

THE MULTILINGUAL STUDENTS' VOYAGE TOWARDS INTERNATIONAL SCALE SETTINGS: CHALLENGES AND EXPECTATIONS



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Abstract:

The current study aims at tracking the social and academic linguistic performance of international students from three African countries studying in the Algerian universities. The early stage of involvement in a new different multilingual context can affect significantly the academic practices of international students. To get in-depth insights into this area of research a qualitative study during the academic year 2020/2021 was conducted at the universities of El-Oued and Annaba. Two data gathering tools were utilized, a questionnaire as well as a structured interview. The findings reveal that the students' prior experiences as being members in small-scale multilingualism settings enabled them to adhere quickly to a larger multilingual scale. A cultural openness was also noticed among the host society when peer colleagues' curiosity to know about the other different led them to be in close contact with international students.

keywords: Code-Switching ; Code-Mixing; Multilingualism; Multiculturalism.

Introduction

In a globalized world, monolingual individuals face different challenges to conduct their social, economic, cultural and academic tasks efficiently. The phenomenon of multilingualism imposed itself as people around the world are more interested than any time before in acquiring

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other languages different from their mother tongues so as to cope with novelties imposed by the modern digitalized world. The phenomenon of multilingualism is specifically affecting the young as they are in permanent search for ameliorating their academic and social realities. Hence, immigrating to other countries for different reasons is widely observed among the youth. This mobility is mainly noticed among university students who will do their best to cope with new multilingual settings. For this reason, the present research aims at tracking the social and academic performance of international students studying in the Algerian universities. The phenomenon of multilingualism has been approached by different disciplines such as linguistics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and education. Consequently, the present study seeks to answer the following questions:

- How can international students cope with the new linguistic diversity in a host country?
- How can the small scale and large scale forms of multilingualism affect students?

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section is devoted to providing a theoretical background of the study. Hence, defining certain notions related to the subject of the study are illustrated. Definitions of multilingualism, multiculturalism, code-switching and code-mixing are provided.

1.1. Multilingualism

Multilingualism is ‘the presence of a number of languages in one country or community or city’ Aronin, L. (2018:1). Cenoz and Genesee (1998) stated that the multilingual competence consists in using “several languages appropriately and effectively for communication in oral and written language” (p. 17).

Multilingualism is defined by the European Commission (2007) as: “the ability of societies, institutions, groups and individuals to engage, on a regular basis, with more than one language in their day-to-day lives” (p. 6).

According to Li (2008:4) a multilingual individual is “anyone who can communicate in more than one language, be it active (through speaking and writing) or passive (through listening and reading”. As for Aronin and Singleton (2008 cited Cenoz, 2013), they see that differences in the features of historical and contemporary multilingualism can be categorized as follows:

- Geographical: In comparison with the past, multilingualism is not limited to geographically close languages or to specific border areas or trade routes. It is a more global phenomenon spread over different parts of the world.
- Social: Multilingualism is no longer associated with specific social strata, professions, or rituals. It is increasingly spread across different social classes, professions, and sociocultural activities.
- Medium: In the past, multilingual communication was often limited to writing, and mail was slow. In the 21st century, because of the Internet, multilingual communication is multimodal and instantaneous.

(Cenoz, J. 2013: 4)

There must be a differentiation between 'Individual multilingualism' and 'Societal multilingualism'. The former refers to the utilization of more than two languages by an individual person whereas the latter refers to the linguistic diversity that can exist in a country.

In the Algerian context, multilingualism is inherited from the colonization period. Arabic and French are used as two important languages in both formal and informal settings in addition to English which imposed itself in recent years because of the revolution in technology that made it a lingua franca of commerce and communication. Many intellectual people in Algeria are now masters of three languages: Arabic French and English; this helped the Algerian society to accept the linguistic diversity.

1.2. Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is a term used to indicate the existence of a variety of cultures in a given geographical area. This diversity in culture is due to the existence of different ethnic groups. Bekker and Leilde (2003) state that 'multiculturalism' is a term that can be regarded:

- As a description of the state of cultural diversity in a society
- As an ideology aimed at legitimising the incorporation of ethnic diversity in the general structure of society
- As a public policy.

Bekker and Leilde (2003: 121)

1.3. Code-Switching

Bhatia and Ritchie (2013) define Code-switching as “the use of various linguistic units (words, phrases, clauses, and sentences) primarily from two participating grammatical systems across sentence boundaries within a speech event” (p.376). Furthermore, Bhatia and Ritchie (2013) state that ‘creativity and complexity are the two salient features of code-mixing and code-switching’.

1.4.Code- Mixing

Gumperz (1982) defines the code mixing as ‘the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems’ (p.59). According to Halmari (2004), the code mixing is ‘the mixing of two or more languages within the same conversational episode’ (p.115). Both code-switching and code mixing are widely found in the Algerian context in all forms of communication whether formal or informal.

