The Travails of Bangsamoro Learners on Multilingualism:
A Phenomenology

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Abstract

This phenomenological study describes the struggles and coping mechanisms in Multilingual learning among the learners in Hadji Ali Baganian Memorial School Inc. It utilized the method described by Colaizzi (1978) to analyze data, including familiarization, identifying significant statements, formulating meanings, clustering themes, developing a detailed description, producing the fundamental structure, and verifying the fundamental structure. The participants were the ten purposively selected Grade 9 students at the said school who performed average to outstanding levels in their respective classes. This school has provided Bangsamoro learners educational perspectives both in the private Madaris and the DepEd curriculum. The findings revealed that the participants encountered difficulties with multilingualism. The difficulties include negative attitude and complexity of the rules in phonology, a poor background of students in word stratification in morphology, poor sentence construction due to the complexity of rules in syntax, and word recognition and correct usage in semantics. Five coping mechanisms were identified to address these difficulties. These were oral practicing, using a dictionary, tutorial, listening attentively, taking notes, and internet surfing. These identified coping mechanisms were summarized into one emergent theme – intrinsic motivation. The researchers concluded that language users and language learners need to know their language needs, background, progress in acquiring the target language, and capability to use it.

Keywords: Bangsamoro learners; multilingual learners, multilingualism, private Madaris

Introduction

Multilingualism exists all over the globe. Many countries have realized that multilingualism has become societal normality. Diversity of multilingual education is linked to different factors that can be classified as linguistic, sociolinguistic status and educational (Cenoz and Gorter, 2010).

With globalization, language education has shifted from monolingualism towards bilingualism and multilingualism that have made significant changes in economic and politics over the past few decades. These changes also have put a substantial mark on language teaching and learning practice globally (Singh, 2013).
In a narrower setting, the gradual implementation of Mother Tongue Based-Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) in the Philippines began in 2012 (Burton, 2013). It is meant to address the high functional illiteracy of Filipinos where language plays a significant factor and aims to meet the learning needs of all children or education for all. It involves the implementation of local mother tongues as the language of instruction in Kindergarten to year three (K-3), with the official languages, Filipino and English, being introduced as the language of instruction after grade three.

To ensure that the program "Education for All" serves all learners, such as Muslim learners, the Department of Education of the Philippines has developed the Road Map for Upgrading Muslim Basic Education, a comprehensive program for the educational development of Filipino Muslims. One of these programs is the development and the institutionalization of Madrasah education. Madrasah, the Arabic name for the school, is a community-based and community-managed school whose teachings are based on the Qur'an.

Hadji Ali Baganian Memorial School, Incorporated in the province of Maguindanao, is one of the Institutionalized Madrasah wherein the teaching is based on Qur'an. This school has been implementing a multilingual classroom setting. It mandates learning the Arabic language and Islamic values for Moro learners. Multilingual classrooms are considered the most significant challenge not only for the teachers but also for the students. Multilingual classrooms are not easy to handle, and sometimes they become challenging for the learners, especially those who are a bit disadvantaged. At Hadji Ali Baganian Memorial School Incorporated, learners face challenges relative to multilingualism, and teachers had observed that the learners find it challenging to cope with the struggles.

Currently, in Mindanao, specifically in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), being a new born region in the country, studies like this would be essential for the betterment of the education offered in the said region. This study would like to present some experiences of the Bangsamoro learners towards multilingualism and their possible coping mechanism to the difficulties they experienced.

Methods

This paper utilized the qualitative research design employing phenomenology. Qualitative research is a type of social science research that collects and works with non-numerical data and seeks to interpret meaning from these data that help understand social life by studying targeted populations or places. Qualitative research is intended to deeply explore, understand and interpret social phenomena within a natural setting (Creswell, 2017). Moreover, phenomenology is an approach to qualitative research that describes what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon (Creswell et al., 2007).

The study was conducted at Hadji Ali Baganian Memorial Incorporated at Tambunan I, Talayan, Maguindanao. The school is located along the National Highway connecting Cotabato City to General Santos City. It is 38 kilometers from Cotabato City and 172 kilometers from General Santos City. The school is accessible by land transportation. It can be found before the Bridge of Talayan River.
Participants

The participants of this study were the ten (10) Grade 9 students of Hadji Ali Baganian Memorial School Incorporated S.Y. 2018-2019. The class adviser selected the students who obtained average to outstanding levels. In conducting phenomenology, Polkinghorne (1989) recommends to interview 5 to 25 individuals to develop the possibilities of experiences.

