Students' perceptions on the implementation of ELT in a language center to their multicultural background

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Abstract

This study is aimed at finding out the extent to which students' perceptions towards the roles of language centers in higher education context clearly stated the implication of further better services and management of the language center. The study explores how students perceive the function of a language center in relation to their improvement of their language competence and performance. By using a set of well-developed questionnaires, researchers conducted the study and collected the data from 303 participants of higher education students with multicultural background. The results demonstrate that a language center in a higher education context need to provide diversification as well as standardization, particularly, on language services offered to all of university stakeholders, especially, the students taking parts as active users of the language center. The reported results have shown a special role of a language center and the opportunity of further language policy maker in a university level to illuminate the roles of the language center as an intermediatory between students and academic language services.

Keywords: *Language centers, students' perception, foreign language services, multiculturalism*

INTRODUCTION

Language centers in higher education have a structure and organization that represents the environment, history, and context in which they have grown. Universities have recognized and implemented a variety of remedies to new needs in response to huge increases in demand for language services. A language center's function can be summarized as providing language education and training to non-specialist students, i.e., students who are not majoring in language and literature, studying literary, or linguistic studies. A language center is positioned as a core academic unit in a substantial number higher education context. However, language centers can have a wide range of goals, activities, and resources. An institution may speak more than one language at times.

The functions of language center have been acknowledged by some experts as one of the main factors to boost students' academic capacity. According to Morrison (2008), a language center serves four primary functions: integrating language learning and independent learning together, enabling learners to increase both linguistic competency and independent learning skills, offering appropriate resources, and giving learner support. Their report thus resonates aims of broadening opportunity to higher education nationally and universities' internationalization.

In terms of providing adequate services for foreign language learning, a university language center also meets the demand for university stakeholders. Even though the challenge, particularly that is of students' motivation, is obvious, improving its service to encounter the obstacle can be more practical. This is because motivation and engagement have long been recognized as determinants of foreign language learning and a university language center has its own position to provide the answer (Li, J., King, R.B., and Wang. C., 2022). Despite the fact that language centers are widely spread, there have been few studies on the subject, especially, on students' perceptions towards services provided by a university language center to help them boost their knowledge and competence of learning foreign languages.
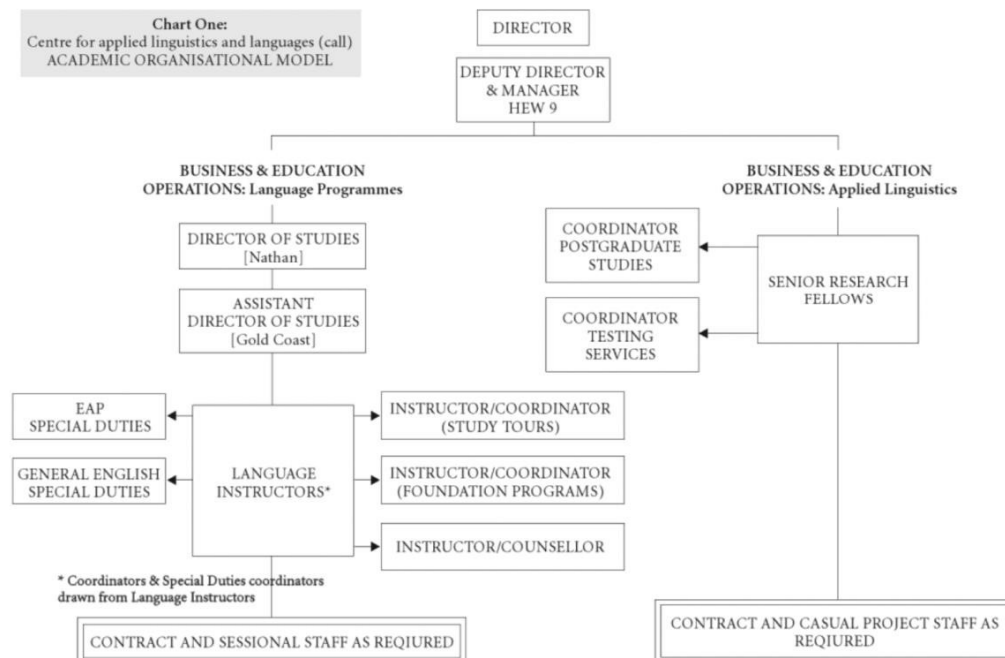
The aim of study is therefore to explore students' perceptions of their experience in relation to their encounter with a language center in the university. More specifically this study examines the following research questions: what is students' perception toward the language center services to help them improve their academic language performance in a multilingual context?

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Revisiting the roles of a university language center

Language centers play an important role in the development and implementation of language policies, as well as in providing support to university stakeholders. Since the demand for academic language competence increased, it became evident that alternative types of education and specialist facilities for non-specialist language students were required. The idea of a language center began to take shape, gently at first and then with greater evidence. Language centers, on the other hand, were modest in the beginning, unsure of their position, and played a minor role in university life. The concept of a 'language center' did not take off in the expert language learning literature right away. For example, language centers are not mentioned in A.P.R. Howatt's comprehensive history of English language teaching, and the term 'language center' is not even listed in the index (Howatt 1984).

