"MY TEACHER TAUGHT ME TO FOCUS ON MY SPEAKING SKILL AT FIRST": A PORTRAIT FROM AN ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL STUDENT ON HIS FOREIGN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION PROCESS

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Abstract
Modern English has forsaken the traditional English tenet. The endeavour on the shift of modern eductaional needs has been studied by myriad researchers. Thus, the current study inquires the learning style change of an Islamic boarding school student, providing novelty to the identity struggle in an initial teacher education context. A narrative inqury design was piloted in this study, recruiting Arif (pseudonym) from a *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) in Probolinggo. Moreover, the current study uncovered that Arif used to consider grammar in speaking. Focusing grammar in speaking was the drawback of Arif when he tried to speak English fluently. He should think twice before produce the sentence. Therefore, he changed his learning style on focussing on the meaning after listening to the sheikh of the Islamic boarding school. The condition unconsciously adhered to the World Englishes notion that English does not belong to anyone but the speaker itself (Kirkpatrick, 2010; Wei, 2020). He believed that the new learning style may improve his speaking skills.

1. Introduction

The functional shift of the language may still be considered peculiar to many speakers of the language despite its enormous campaign on social media. Diverse cultural background and the speakers' mobility may provoke some peculiar forms (Cenoz & Gorter, 2020). The paradigm change that is taking place in multilingual studies with the shift from monolingual to multilingual ideologies. The growing varieties of the language occur due to the expansion of the language itself. It is in fact that L2 and the foreign language speakers have outnumbered the L1 speakers of the language (Crystal, 2003; Fikri et al., 2024). However, the apaching peculiar form of the language remains vigurous (Wei, 2020). Thus, the current study will initially aim to investigate students' perceptions on his early acquisition when he studies English.

The paradigm of World Englishes challenges the traditional view that English is the property of native-speaking countries like the United States or the United Kingdom (Dewale et al., 2021). It highlights the reality that English has been adapted and reshaped by various communities across the globe, resulting in multiple equally valid forms of the language (Rose & McKinley, 2024). These localized versions of English, such as Indian English, Nigerian English, and Singlish, reflect the cultural and linguistic identities of their speakers. This paradigm shift advocates for a focus on communication and understanding rather than rigidly adhering to native-speaker standards (Jeharsae et al., 2024).

In this framework, speaking English is no longer about imitating a "perfect" accent or mastering native grammar (Charatwattananich & Proces, 2024). Instead, it is about expressing oneself clearly and respecting the linguistic diversity of others (Ibarra-Gambrill, 2021). By recognizing World Englishes, educators, and learners can emphasize inclusivity and collaboration, empowering speakers to use English as a practical tool for global interaction (Kanwaal et al., 2024). This approach also fosters a greater appreciation for the role of culture in shaping language, breaking down stereotypes, and promoting equality among English speakers worldwide.

Furthermore, learning English in the context of World Englishes challenges traditional notions, prioritizing perfect grammar and native-like fluency (Ja'ashan, 2020). Instead, this approach celebrates the rich diversity of English as it is spoken around the world. By shifting the focus to communication and understanding, learners are empowered to express themselves confidently, even if their grammar or pronunciation deviates from standard norms. This change in mindset fosters greater participation and inclusivity, especially among non-native speakers.

The neglect of strict grammatical rules in favor of appreciating World Englishes allows for more authentic and culturally relevant interactions. Learners can adapt their English to reflect their cultural identity without fear of being judged for "errors." For example, variations like Indian English or Nigerian English showcase how localized forms of the language effectively meet the needs of their communities. Accepting these variations promotes linguistic equality and validates the experiences of millions of English speakers worldwide.

This approach is particularly important in a globalized world where effective communication often outweighs grammatical perfection. Employers and institutions value individuals who can navigate multicultural settings with ease and clarity. Encouraging learners to embrace World Englishes not only builds their confidence but also enhances their ability to connect with diverse audiences. Ultimately, this perspective reflects the evolving role of English as a dynamic and inclusive language, fostering mutual respect and collaboration across cultures.

2. Method

A narrative inquiry with a semi-structured interview, employing three spaces of time was piloted in the study (Clandinin, 2013; Mendieta & Barkhuizen, 2019). The interviews started with the question, "How did you choose English as your favourite subject?". It then continued with more specific questions, "How did you encounter English when you were in the early school level?". The conversation then led to some other questions, such as "How did you change your style in studying English?", "What did you feel with the new style of learning?". Ultimately, the interview ended with the question "How do you think the new style of learning will affect your achievement as an EFL?". The interview process lasted from 3for an hour. The researcher utilized a smartphone as the recording tool. No specific inquiries were employed to maintain the subject's natural voices in the interview (Eastmond, 2007). The prepared questions were employed as general guiding navigation for the participant to recall Arif's memories in language learning. Then, the researchers transcribed the excerpts to obtain meaning. After transcribing the data, the researchers began the narrative analysis by repeatedly reading and analysing the transcript (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and selecting emerging themes from the talking data. The researcher, then, matched the emerging themes with the transcription to ensure trustworthiness and uncover categorical contents within the transcripts (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Furthermore, the researchers narrated the participant's past language learning. It started witha brief profile of the participant: Arif (pseudonym) is in his third year as an Islamic boarding school student in Probolinggo, East Java, Indonesia. He has been studying English for more than five years. He shared his stories based on the guiding questions. He also wants to be an English teacher. Thus, the subject background as an Islamic Boarding School Student (Santri) that usually focusing themselves on the arabic language may add the identity struggle in an initial teacher education context.