Instruments

This phenomenological study utilized a semi-structured interview guide. The instrument contained open-ended questions to gather information about the struggles of Bangsamoro learners on learning Multi-languages. These interviews used an interview protocol to guide the researcher through the interview process. It incorporated conversational aspects; it is primarily a guided conversation between the researchers and the participants. It also allowed the researchers to probe the participants for additional details.

Procedure

Each participant went through a one-shot in-depth interview for the data collection to determine their reactions and experiences about the phenomenon being studied. The in-depth interviews were used to allow the participants to develop their ideas and follow their thoughts (Creswell 2003, as cited in Samson, 2017) in relation to their phenomenon. This research also followed Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) assessment of truth in a qualitative approach.

Data Analyses

This phenomenological study utilized the method described by Colaizzi (1978). First, the researchers familiarized the data by reading through the participants’ accounts several times. Then, the researchers identified all statements in the narratives about the Struggles of Bangsamoro Learners on Learning Multilingualism that directly relate to the phenomenon under investigation.

Finally, there was a verification of the fundamental structure. After producing the fundamental structure, the researcher condensed the detailed description down to a short, dense statement that captured just those aspects deemed essential to the structure of the phenomenon. The researcher returned the fundamental structure statement to all participants to ask whether it captured their experience or not. The researchers may go back and modify earlier steps in the analysis in light of this feedback.

Results and Discussions

The in-depth interviews with the ten participants revealed common patterns regarding their experiences in learning different languages. By selecting significant statements from each transcript of the interview to formulating meaning for each statement and clustering themes, five key themes emerged from the shared stories of the participants presenting the different experiences of Bangsamoro learners in learning Arabic, English, and Filipino language in terms of Phonology, Morphology, Syntax, and Semantics.

The emergent themes captured from the participants' perception and experiences in learning Multilingualism in Phonology were Negative Attitude and Complexity of the Rules. These emerged from ten formulated meanings, which produced three clustered themes:
Language rules, attitude towards language, and students' background of the sound system of the language.

Table 1: The Emergent Themes of the Bangsamoro Learners' Struggles in Learning Multiple Languages in Terms of Phonology

| PHONOLOGY                        | Bangsamoro Learners’ Struggle | Significant Statement                                                                 | Emergent theme                                           |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Difficulties in pronunciation | "In assimilation, repetition of sound." (P3)                                  | Negative Attitude and Complexity of the Rules                                          |
|                                  | "It is difficult because in Arabic, especially in Qur-an,"                    |                                                                                        |
|                                  | Alif at Ain and Alif "A" and Ain "Ah" almost the same sounds." (P9)          |                                                                                        |
|                                  | utterance of "Alif, ba ,Ta ,tha" they should be pronounced properly." (P7)  |                                                                                        |
|                                  | "in pronunciation, especially if I do not know the word." (Participant 10)  |                                                                                        |
| 2. Accent and intonation         | "In accent and pronunciation Ma’am." (P4)                                    |                                                                                        |
|                                  | In accent and intonation in English and Arabic." (P8)                        |                                                                                        |
| 3. Utterance of the consonant letter "L" and "R." | “In Letter “R” (P1)                                                      |                                                                                        |
|                                  | “L” and “R” letters) (P6)                                                   |                                                                                        |
| 4. The inability to recognize or to pronounce the Arabic Alphabet | "From the start, I'm quite slow in Arabic." (P4)                               |                                                                                        |
|                                  | "Of course, it is hard because in Arabic it is essential to know the correct pronunciation of the words." (P5) |                                                                                        |

**Negative Attitude and Complexity of the Rules**

The data gathered from the participants' shared experiences revealed that the Bangsamoro learners have a negative attitude towards the languages and difficulty in the complexity of language rules in terms of phonology. In connection to this, the first identified
struggle reflected in the transcripts was the difficulty in pronunciation, as emphasized by the students.