The Centre for Applied Linguistics and Languages (CALL)

Chart One:
Centre for applied linguistics and languages (call)
ACADEMIC ORGANISATIONAL MODEL

DIRECTOR

DEPUTY DIRECTOR & MANAGER HEW 9

BUSINESS & EDUCATION OPERATIONS: Language Programmes

BUSINESS & EDUCATION OPERATIONS: Applied Linguistics

DIRECTOR OF STUDIES [Nathan]

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF STUDIES [Gold Coast]

COORDINATOR POSTGRADUATE STUDIES

COORDINATOR TESTING SERVICES

SENIOR RESEARCH FELLOWS

EAP SPECIAL DUTIES

GENERAL ENGLISH SPECIAL DUTIES

LANGUAGE INSTRUCTORS*

INSTRUCTOR/COORDINATOR (STUDY TOURS)

INSTRUCTOR/COORDINATOR (FOUNDATION PROGRAMS)

INSTRUCTOR/COUNSELLOR

* Coordinators & Special Duties coordinators drawn from Language Instructors

CONTRACT AND SESSIONAL STAFF AS REQIURED

CONTRACT AND CASUAL PROJECT STAFF AS REQIURED

Gardner (2011) mentioned a technical concept of a self-access language learning (SALL). It is believed that managing this center is a complex process and unique to each context but there are some basic principles for effective management of the SALL.

B. Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism in education is an approach to teaching and learning that recognizes and values the diversity of cultural backgrounds and experiences that students bring to the classroom. It involves creating an inclusive learning environment that respects and celebrates the differences among students, while also promoting understanding and common ground.

In a multicultural educational setting, teachers and students are encouraged to explore and learn about different cultures, traditions, and ways of life. This includes incorporating diverse perspectives and voices into the curriculum, using materials and resources from a variety of cultures, and creating opportunities for students to share their own cultural experiences and perspectives with one another.

Multiculturalism in education is important because it helps to promote equity and social justice and prepares students to live and work in a globalized world where diversity is increasingly valued. It also helps to create a more inclusive and welcoming school environment, where all students feel valued and respected regardless of their cultural background.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach to understand people's interpretations of reality by considering their experiences and opinions in a specific context. Researchers used an inductive approach to gather data, support the findings, and understand the phenomenon from the participants' point of view (Merriam, 2002). Furthermore, an unstructured interview with open-ended questions delivered to the language center's staff was used as a data collection tool.

Overview of Data Collection

Method	Focus
▪ Questionnaire (n=303)	Language services preferred by students to achieve their academic language performance
▪ Students Semi-structured Interview (n=10)	Students' academic language performance improved
	Students' perception toward language service available in their university

Informed consent forms for respondents were created to justify the ethical consideration. The students could understand the purpose of the research, their level of participation, and the use of the obtained information, that is, for purely academic and research purposes, through these documents. They agreed to fill in the questionnaires anonymously because they understood the scope of the study.

FINDINGS

Based on the survey data obtained, students are generally multilingual. Multilingualism is the ability to use languages interchangeably according to the conditions of the speakers at that time without measuring the ability of the languages used (KBBI; Chaer, 2004). A total of 254 participants (83.83%) used Indonesian in their daily lives, followed using Javanese by 230 participants (75.91%), and English by 54 participants (17.82%). Detailed information about the language used by participants in daily life can be seen in Table below.

No	Languages used in students' daily life	Frequency	Percentage
1	Indonesian	254	83.83%
2	Javanese	230	75.91%
3	English	54	17.82%
4	Sundanese	10	3.30%
5	Arabic	2	0.66%
6	Melayu	2	0.66%
7	Banjar	2	0.66%
8	Bangka	1	0.33%
9	Padang	1	0.33%
10	Bengkulu	1	0.33%
11	Japanese	1	0.33%

12	Palembang	1	0.33%
13	Lampung	1	0.33%
14	Minang	1	0.33%
15	Simalugun	1	0.33%
16	Other local languages	1	0.33%
17	Korean	1	0.33%
18	Mandarin	1	0.33%
19	Spanish	1	0.33%
20	French	1	0.33%

A total of 264 participants (40.18%) of the 303 participants who filled out the survey thought that English should be facilitated by the UNY Language Training Center. In addition, Indonesian (19.18%), Javanese (15.37%), and Arabic (11.42%) were also deemed necessary to be facilitated by the UNY Language Training Center. There are several foreign and regional languages that were also proposed by some participants, detailed data related to these languages are listed in Table below.

No	Languages students perceive the University Language Center needs to teach or facilitate	Frequency	Percentage
1	English	264	40.18%
2	Indonesian	126	19.18%
3	Javanese	101	15.37%
4	Arabic	75	11.42%
5	Mandarin	26	3.96%
6	Deutsch	17	2.59%
7	Japanese	17	2.59%
8	French	12	1.83%
9	Korean	9	1.37%
10	Spanish	5	0.76%
11	Romanian	1	0.15%
12	Sign Language	1	0.15%
13	Sundanese	1	0.15%
14	Thai	1	0.15%
15	Dutch	1	0.15%

According to the findings, most of the students choose English as their preferred language service because it is one of students' requirement to graduate from the university and is of the most in-demand languages for finding work. Furthermore, some students take English courses solely to fulfill a graduation requirement. Furthermore, there are some complications regarding the development of speaking skills in online English learning. In addition, low student participation is caused by a lack of interest or a fear of making mistakes. As a result, different techniques and methods must be implemented to carry out the teaching-learning process of English as a proficiency in an effective manner and thus meet all of the students' expectations.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Despite the fact that students are in the need to improve their academic language proficiency, especially in English, it cannot be simply put aside the relevance and significant importance of multilingual aspect of the students. Coming from different sociocultural background, the students essentially have enough comprehensible input which should be considered by language center stakeholders, particularly when providing the services, developing curriculum, as well as appropriately provide materials that address and help the students find their comprehensible input during the process of learning the language.

It is, therefore, the multicultural context of the students must be seen as the strength to dig more deeply what program and services the language center in higher education should have and thus it can eventually help not just the students, but also all of the university stakeholders, to fully engaged and finally can achieve their expected outcome of their academic language proficiency level.

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