2. METHODOLOGY

This section is devoted to present the methodology adopted by the present researcher so as to generate and analyze data. It also clarifies the sampling method utilized to select the participants from the target population. After analyzing the data, the findings and the discussion were presented in order to provide implications and recommendations in the conclusion section. A qualitative research during the academic year 2020/2021 was conducted at the universities of El-Oued and Annaba in Algeria.

2.1. Participants

The first category of participants consists of twenty five international students coming from three African countries: Mali, Mauretania and Nigeria pursuing their studies in two branches: humanities and exact sciences in two Algerian universities, the university of El-Oued and the university of Annaba. The second category of participants comprises five Algerian university teachers, from both universities, who have taught those international students. The table 2.1 on the next page illustrates the participants’ categories.

Table 2.1 The Participants of the Study

Categories	N	Universities	Branches
International students	25	05 in El-oued University 20 in El-Oued University	07 in humanities 18 in Exact sciences
Teachers	05	02 from El-Oued Univ 03 from Annaba Univ	02 in humanities 03 in Exact sciences

2.3. Sampling

A purposive sampling was adopted to select the participants of the study because it is efficient and time and effort saving. Specifically, a snow- ball method of sampling was utilized. The prior knowledge of the present researcher with teacher participants led to know about the student participants.

2.3. Data Gathering Tools

Two data gathering tools were utilized, a questionnaire and a structured interview. The tools are illustrated as follows:

The questionnaire targeted twenty five international students. It was sent to their teachers who in turn assumed the responsibility of distributing and collecting the questionnaire and sending it back to the present researcher who has a prior knowledge with the five teachers.

The questionnaire is composed of three different parts. The first part seeks to elicit background information on the international students: age, gender, nationality, specialization, reasons for existing in the Algerian universities as well as the duration of their stay in Algeria. The second part is devoted to investigate the students' prior linguistic experiences. They are asked about the dialects spoken in their countries of origin as well as the official languages utilized in schools and academic institutions. They were also asked to evaluate the linguistic diversity in their countries.

The third part of the questionnaire aims at finding information about the students' present linguistic experiences. This part comprises three sections. The first section is about the shift to a larger multilingual community. The second section is about the academic and social performance in the host country. The third section investigates the students' impressions about the host country.

The second investigation tool was the structured interview conducted via telephone conversation with five university teachers who have been teaching international students for many years. The interview consists of five questions that focus on these elements: multilingualism versus monolingualism and their relation with the students' academic achievements , the correlation between the linguistic diversity and the cultural openness, the shift from small-scale multilingualism (SSML) to larger multilingual scale, the relationship between the new different multilingual context and the academic practices of international students and finally methods that teachers adopt to facilitate the international students' integration in the host academic institutions.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that the student participants are aged between 22 and 28 years old. Most of them are male students. They are from three African countries: Mali, Mauretania and Nigeria. Ten of them are pursuing their studies in humanities and fifteen of them study in exact sciences' branch . They study in two Algerian universities: the university of El-Oued and the university of Annaba. Most of them have been in Algeria for, at least, two years and become international students as a result of students' mobility programs. All participants said that dialects do exist in their countries of origin and confirmed that in schools, English ,French and Spanish are used as a medium of instruction.

They stated that their countries of origin enjoy a linguistic diversity which is also found in Algeria because of the existence of different languages: Arabic, French and English. They added that the different dialects spoken by Algerians contributed in constructing its linguistic richness. They argued that their experience in moving from a small- scale multilingualism to a larger scale was done in a smooth way since they were already accustomed to linguistic diversity. They clarified that the difficulties encountered were not related to the issue of diversity in itself but rather related to the new dialects found in the host country which are totally different from their own dialects. Moreover, they considered the code-switching and the code mixing used by Algerians- including colleagues, teachers and administrative staff- in their daily official and informal conversations as a source of difficulty and misunderstanding in certain cases.

The international students also stated that the new linguistic reality in the host country did not hamper them from developing their academic performance, on the contrary, it strengthened it. Participants said that the academic setting assisted in reassuring them by providing all sorts of support, orientation and advise. They see that the host society accepted the otherness' differences and they did not encounter any difficulties when dealing with people inside and outside the academic institutions. They always find people in their service when they ask for clarifications, guidance or assistance. They consider Algeria as a suitable place for welcoming international students because the multilingualism phenomenon found in this country led to a multiculturalism phenomenon.

As far as the interview conducted with the teachers, the findings reveal that the teacher participants argued that the multilingual student is more likely to gain more academic achievements than a monolingual one because the monolingual students are subject to encounter problems while searching information in a digitalized world mastered by languages mainly English. The participants also stated that the linguistic diversity contributes in building the cultural openness of the multilingual society. According to them, enjoying multicultural environment in a given society is a direct result of its acceptability to others' cultures.

