

Identity and Engagement in EAP Writing Classes for Multilingual Learners

Litong Nan

School of Education, The University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia

Abstract: In the past, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) mainly focused on the language system and structure of school life. Recently, many scholars have been studying how writing can also serve as a tool for self-construction and identity formation in the modern era. Examine the complex relationship between identity and participation of multilingual learners in EAP writing classes in this paper. According to post-structuralist theories of identity and multi-dimensional models of student engagement, this study finds that language learners are not communication-impaired individuals but rather complex people with various cultural and academic demands that need to be managed simultaneously. Based on the analysis, authorial presence, social investment and power relations directly affect how much students are willing to participate in academic writing activities at different levels of behaviour, emotion and cognition. In addition, this paper also proposes some practical teaching strategies that promote the construction of an all-inclusive learning environment, such as translanguaging, culturally sensitive feedback, and dialogic teaching. In the end, the study believes that recognising and honouring the various identities of multilingual learners will foster a sense of belonging and drive them to learn better in higher education.

Keywords: Identity Construction; Student Engagement; Multilingual Learners; English for Academic Purposes; Translanguaging; Academic Writing.

1. Introduction

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programmes have traditionally served as the first port of entry for multilingual students in English-medium higher education. For many years, the main teaching mode in these courses has been too focused on practicality and too concentrated on text-based learning; thus, students have not been adequately prepared in terms of structural conventions, syntactical accuracy, or specialised vocabulary required for high-level academic communication. Under the above traditional system, scholarly writing was regarded as a relatively neutral and technical ability that could be learned by repeated practice and linguistic imitation. Multilingual learners were often framed through a deficit model, viewed primarily as non-native speakers lacking the linguistic capital needed to succeed in the high-pressure environment of school. Thus, the reduced approach failed to recognise the extensive cultural and linguistic resources available to these students beforehand.

However, the form of higher education around the world has changed significantly. With the increasing diversity of university classes, scholars and educators are now aware that academic writing is not entirely objective. On the other hand, it is an all-encompassing idea that pervades the institutions of power. When a multilingual learner tries to write a university paper in a foreign language, they are not merely translating their thoughts; rather, they are actively exploring a new culture and system of knowledge. Navigation is relatively taxing on the mind and emotions. At all times, students are adjusting their sense of self and deciding which elements of national identity to reveal and which to conceal in order to conform to the standards of Western academic discussion. As a result, the study of EAP has shifted to focus on sociological problems related to learners' identities and classroom participation in recent years.

Identity and involvement at the intersection provide the

reasons why some teaching methods work well for some students but not others. If a student feels that their core identity is being ignored or diminished by the school curriculum, they will lose the will to learn. At the same time, if the environment of a classroom acknowledges and uses the various backgrounds of its students, they will be more engaged in learning. Thus, research will be conducted to explore the reasons behind the above phenomenon. This paper will explore the connection between identity construction and student engagement in EAP writing classes. After the above introduction, Section 2 will present the theoretical foundations for identity in applied linguistics. Section 3 will introduce different kinds of learner engagement and how they are related to identity negotiation. Section 4 will put forward some specific teaching ideas to build identity-affirming, highly engaging writing spaces. Finally, Section 5 will summarize the results and explore the broader implications of these findings for the future development of higher education in this paper. The previous model failed to recognise the intelligence of these students and set up an all-powerful power imbalance in the classroom. The main academic culture was presented as the correct one without exception, and students' home cultures and their first languages were viewed as deficiencies to be corrected. As a result, the first goal of teaching early academic writing was to eliminate differences and guide all students towards a single, ideal standard of native-speaker proficiency. Research in sociology and linguistics has also shown that, over time, the belief that superior academics must be culturally or linguistically inferior has been proven wrong. Rather, a strong educational system should be able to recognize the socio-political context of the lives of international and multilingual students in higher education today and respond accordingly.