The responses show that the Bangsamoro learners struggle in learning the sound of English and Arabic languages. This means that the Bangsamoro learners have learning difficulties in pronunciation, which is one of the essential skills in learning the target language. This is because they lack knowledge and interest since learning a second language is not easy because of its complexity of rules. Moreover, the learners have no good exposure in English and Arabic, unlike in the Filipino language and their L1 outside the classroom. The learners likewise carry over the pronunciation features of their L1 to the target languages. In addition, many students fear of mispronouncing words in front of their peers. Thus, learners of multilingualism must have frequent activities using the target language in the classroom for exposure. The work on receptive multilingualism reveals affordances relevant to acquiring receptive skills generated by the interaction of the characteristics of the languages and the traits of the learners (Hufeisen and Marx, 2007). As cited in Elaldi (2016), Hashemi and Abbasi (2013) reported language learners being less anxious and stressed in environments that emphasize collaborative activities among the teachers and the students.

The second identified struggle was on accent and intonation. The participants' answers show that they struggled to learn the accent and intonation in Arabic and English. Errors in individual sounds may affect how strong a learner's accents are perceived to be rather than how far they are accurately understood (Munro and Derwing, 1999). They further added that intonation is more important for how easy relatively advanced speakers are to understand than how far they are understood.

The third difficulty that was identified was the utterance of the consonant letter "L" and "R." The participants were confused since the rules are not consistent in all language specifically in rules of pronunciation and with the speech impediment called Rhotacism (residual error) and Lambdacism (error in pronouncing letter L). One of the most common speech and language disorders a child may experience is an inability to pronounce the /l/ and /l/ sounds correctly. This particular speech impediment is known as rhoticism (Ben-Aharon, 2019).

The behavior towards the language has a significant impact on Bangsamoro learners' proficiency. There are conflicts among the sound systems of L1, L2, and L3, so they strongly build the phonological features of L1 that make them encounter many difficulties distinguishing sound systems between a native language and the other target language. As expressed by the participants, the last identified struggle is their inability to recognize or pronounce the Arabic Alphabet. Each letter represents only one sound in Arabic, so it is easy to read any word from a written text. In addition, no sound is not pronounced (silent), as it happens a lot in English. According to a study by Nunan (2001, as cited in Hassan and Hassan, 2014), a difference in the sound system in the L1 and L2 showed that errors are expected to be committed because the learners transfer their mother tongue sound system into the target language.

Finally, it is manifested that none of the participants meet any struggle in Filipino as far as phonology is concerned. The participants were all exposed to Filipino as their second language.
Table 2: The Emergent Themes of the Bangsamoro Learners' Struggles in Learning Multiple Languages in Terms of Morphology

| MORPHOLOGY |
|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Bangsamoro Learners’ Struggle | Significant Statement | Emergent Theme |
| 1. Affixes | "Root words in Arabic, it is more difficult, so it needs to be studied." (P1) | Poor background of students in words stratification |
| | "Affixes, prefix, and suffixes." (P2) | |
| | "You get confused where the root word is when the word is being added." (P7) | |
| 2. Tense of the verb | "In learning the word derivation, in learning present and past tense ma’am." (P3). | |
| | "I have difficulty in identifying which is present, past, and future tense of them." (P8) | |

Poor Background of Students in Words Stratification

The emergent theme Poor Background of Students in Words Stratification was developed from the participants' perception and experiences in learning multilingualism in terms of Morphology. This was formulated from clustered themes composed of Poor Vocabulary and Word Derivation or Structuring.

The participants' shared experiences revealed that the Bangsamoro learners struggle in Arabic and English in learning morphology. They lack a background in word-formation. The first identified struggle was difficulty learning root words and affixes.

Word formation is another confusing area to study. A root word is the central part of a word; it conveys most of the meaning of a word, and when learners are identifying root words, they learn about affixes as well. For this reason, we must admit that the processes of word-formation, through which every language vocabulary can be enriched, are critical in language teaching and learning (Enesi, 2017).

Moreover, the other participants stated that both in English and in Arabic, morphology was a challenge to them. The responses revealed that participants 8, 4, and 6 had difficulty learning the morphology of Arabic and English languages. Morphology, like other disciplines, enriches with issues that require discussion. As far as learning derivations is concerned, one may notice that some learners, in general, are suffering from how words are formed and what
morphological processes are appropriate to use not only among words but also to distinguish a word from one other.

Morphological errors are one of the most common errors in learning a second or target language because of many factors that may cause. Such as interlingual, intralingual, communication based-strategy, and induced errors categorized by Brown (1998) as cited in Heydari & Bagheri (2012).

