to their home tongue. One participant, for instance, mentioned that while using English improves their interactions with people around the world, it also makes it harder for them to preserve their native tongue. This observation is consistent with research by Tan and Rivera (2023), which addresses the "cultural tension" that bilinguals face as they attempt to preserve their cultural roots while adjusting to global norms. Garcia et al. (2023) also emphasize the notion of bilinguals juggling two cultural identities, stressing the cognitive flexibility that comes with traversing two cultural environments.

3.English Proficiency and Cultural Identity Displacement

Due to their growing fluency in English, a number of participants expressed feeling as though they were experiencing "cultural displacement," which could result in complicated feelings of cultural authenticity and belonging. Some students mentioned that they feel disconnected from their home culture because they use English so much, especially in academic contexts. This idea is consistent with recent research on "linguistic detachment," which holds that being more fluent in a second language may cause one to use the native tongue less frequently, creating a feeling of cultural estrangement (Park et al., 2023). These participants express concern about possible cultural degradation, especially in contexts where Filipino identity is articulated through the original language, even as they recognize the wider options that come with competence in English.

4.Strengthened Cultural Pride and Identity Through English

Interestingly, some participants said that because learning English gives them a way to communicate their heritage with others, it has increased their pride in Filipino culture. The notion that English may act as a bridge for cultural exchange is reflected in these replies, particularly as Filipino students engage in global settings. Studies by Santos and Cruz (2022) have examined this "transcultural identity," in which students used English to communicate and promote their local culture around the world, frequently resulting in a heightened sense of pride and identification. As a result, Filipino students feel encouraged to represent and highlight their cultural heritage through English.

Personal narratives that emphasize the impact of cultural values, traditions, and beliefs on students' approaches to learning

1.Cultural Values as Motivation for English Learning

Many students say that their desire to become fluent in English is motivated by cultural values, particularly those that place a strong emphasis on education, discipline, and respect. This motivational drive is supported by the study of Garcia & Lau (2022), which shows how cultural ambivalence can both hinder and enhance language learning, especially when students reconcile their native values with the perceived benefits of English proficiency. They see English as a valuable skill for academic and professional advancement, aligning with cultural ideals of success and achievement. This dichotomy fosters an educational setting in which cultural values provide learners with a basis as well as a challenge.

2. Collectivism and Collaborative Learning

For many Filipino students, collectivist cultural ideas promote collaborative language learning. Students saw that principles like respect for instructors and peer support help create a positive, socially cohesive learning environment. Collectivist cultures usually encourage group-based learning practices where students benefit from knowledge and assistance from one another (Al-Momani & Al-Serhan, 2022). Through

the facilitation of a more inclusive and integrated learning process, this collectivist approach enhances motivation and engagement in the classroom.

3. Tension Between Cultural Identity and Language Learning

Some students indicated that learning English creates an internal conflict with their cultural identity, perceiving it as an imposition on their native language and cultural practices. A feeling of cultural loss or ambivalence can occasionally result from this tension. Kim and Lee (2021) talk on how bilingual kids frequently have hybrid identities, where being proficient in a global language like English can cause conflict with signs of their native identity. The intricate connection between cultural identity and language acquisition is demonstrated by this "hybrid identity" model, which also shows how students may feel cut off from their heritage while pursuing global integration.

4. Preservation of Native Language and Cultural Integrity

Other students highlighted the need to balance English acquisition with the preservation of their native language. For them, cultural values prioritize maintaining linguistic and cultural heritage even as they engage with a global language. Santos et al. (2023) note that bilingual individuals often navigate a dual cultural identity, where they integrate English skills while preserving their native language. This delicate balance is crucial for Filipino students, who seek to enhance their English proficiency without compromising their native linguistic identity, fostering what Santos et al. term a "transcultural identity."

5. Cultural Beliefs on Language Superiority and Inferiority

Some students expressed beliefs about the perceived superiority of English, which is often associated with social or professional status. This belief sometimes causes students to prioritize English over their native language in formal settings, though it also leads to a sense of cultural disconnect. Lin et al. (2023) examine how language hierarchy beliefs affect students' motivation and attitudes towards English learning. In contexts where English is seen as a prestigious language, students may feel pressured to adopt it at the expense of their native language, impacting their self-perception and sense of cultural belonging.

6. Role of Cultural Tradition in Learning Styles and Language Use

Students reflected that Filipino cultural traditions, such as oral storytelling, influence their approach to learning English. They emphasized the importance of communication skills and oral proficiency, stemming from cultural practices of storytelling and verbal expression. Park et al. (2023) discuss how cultural traditions shape learning styles, particularly in language acquisition. In cultures with strong oral traditions, students may prioritize speaking skills and oral fluency, reflecting a culturally embedded preference for verbal communication.

Conclusions

The study emphasizes how cultural identity shapes the English language learning experiences of Filipino college students. Pupils manage two identities while striking a balance between cultural values and English-language proficiency-related academic and career goals. According to their comments, cultural values like respect, ambition, and collectivism have an impact on how they approach language use in social and academic contexts as well as how motivated they are to learn English. Furthermore, the impact of environmental contexts and socioeconomic factors on language accessibility highlights the variety of difficulties students encounter; some report little exposure to English in rural locations and in households where English is not the primary language.

This also highlights the challenges students have in maintaining their cultural identity and local language while learning English. The predominance of English in academic contexts causes "cultural displacement" or "linguistic insecurity" for many students, which can impact cultural pride and result in a reduction in native language competency. But English also gives students a way to interact with people around the world, which frequently leads to a "hybrid cultural identity." This dual effect highlights the delicate balance students must strike between maintaining their cultural heritage and adjusting to the more general requirements of English proficiency in a globalized world.

Recommendations

Educational institutions sould consider introducing language programs that highlight bilingualism and the cultural value of maintaining one's native tongue in order to better assist Filipino students in striking a balance between their cultural identity and English language skills. Students' native language proficiency can be preserved and their confidence in English can be increased by encouraging them to use both English and Filipino in academic contexts. Furthermore, encouraging storytelling and cultural presentations—activities that let students express their cultural identities in English—could boost students' sense of pride in their ancestry and reaffirm the importance of their mother tongue.

Deeper understanding of the variables influencing bilingualism in Filipino students can be gained by additional research on the relationship between cultural identity and language acquisition. Programs that emphasize identity development and socioemotional support may help students balance the cultural demands and expectations related to English proficiency. Teachers can assist students in navigating the challenges of linguistic identity and cultivating a transcultural worldview that embraces both Filipino and global cultures by fostering a more culturally inclusive learning environment.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

The authors hereby declare that this work was conducted in strict accordance with ethical research guidelines. All respondents were provided informed consent prior to participating, ensuring that they were fully aware of the study's nature and objective.

Respondents were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any moment, without consequence or detriment. The respondents' anonymity was protected throughout the research procedure, and all personal information was kept private. The respondents' well-being was prioritized, and all measures were taken to protect their rights and dignity. The author additionally confirm that no conflicts of interest arose during the course of the investigation. Every attempt was taken to avoid plagiarism, and all sources were appropriately mentioned. Additionally, the findings were interpreted honestly and without bias. Finally, the findings of this study were used purely for research reasons, benefiting the academic and scientific communities.

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