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Interdisciplinary Collaboration in Learners' English Language Enhancement: A Narrative Inquiry on Teachers' Challenges and Strategies

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Experiencing challenges in teaching and implementing strategies for better teaching and learning is part of the profession of teachers, especially when learners come from different walks of life. This narrative inquiry, a qualitative approach based on interviews, stories, and observation, explores interdisciplinary collaboration in learners' English language acquisition from a new perspective by gathering the reflections of four university teachers from two schools (the School of Theology and the School of Education) at a private university in West Indonesia. The study documents teachers' challenges, strategies, and key success factors in meeting the needs of English language learners through interdisciplinary collaboration. Findings revealed that teachers need sufficient training, skills, and digital literacy for effective teaching, learners' English language acquisition, and accommodation for learners' feedback to meet the diverse demands of learners. This study implies that interdisciplinary collaboration enhances language learners' development. Therefore, the study recommends interdisciplinary collaboration between schools.

Keywords: *English language learners, teachers, challenges, strategies, narrative inquiry, West Indonesia*

No matter how diverse and decentralized different schools in a university are, the concept of interdisciplinary collaboration (IC) still stands out as a good contribution to learning, as reflected in various studies (Christensen, Ekelund, Melin, & Widén, 2021; Johnston, Burleigh, & Wilson, 2020). As a result of interdisciplinary collaboration, opportunities are created that may not have been discovered if the collaboration had not taken place (Bird, 2020), has a role to play in learners' successful learning in different disciplines. It is because of the positive contributions IC brings (Johnston et al., 2020).

Interdisciplinary collaboration, conducted between colleagues within or across institutions in research and teaching (Lee, 2008), has shared attributes of successful collaborative skills and pedagogies that contribute to academic development. IC has caused discussion for comprehension of collaborative forms (Porac et al., 2004). Collaboration between different school disciplines enhances pedagogies that cater to improved teaching and learning (Eddy & Garza Mitchell, 2012), including English language learning enhancement.

People worldwide rely on the English language (Crystal, 2003), which has been considered the global lingua franca. The English language globally serves. Since the English language has a growing influence and has infiltrated many disciplines, such as education, there has been a call for teachers to find ways for learners to enhance their English language learning through interdisciplinary collaboration. Teachers in Indonesia also address this concern.

Teachers have some challenges in teaching the English language in Indonesia. It is because learning English as a foreign language in Indonesia seems to cause learners struggles since users still widely use Bahasa Indonesia in their daily conversations (Turmudi & Hajan, 2020). Besides, English is considered the most difficult subject at school (Panggabean, 2015).

This interdisciplinary collaboration was conducted to address this concern about how Indonesians' English language may be enhanced. The following research questions helped guide the exploration of in-depth understanding using the narrative inquiry approach:

1. How did the participants interdisciplinarily collaborate for English learners' language enhancement?
2. What were their challenges?
3. What were their strategies for overcoming their challenges?
4. What attributes and organizational frameworks do successful collaborative research teams demonstrate?
5. How did their experiences inspire them to practice interdisciplinary collaborative research in the future?

Methodology

This section discusses the research design, the research setting, and the participants of the study. It also discusses instrumentation and data procedures. This section closes with ethical considerations.

Research Design

This study is qualitative, using a narrative inquiry. This narrative inquiry is intended to record the participants' experiences as occurrences under study (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006) for in-depth results of the phenomenon regarding the challenges and strategies of the participants in the interdisciplinary collaboration research. Narrative inquiry enables researchers to "enter into lives in the midst of each participant's and each inquirer's life" (Clandinin & Huber, in press p. 10).

Sampling Techniques

This study was conducted in West Indonesia. It involves four participants who were recruited through purposive sampling. The study employed purposive sampling because it is "widely used

in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest” (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, & Hoagwood, 2015, Abstract). The criteria had to be (a) university teachers, (b) teaching in the Theology and Education departments, and (c) having taught at the university for three years. The four participants agreed to voluntarily participate in the study.

Instrumentation

The researcher discussed with the participants what the study was all about before the interviews. The spoken interview encouraged participants to share their challenges and experiences during the interdisciplinary collaboration in English language learning enhancement. Conversations during the interviews were recorded aside from taking notes. Researchers asked further questions to get the gist of the experiences.

Data Analysis

This narrative inquiry enables the researcher to comprehend and inquire into experience through collaboration between the researcher and participants over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. It follows the steps of the data gathering procedures and analysis, which followed the major phases outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) in conducting a narrative inquiry. These major phases are: 1) familiarizing oneself with the data; 2) generating codes; 3) constructing themes; 4) reviewing potential themes; 5) defining and naming themes; and 6) producing the report.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher considered ethical concerns before conducting the research. The researchers explained to the participants the purpose of the research. Any questions and clarifications were settled. Participants signed informed consent. It is significant that research participants need to have complete information about the study, were

not forced but were willing to participate in the study, and that their identity was kept for privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity (Miles, 2014).

Results and Discussion

The participants came up with an overarching theme to summarize their challenges and experiences. It is termed *bersama-sama*, which means teachers can achieve more if they work together. It implies that despite the challenges teaching students from different walks of life may bring, IC promotes learners' achievement. Though IC requires critical thinking and creativity, it can be rewarding.

Recurring Themes

Themes have emerged from the narratives of the participants. These themes include planning, collaboration, teamwork, and support.

Planning

Faculty members have significant roles in any educational transformation (Boyer, 1996; Christensen, Ekelund, Melin, Widén, 2021). The creation of IC from this group of human resources assisted in the advancement of the institution's functions. Thus, after the participants met to have interdisciplinary collaboration, they started planning for what was best for the activity. Everybody contributed to the betterment of the two disciplines.