Interlanguage errors happen when the mother language interferes with learning the second language. The mother language acts as a harmful interference in learning. It is interference within the second language. Intralingual errors are errors that occur when learning the target language itself. Examples of intralingual errors are overgeneralization, misconceptions, and incomplete rules applications. Communication based-strategy errors are when linguistic forms are available for the learners and can lead to errors.

Finally, it is also observed that none of the participants identified any struggle in learning morphology in Filipino. This is because they are familiar with the Filipino language. Hence, this supports the idea of Heubener (1965), as cited in Thornbury (2002), which states that vocabulary learning is based on the formation of specific habits. Since this involves the association of symbols and their meaning, it is clear that an enrichment of the meaning of the word is as important as its frequent repetition.

Table 3: The Emergent Themes of the Bangsamoro Learners’ Struggles in Learning Multiple Languages in Terms of Syntax

| SYNTAX         | Significant Statement                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Emergent Theme                                                                 |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Bangsamoro Learners’ Struggle |                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                              |
| 1. Grammar rules | "Arabic and English are difficult because there are many rules that need to be familiarized." (P1)                                                                                                                  | Poor Sentence construction due to the complexity of rules                      |
|                | "The rules are most difficult in English and Arabic Ma'am." (P5)                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                              |
|                | "The rules in constructing a correct form of a sentence are complicated for me in Arabic and English." (P10)                                                                                                        |                                                                              |
| 2. Sentence construction | "There are many rules to follow, especially, in Subject-Verb Agreement that's why I have difficulty in constructing a correct form of sentence in both Arabic and English." (P2)       |                                                                              |
Poor Sentence Construction Due to Complexity of Rules

The data gathered from the participants' shared experiences revealed that the Bangsamoro learners were poor in sentence construction due to the complexity of rules. This is produced from clustered themes, grammar rules, and sentence construction.

It was revealed that syntax is the most difficult in learning language as all participants stated that they struggle to learn the grammar rules of Arabic and English. For them, the rules in the construction of correct forms of sentences are complicated, for there are many rules.

Aside from that, the participants emphasized the Subject-Verb Agreement and Parts of Speech as difficult to learn. This implies that one cannot write or speak the language they do not understand. A study by Widianingsih and Guló (2016) emphasized that in learning English, writing ability is the most complicated and challenging language skill to be learned almost by the students in every level of education. Furthermore, within the classroom, any mention of grammar causes the student moments of discomfort and sometimes even terror (Al-Mekhlafi and Nagaratnam, 2011). On the other hand, half of the participants said that Filipino is less difficult to learn; only unfamiliar Filipino words are somewhat hard to understand.

Table 4: The Emergent Themes of the Bangsamoro Learners' Struggles in Learning Multiple Languages in Terms of Semantics

| SEMANTICS                        | Significant Statement                                                                 | Emergent Theme                          |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Bangsamoro Learners' Struggle    |                                                                                       |                                         |
| 1. Antonyms                      | "In antonyms, homophones, synonyms, and the use the words." (P10)                      | Word recognition and correct usage      |
| 2. Synonyms                      | "In synonyms, antonyms, homonyms, and how to use the words." (P2)                      |                                         |
| 3. Homonyms                      | "I have difficulties especially when the words are the same sound but different in meaning in Arabic and English." (P5) |                                         |

Word Recognition and Correct Usage

Word Recognition and Correct Usage was the emergent theme obtained from the participants' perception and experiences in learning multilingualism in terms of semantics. This is formulated from ten formulated meanings from the clustered theme, word recognition, and correct usage of the words.

The participants revealed that the study of meaning is one of the most challenging language components. They all stated that learning Arabic and English language, specifically antonyms, synonyms, and homonyms, is the most difficult to learn.
The responses revealed that the Bangsamoro learners are poor in vocabulary, fail to perceive subtle changes in word meaning, or fail to pick out, name, designate, apply to, or denote different things. This seemed to be influenced again by the participants' background knowledge in Arabic and English since they are not speakers of these languages. Furthermore, the Bangsamoro learners stated that learning semantics challenge them almost all.

The Bangsamoro learners also have struggles in learning English and Arabic as far as semantic are concerned. Vocabulary plays an integral part in learning and serves as the basic building block. In addition, Richards et al. (2002) mentioned that vocabulary is a core component of language proficiency and provides much of the basis for how learners speak, listen, read and write. Without an extensive vocabulary and strategies for acquiring new vocabulary, learners often achieve their potential. They may be discouraged from using language learning opportunities around them, such as listening to the radio, listening to the native speaker, and using language in different contexts, reading, or watching television.