3. Result and Discussion

How Did Arif Choose English as His Favourite Subject?

The interview session was embarked on Arif's early experience with English. Arif loved English because his aunt could speak English fluently. She was amazed with his aunt when she spoke with a native speaker. She thought that the moment was astonishing, being able to speak with a foreigner, and making other people felt amazed, shaping English his favourite subject. The excerpt advocated the statement with Arif's interview about his early encounter with the language.

"I studied English because my aunt fluently speak the language. It makes me envy for her. Long time ago, she invited her foreigner friend to our house to get to know Indonesian local tradition. At that point, everyone was amazed for her friend's appearence, having blue eyes and blonde hair. Many villagers came to our house to see the foreigner. What makes everyone more amazed

was that when my aunt and her friend were having conversation. That moment also motivated me to study English. I wanted to be like my aunt and wanted be a teacher like her".

How Did Arif Encounter English when He Was in the Early School Level?

The interview were then continued with a question on Arif's experience on his early English study. He said that he went to an English course with all of his cousin with a private teacher in his village. He studied English when he was at the fourth class of elementary school. In the private course the teacher gave him some vocabularies (V1, V2, and V3) and conversation to memorize. The teacher also gave him some basic grammar about present tense verbal nominal and present continous tense. The teacher also correct him when he practiced the language. Therefore, the habit sometimes make him corrected himself when he tried to practice English and impeded his English improvement.

"Due to my aunt successful exeperience with English, all of my family interested in enrolling their son and daughter to an English course. My other aunt contacted a private teacher to come to our house every Sunday to teach us English. That was when we were in our fourth year of elementary school. We memorized some conversation and vocabularies of V1, 2, and 3. We were also taught how to use the present, continous, and past form correctly in the form of verbal and nominal. We practiced our English with the teacher, and I got the most of her appreciation due to completing the English task well that I recalled. The teacher sometime corrected us when we did wrong in speaking. Thus, making us think twice when we wanted to speak English. Althogh she corrected kindly, however, it grew the butterfly in my stomach".

How Did Arif Change His Style in Studying English?

After the anxiety grew, two years later Arif came to an Islamic boarding in Probolingo to continue his study. The Islamic boarding school focused on Arabic and English language acquisition and Al-quran and Islamic book interpretation. Arif initially faced some difficiulties in the Islamic Boarding School due to his old strategies. He joined an English program there, called English Development Program (E.D.C). However, he still felt some difficulties when tried to speak. He always corrected him self before speaking and getting low score in the test, because the Islamic boarding school program focussed their studying on fluency and meaning. As Arif said:

"I change my English learning style when I was in junior high school. That was after two years of my English course. My parents put me in one of a famous Islamic boarding school in Probolinggo due its Arabic and English language studies and Al-qur'an and Islamic books interpretation. I like being there because I can join an English course. The name is E.D.C. It stands for English Development Club. The program requires me to speak English everyday. Therefore, I feel some difficulties when I have to think about the grammar before I speak. Did I speak correctly or not. That's what come to my mind in the first two month of joining the program. Then, one day, there was an agenda about stimulating the students to speak English and Arabic. The sheikh of the Islamic boarding school gave like thirty minutes of lectures about stimulating the student to speak. One of the quote that made me change my strategies was that "if you want to be able to speak, don't think about the grammar and nahwu and sharraf (Arabic grammar). Forget that! And start making mistakes, because as we know that practices make perfect and not practice makes perfect. After you master the language, the grammar will come by itself". Therefore, when I spoke, I neglected the grammar, but when I write, I have to 100% consider about the grammar".

What Did Arif Feel with His New Style of Learning?

The next question talked about Arif's opinion about his new learning style. He thought that his new learning style was very convenient. He became more confident to practice his English and consider that the new learning style can improve his score and speaking fluency. The excerpt was supported by Arif statement that:

"with this new style of learning and practice, I felt more confident to speak. I don't have to think about the grammar. Although I know that the grammar is wrong, I still use the form confidently. Furthermore, with this new style of mine, I can improve my speaking speed and fluency. I also

can improve my score in the program. Before implementing the new learning style, I have to think wether I should add S/ ES in the present form or ED or Irregular verb in the past form, but now, I just speak and take a note about my mistake. I still do my self correction but with more flexible way".

How Does Arif think the New Style of Learning Will Affect His Achievement As a EFL?

Finally, the final interview question talked about Arif's projection about his future achievement with the new learning style. He thought that using the new style will help him to reach his dream of becoming English teacher and continue his study in a good University. His teacher now also invites him to join some competition in English.