2. Theoretical Perspectives on Identity in EAP

Conceptualisation of identity in applied linguistics has changed significantly, and now, post-structuralist thought is being used to explore how identity is constructed. Based on the above theory, language learners are no longer regarded as having a fixed, uniform identity determined by their native language or country of origin. Social identity is now thought to be fluid and multiple, changing with life in different social settings and language use [1]. Multilingual learners create their own sense of self in the writing they produce during learning activities, as well as present various views and perspectives on issues. The idea of a "discursive self" refers to specific language characteristics that writers intentionally or unintentionally use in harmony with or in contradiction to the prevailing values in their fields of study [3]. The negotiation of authorial identity is also relatively complicated; at the same time, students need to meet the requirements of academic discourse while also expressing their own culture and language [11].

One type of identity construction is the creation of an authorial figure. The traditional EAP instructions regularly told students not to use first-person pronouns and to speak in a very objective, detached way. However, recent studies have shown that an author's clear persona, acting as a legitimate advocate for the content in academic writing, can be established to a certain extent [5]. Multilingual learners may have difficulty in asserting authority because they do not feel that they have the right to express their opinions individually, and the cultural background they are familiar with might not support this kind of independent thought. As a result, the act of writing becomes a place for the expression of identity, and learners need to reconcile various cultural systems to construct an acceptable academic persona.

In order to better understand the above changes, scholars have put forward the idea of 'investment' as an all-encompassing alternative to the traditional theory of motivation. Motivation is generally considered a fixed psychological quality of a person; on the other hand, investment is related to the social environment, a changing sense of self, and power relations in the target language community. When a multilingual learner studies for their college entrance exams through written assignments, they hope that by learning this method, they will be able to gain the rewards of higher education and better job prospects [10]. However, this investment will only be possible if the learner is accepted by the school. If the teaching environment continues to view them as inadequate or inferior, the expected return on investment will be low; thus, there will be reduced participation, silence or lack of enthusiasm. Thus, identity is not just an abstract theoretical concept, but the foundation for both the economy and mind of students that motivates them to face the challenges in learning English as a second language. In light of the above situation, one must also consider the impact of all-around systemic problems in the institutions on this matter. The rules and customs of academic discussion are generally implicit; otherwise, they would have been clearly stated, and not all kinds of knowledge would have been accepted as valid. Multilingual learners often need to adjust their fundamental epistemological worldviews in order to learn these conventions. It will be a bit disorienting. When a student tries to explain a difficult theoretical idea, at the same time they have to deal with the complexity of a

foreign language's structure and the expectations for ideologically sound expressions from their teachers. If the student's main identity is continuously corrected or pathologised at this time, they may develop a defensive academic attitude and, out of fear, be unable to take intellectual risks required for high-level studies. Therefore, to establish a good academic identity, one needs to be able to express oneself and think well, have strong psychological resilience, and be socially aware.

3. The Dynamics of Learner Engagement in Writing

With the new theory of learner identity, research on students' sense of belonging has begun. Engagement is not limited to a student's observable on-task behaviour; it is a combination of behaviour, emotion and cognition [6]. Behavioural engagement is active participation, perseverance and effort in one's studies. Emotional engagement refers to the student's emotions and feelings in the classroom, such as their sense of belonging, interest, or anxiety. Cognitive engagement refers to the extent of psychological commitment and self-regulation in learning new knowledge and skills. The three dimensions of engagement listed above are closely related to how the identities of multilingual learners are recognised and valued by members of the academic community in EAP environments.

When students feel that their diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds are marginalised or disregarded by the institutional culture, they are more likely to experience a deep sense of alienation and feel like outsiders in academia [2]. This alienation results in a lack of emotion and can cause anxiety, a sense of failure, etc. Emotionless people are less likely to have bad behaviour or think wrongly. A student who feels intellectually illegitimate is unlikely to participate in the peer-review session, seek out the teacher for help, or put in the effort to write and revise the difficult academic paper. The writing process has degraded to mere application of rote memorisation to meet the minimal demands of the assignment and avoid any disciplinary action from the school.