Moreover, teachers see that belonging to SSML settings enable students to adhere quickly to a larger multilingual scale because students are already prepared to be fully immersed in other societies enjoying multiple cultures and languages. However, they see that the early stage of involvement in a new different multilingual context affects the academic practices of international students since the environment is different from their original countries. Teachers added that this difficulty can be overcome if teachers adopt certain methods to facilitate the international students' integration in the host academic institutions. Teachers can make international students in permanent contact with local students by integrating them in different heterogeneous groups that comprise different nationalities when involving in group work or when giving assignments.

The findings of the study reveal that participants' prior experiences as being members in SSML settings enabled them to adhere quickly to a larger multilingual scale. Their arrival from an environment that originally used to utilize several dialects, a mother tongue, and one or two official study languages such as French or English in academic institutions enriched their readiness to accept otherness' differences.

This cultural openness was also noticed among the host society when peer colleagues' curiosity to know about the other different led them to be in close contact with international students. Participants also signaled the importance of participation in the cultural and scientific events organized by the host universities. According to them, this enabled them to gain more interaction with different colleagues from different countries and thus constitutes an opportunity to improve the language practices at the academic and social levels. They added that engaging in group work activities and assignments designed by teachers

also enabled them to be closer to locals and therefore exchanging conversations and sharing ideas were easier.

Despite the advantages of being a member in a bigger multilingual community, the participants declared that they faced some impediments that hampered them from the ease of acclimatization such as the loss of parts of their local identities so as to cope with the new linguistic environment. Moreover, they faced challenges to cope with the translanguaging, the code-switching and the code-mixing that characterized the discourse of the host community especially in the first six months of their stay in the Algerian territory.

Conclusion

The current study was conducted to track the social and academic linguistic performance of international students from three African countries studying in the Algerian universities. Previous studies signaled that students belonging to minoritized small-scale multilingualism (SSML) once shifting to larger-scale settings will be more prepared to social integration. However, the early stage of involvement in a new different multilingual context can affect significantly the academic practices of international students.

The findings of the study come to answer the research questions. They revealed that participants' prior experiences as being members in SSML settings enabled them to adhere quickly to a larger multilingual scale. Despite the advantages of being a member in a bigger multilingual community, the participants declared that they faced some impediments that hampered them from the ease of acclimatization such as the loss of parts of their local identities, translanguaging, code-switching and code-mixing. The significance of the present study lies in its pedagogical implications concerning designing syllabuses, implementing flexible linguistic policies as well as encouraging students' mobility programs among different countries. Recommendations were provided to reinforce and activate the role of the educational support unit for international students so as to enable them to be fully immersed in the novel multilingual situation. Further future research focusing on the otherness studies is also recommended.

Bibliography List :

1. Aronin, L. (2018). Lecture 1: What Is Multilingualism?. 10.21832/9781788922074-003.

- Exact Sciences
- Other:

.....

4- How long have you been studying in the Algerian universities?

.....

5- You are an international student as a result of:

- A scholarship
- Students' mobility program

PART TWO: Students' Prior Linguistic Experiences

- 1- Do dialects exist in your country of origin?
Yes No
- 2- If Yes, how many dialects are found in your home town?
.....
.....
- 3- In schools, which languages are officially used for instruction?
.....
.....
- 4- How do you evaluate the linguistic diversity in your country of origin?
- 5-

PART THREE: Students' Present Linguistic Experiences

SECTION ONE: The Shift to a Larger Multilingual Community

- 1- -How did you find the linguistic diversity in Algeria?
.....
.....

- 2- - Did you encounter difficulties when moving from a small scale multilingualism to a larger scale?

Yes No

- 3- If yes, what types of difficulties have you encountered?
.....
.....

SECTION TWO: Academic and Social Performance in the Host Country

1- Has the new linguistic reality in the host country hampered you from developing your academic development?

Yes

No

2- If yes, provide more details.

.....
.....

How did the academic setting assist in reassuring the international students?

.....
.....

SECTION THREE: Students' Impressions About the Host Country?

1- Do you see that the host society accept otherness' differences?

Yes

No

2- If yes, explain how the host society managed to do that.

.....
.....

How do you evaluate the multilingualism and the multiculturalism phenomena in Algeria?

.....
.....

Thank you for your Cooperation

Appendix Two: The Teachers' Interview

1- Do you consider that the multilingual student is more likely to gain better academic achievements than a monolingual one?

2- How can the linguistic diversity contribute in building the cultural openness of the multilingual society?

3- Do you see that belonging to small-scale multilingualism settings enable students to adhere quickly to a larger multilingual scale?

4- How can the early stage of involvement in a new different multilingual context affect the academic practices of international students?

5- What methods can teachers adopt to facilitate the international students' integration in the host academic institutions?