It is difficult to formulate a distinct definition of terms because their use largely overlaps in the literature despite individual preferences. The fact that the meanings of their constituents determine complex purposes is often referred to as the compositionality of natural languages. Therefore, learners must be cautious in using terminologies. This struggle is very common to those learners who have less stock of vocabulary and are not fond of reading. As mentioned by Cunningham (2005), reading text can provide critical opportunities for advancement in vocabulary development. The finding of this study revealed that none of the participants had experienced any struggle in Filipino as far as semantic is concerned.

Table 4: The Emergent Themes of the Bangsamoro Learners’ Struggles in Learning Multiple Languages in Terms of Coping Mechanism

| COPING MECHANISMS                      | Significant Statement                                                                 | Emergent Theme          |
|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Oral practicing                     | "I practiced words several times." (P4)                                                | Intrinsic Motivation     |
| 2. Using Dictionary                    | "The same Ma'am. I asked help to my classmate, and my teachers and I studied at home Ma'am. (P3) |
| 3. Listening attentively and taking down notes | "What I do is I write the meaning of all the words that are the same." (P8)               |                         |
|                                        | "Every time the teachers teach, I'm listening, and I'm taking notes so that I could study at home." (P1) |                         |
4. Internet surfing
"Then the others (synonyms and antonyms) I search using the Google site and ask my teachers and Ustadz." (P2)
"Google is very easy to access, and then all the language can be translated using it." (P5)
"Ah… for me ah.. what I do is I go to Google or any website that I may search about Arabic". (P6)

Intrinsic Motivation

Data analysis found that the participants were intrinsically motivated, for among the strategies used were initiated by themselves. The emergent theme, Intrinsic Motivation, was formulated from the participants' perceptions and experiences about the coping mechanism used in learning different languages. This theme emerged from the developed meanings, which produced clustered themes: attentive listening, taking down notes, tutorial, and internet surfing.

The coping mechanisms used by the participants in their struggles in learning phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics are oral practicing, tutorial using, using a dictionary, listening attentively and taking down notes, and internet surfing as video downloads.

In phonology, the coping mechanism used was oral practice. The repetition of the word is one of the strategies used by the Bangsamoro learners in dealing with the struggles in learning the sound system, specifically in pronunciation of the target languages, English and Arabic. This implies that constant repetition of the words helps them pronounce correctly. Since speaking is required in academic and professional performances, a severe disadvantage is that the lack of oral production skills. Therefore, oral skills have to be developed at an early stage of learning. Hence, by practicing constantly, learners will achieve their objectives. It is essential to encourage your child to practice regularly to see improvement (Ben-Aharon, 2019).

In line with this, downloading video clips is one of the recognized coping mechanisms used by the learners in dealing with the struggles in learning accent and intonation. Today, learners learn and respond more visually and with their learning style. Learning styles are relatively stable behaviors or ways of functioning that indicate how learners perceive and interact with the learning environment, Keefe (1979) as cited in R. Ma, R. L. Oxford (2014).

Moreover, listening attentively and taking notes is another strategy the learners use in dealing with the struggles in learning Phonology, Morphology, Syntax and, Semantics. The statements of the participants reveal that listening attentively and taking notes is one of the strategies used to deal with the struggles in learning multilingualism. With this strategy, the participants could review their lessons at any possible time. This strategy is supported by Rittle-Johnson (2006) which posits that self-explanation was effective when accompanied by either direct instruction or discovery learning. Another coping mechanism used by the participants identified was tutoring in learning phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantic.

The participants stated that it had been a practice to have exclusive tutoring with their teachers, classmates, friends, and parents. Tutoring enables them to learn the different aspects of learning phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantic both in English and Filipino language. According to the participants, tutoring is very effective since it enables them to clear their confusion about a particular topic.
Lastly, most of the participants also acknowledged using internet sites like Google and YouTube and other online apps as their best tools in coping with difficulties in learning phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantic. This implies that the participants find this coping mechanism the best considering that it is very timely and the internet plays a significant role in the lives of young people nowadays. Thus, fan works allow young people to expand their knowledge sphere and interact and collaborate with other young people. The study of Black (2009) suggests that through participation in online fan-related activities, the youth are using language and other representational resources to enact cosmopolitan identities, make transitional social connections, and experiment with new genres and formats for composing.

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