Collaboration

“Our jobs and responsibilities between two faculties were shared and collaborated” (P2). Participants realized the significance of the collaboration. Collaborative teaching enhances English language teaching because it employs teachers from other disciplines to decide on how to share their expertise as they enhance their lesson delivery in varied ways (Taşdemir & Yildirim, 2017). A study (Pauley & McKim, 2019) showed the need for interdisciplinary communities to develop chances for strength through purposeful interactions.

Interdisciplinary collaboration needs to be pursued in the future (McMurtry, 2013) and even now. "Diverse experiences laid a rich foundation for greater collaboration among researchers" (Johnston, Burleigh, & Wilson, 2020, p. 71). Collaborating with other faculty members "eases] workload demands and [reinvigorates] faculty members in the conduct of their teaching and research" (Eddy & Garza Mitchell, 2012, p. 283)

Though the group found challenges in this IC due to "students' lack of interest" (Participant 1) and "*issues in pronunciation, grammar, and listening*" (Participant 2), they believed that their collaboration would enhance learners' English language. As Participant 1 stressed out,

Students come from different walks of life. Some come from places where English is not used, making them less knowledgeable of the language. These students are less interested since they cannot see the importance of the English language. Not to mention that these students may not be motivated.

Given the different challenges the participants encountered, they tried to motivate students to love English and learn more about it by offering different activities within and without the school premises. They had collaborative worship "*where all the program participants from the two faculties were encouraged to speak English*" (Participant 2). They introduced "*sermons in English, prayer sessions, Monday class interactions in English between students-students and students-teachers, speech contests, and chapel programs*" (Participant 1). Furthermore, "we plan for programs wherein the students are actively involved in using the English language (Participant 1).

The above concepts in learning seemed beneficial because English language learners in Indonesia spend less time learning the language (Panggabean, 2015). Learners attested that English learning activities carried out beyond the

four walls of the classroom made them interested in learning the language (Shanthi & Jaafar, 2020), as in the Sabbath School discussion that challenges leaders to read. It is because reading English is not a habit (Panggabean, 2015). A study (Shanthi & Jaafar, 2020) showed that learners opted for group activities over individual activities because they could refer to other English materials beyond classroom references.

The success of English activities carried out beyond classrooms can be assessed by students' ability to complete the task assigned (the end product) rather than the processes involved in completing the task (Shanthi & Jaafar, 2020). A study (Cirocki et al., 2019) attests that students are dependent on their teachers, who instruct them on what to do to complete their class activities. Learners must have benefited from activities outside the classroom because for them,

"Life in the classroom resembles the hierarchical society outside school, where subservience to those in authority or of higher status is required. As a result, students strictly follow whatever their teachers say, convinced there is only one best solution to a given problem—the teacher's option" (Cirocki & Retnaning, 2019, p. X)

Teamwork

In the process of achieving goals for a common cause—the enhancement of English language learners—the participants had teamwork. They motivated students to be participatory in this program. They believe that motivation plays a role. Thus, they provided English programs even outside the classroom walls. "*We opened the English Sabbath School and Divine Service program*" (P3). "*Students were asked to lead and contribute to the Sabbath School discussion in English*" (P3).

A study (Mauludin, 2021) attests that students prefer activities in a comfortable and enjoyable environment because these motivate them. Motivation

plays a significant role in learners' achievement of goals (Marufet et al., 2022) Motivation enhances learning achievement (Dja'far & Bakstomii, 2016). High motivation may enhance the learning curve significantly" (Ordem, 2017, p. 339).

Furthermore, motivation "maneuvers human beings toward attaining a goal" (Ginsberg, 2015, p. 2). It directs students toward learning attainment (Dörnyei et al., 2006).

Motivation plays a significant role in successful foreign learning (Setiyadi et al., 2019). Motivation prompts learning for the acquisition of a foreign language (Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007).

Though the study of Lena, Trisno, and Khairat (2022) suggests that motivation and interest did not influence learners; that is, motivation and interest were not factors for students' success in learning English, the study of Hendrawijaya (2021) argues that motivation contributes to a significant positive effect on learners' learning interest and that learners' interest was a mediator for learners' learning achievement.

Support

"With the support that has been extended to us by the institution and the support we extended to our students, we observed positive changes. Students were more engaged" (P3). "The support that we received from the other discipline has encouraged us to move forward and plan to collaborate with other or more disciplines in the future" (P2). "It seems that the English department does all the teaching of English to our students. With this interdisciplinary collaboration, I felt our department has a significant role to play in assisting English language enhancement" (P2).

One of the supports that we receive from the institution is technology. Technology enhances teachers' communication abilities (Christensen, Ekelund, Melin, Widén, 2021). Technology assists

faculty members to "distribute knowledge that will transform for the better the existing structures within and around universities" (Kosmützky, 2018, cited in Christensen, 2021).

Conclusion and Recommendation

Though there are challenges in doing IC, the conclusion points out a reflection of the necessity of interdisciplinary collaboration between institutional disciplines. For them, IC offers a wide range of benefits, including the enhancement of learners' English language.

IC research has become an increasing point as a multipurpose response to a range of academic problems, which includes the teaching of English and opportunities for teaching learners through varied strategies and ways. IC is needed to understand not only the challenges but also the strategies for potential success. Given the themes—planning, collaboration, teamwork, and support—that emerged, IC is deemed to be reconducted, but with other disciplines to find more chances of offering better service for the students. Through IC, teachers learn to be more sharing.

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