"I thought that new style of learning will help me to improve my score, achieve my dream as an English teacher, and go to a good university. If I can be a teacher, I will invite my students to the same English Learning Strategies to ease them mastering the language".

An Inspiring Family Member Tend to be Students' Role Model

Family plays an integral role in shaping a student's identity, and a particular family member can have a profound and lasting influence (Fikri et al., 2024; Schulte et al., 2020). From childhood, students observe and absorb the behaviors, values, and attitudes exhibited by their family members. Whether it is a parent who emphasizes the importance of education or a sibling who demonstrates resilience in the face of challenges, these close relationships offer a model for developing self-perception and values. The day-to-day interactions and shared experiences between students and their family members lay the foundation for how they see themselves and their place in the world.

A family member's influence is particularly strong because of their emotional connection with the student. This bond fosters trust and admiration, making the role model's traits and behaviors more impactful. For instance, a caring parent who prioritizes kindness and empathy can instill these qualities in a student, shaping their interpersonal relationships. Similarly, a family member who values discipline and hard work can encourage a student to approach their academic and personal goals with similar dedication (Islamic et al., 2024; Matiala et al., 2023). These interactions not only mold students' character but also help them navigate their values, aspirations, and cultural or societal roles.

The guidance of a family member contributes to the development of a student's sense of identity by offering both support and direction. A family member who encourages self-expression and individuality allows the student to explore their strengths and interests. Conversely, providing structure and clear expectations helps students build a sense of responsibility and purpose. This dual role of nurturing and guiding is crucial in helping students understand who they are and who they want to become (Kreber, 2023). Ultimately, family members play a pivotal role in shaping the identity of students by influencing their values, fostering emotional growth, and providing a reliable source of inspiration.

One of the key reasons why inspiring family members become effective role models is their accessibility and relatability (Quinn, 2024). Unlike public figures or celebrities, family members are directly involved in the student's daily life, making their achievements and struggles more understandable. Students witness their role models' actions, decisions, and growth firsthand, providing a realistic framework for emulation. For example, a student observing a family member navigating challenges with optimism learns valuable lessons about problem-solving and perseverance. This proximity allows the role model to offer consistent guidance, fostering a deeper emotional connection that strengthens their influence.

Experiences Unlock Convenient Learning Style

Students' learning styles are not static; they evolve over time as they encounter diverse experiences that reshape how they absorb and process information (Igcasma et al., 2023; Zrudlo, 2023). Experiences such as engaging in hands-on projects, participating in group activities, or facing challenges in traditional classroom settings can influence students to adopt different approaches to learning. For instance, a student who initially thrives on visual aids might shift toward a more kinesthetic learning style after participating

in an immersive science experiment. These experiences provide opportunities to discover new ways of understanding and applying knowledge, making their learning process more dynamic and adaptable.

Personal and social experiences also play a crucial role in altering learning preferences. A student who struggles with independent learning but flourishes in collaborative settings may develop a preference for group discussions or peer-led activities. Similarly, students exposed to new environments—such as studying abroad, joining extracurricular clubs, or utilizing technology in learning—may find their traditional preferences inadequate for addressing these challenges. Like Arif's experiences about changing his style of learning from more grammatical based change into meaning and fluency based. These shifts are often a response to the need for greater efficiency or engagement in their learning journey (Troussas et al., 2023). As students adapt to new circumstances, their evolving experiences teach them to be more flexible and self-aware about how they learn best.

Arif's change of learning style unconsciously adhere to modern English. Modern English has shifted from strict grammatical accuracy to practical language use in a global context. This evolution reflects the growing role of English as a lingua franca, used for communication across cultures, professions, and disciplines. In an interconnected world, the ability to convey meaning effectively and adapt to diverse communicative settings often outweighs rigid adherence to traditional grammar rules (Jeharsae et al., 2024). For instance, international business negotiations, academic exchanges, and social media interactions prioritize clarity and mutual understanding over perfect grammar. This pragmatic approach to language usage enables speakers from various linguistic backgrounds to engage meaningfully, fostering inclusivity and collaboration (Hossain, 2024).

Modern English education and usage also emphasize flexibility and adaptability to the dynamic needs of a globalized society. English is no longer confined to native-speaking regions but has been shaped by the influences of non-native speakers, leading to the emergence of distinct dialects, accents, and localized variations. In this context, communication strategies like paraphrasing, using simplified sentence structures, and incorporating global idiomatic expressions take precedence over rigid grammatical forms (Selvi et al, 2024). This shift empowers users to focus on context, purpose, and audience, making English a versatile tool for bridging cultural and linguistic gaps in a rapidly changing world.

4. Conclusion

In a nutshel, the study unpacked Arif's change of identity due to his drawback on speaking. He initially focussed on grammar while speaking. His drawback when he wanted to speak English was he tried to figure out wether his speaking had already been gramatically correct or not. He finally changed his learning style when his sheikh in the Islamic boarding school said that put aside the grammar when you want to speak. We have to focus on the meaning and not the grammar. Furthermore the current study employed a narrative inquiry design, recruiting one EFL learner from an Islamic boarding school students, adding novelty to the field of the study.

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