At the same time, students will be more motivated to learn when they feel they have a say in how and why they are learning. The process of becoming a full member of the academic community requires continuous and active negotiation of competence and power [7]. When EAP instructors view multilingual learners as capable and have them use their various cultural backgrounds to learn, these students are more willing to participate. They are well-known and respected people. A good mood can make people want to do things. For example, in collaborative group projects across the university curriculum, whether non-native speakers' contributions are valued or overlooked by their native-speaking peers and instructors often depends on how much they care about one's own language skills [4]. When their identity as capable scholars is acknowledged, their cognitive engagement will be enhanced, and thus more refined rhetorical choices and extensive literary syntheses can be made in their works to express a strong authorial voice. Therefore, the motivation for students to participate actively in the EAP writing classroom should not be a high-stakes grade or punishment for missing class; instead, a place that supports the development of complex, multilingual identities needs to be created.

4. Pedagogical Strategies for Fostering Identity and Engagement

Considering that the two are closely related, we have had to rethink how to teach in our EAP writing classes. Traditional monolingual instructional methods in schools do not permit the use of a student's first language and thus fail to foster the all-round development of their minds and sense of self [8]. To inspire genuine and all-encompassing participation from all students, teachers can use culturally sustaining pedagogies that fully exploit the various linguistic systems students have learned. A typical theoretical and practical system that has emerged in this sense is translanguaging. Translanguaging is a way of using all the languages one is proficient in flexibly and freely to communicate; it does not require that one's languages be strictly separated [9].

Integrate translanguaging in the writing process of EAP to have students use their first language during brainstorming, outlining and the first draft. Therefore, it is hoped that the emotional barrier and the large amount of mental effort required for writing difficult academic content in another language can be reduced. By allowing students to first express their thoughts in the language they are more comfortable with intellectually, teachers acknowledge that students are already capable thinkers. When the students translate and modify these ideas in academic English later on, the resulting works are generally richer in content and more authoritative in tone. The writing will no longer be a simple act of translation but rather an authentic expression of their bilingual intelligence, and thus they will be more willing to invest in it.

Foster the identity and interest in learning through culturally appropriate dialogic feedback. The old-fashioned correction mode mainly points out mistakes in grammar and syntax; as a result, students who are learning at a higher level struggle to use written expressions independently. The teacher can use the dialogue method for feedback and present the corrections as a conversation with the writer rather than pointing them out directly. Ask the student for their own thoughts on why they believe the rules should be so, confirm how strongly they feel about this reasoning, and then explain to them why certain rules should be followed so they can better understand. With such a supportive pedagogy, the writing classroom will become a safe space for identity exploration, and multilingual learners will feel emotionally supported and intellectually stimulated to be actively engaged in learning all the time.

5. Conclusion

Research on the concept of identity and participation in English for academic purposes writing classes shows that they are closely linked and intricate. With the globalisation of higher education, the traditional deficit-oriented model of language teaching is no longer suitable or fair for all students. Academically written works can be considered private spaces for self-construction of identity and exploration of ideology, rather than being regarded as purely objective exercises in grammar and syntax. Multilingual learners are not empty vessels to be filled with the conventional norms of Western academia; rather, they are all different people with rich linguistic and cultural resources. Each essay they write is, in fact, both an adaptation to the new institutional norm and an inheritance of traditional Chinese culture.

When the teaching environment does not recognise all kinds of students' identities, these students will feel marginalised and lose their interest in learning, affecting their behaviour, emotions and thinking. A pedagogy based solely on assimilation and correction will inevitably silence the students, take away their sense of authorship, and turn learning into a feeling of alienation. On the other hand, if EAP classrooms function as inclusive and culturally responsive spaces, students will be motivated to learn more eagerly. With the help of a pedagogical system that honours linguistic diversity, such as translanguaging and dialogic feedback, the task of writing can be converted into a form of self-expression.

Finally, the future direction of teaching English in schools requires a fundamental change in thought. Higher education institutions should stop requiring strict linguistic uniformity and start creating a warm environment for all kinds of ideas and expressions. The EAP instructor no longer needs to point out grammatical mistakes in the students' work; instead, they can help the students boost their self-confidence as learners. Only in this case will educators be able to fully unlock the potential of multilingual learners and sustain their interest in learning, achieve excellent academic results, and make significant long-term contributions to the international academic community.

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