

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research method employed in the present study to collect and analyze data in order to answer the research question. It starts with the description of the research design, followed by the research question, data source, data collection, data analysis, and finally data presentation.

3.1 Research Design

This research adopts a qualitative approach with narrative inquiry as its specific research method. Qualitative approach is used when the researcher aims to seek meaning and in-depth understanding of a particular situation (Levitt, Motulsky, Wertz, Morrow, & Ponterotto, 2017; Strauss & Corbin, 2008). To do so, qualitative research may make use of interviews, diaries, journals, or open-ended questionnaires to obtain, analyze, and interpret the data (Mohajan, 2018). Narrative inquiry is deemed appropriate for the present study as it allows me, the researcher, to ‘see’ details of experiences, interpret, and make sense of these experiences in order to understand the social reality being constructed (Creswell, 2009; Mohajan, 2018). This research, therefore, is descriptive in nature as descriptions of the experiences or issues concerning the researcher identity are used as the source of data. In the subsequent paragraphs, I elaborate further my choice for narrative inquiry and explain how such inquiry is able to unravel the complexity of one’s identity, which lies at the heart of the present study.

The study of narratives seeks to understand the ways people experience the world. Narrative itself has been regarded as “a fundamental structure of human experience” (Bell, 2005, p. 2). Individuals’ narratives, therefore, can provide a rich source of data in qualitative research (Bell, 2005). Throughout history, experiences have been shared in the form of narratives, and the stories that have been told, in turn, provide the opportunity for others to learn something from. As Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) contend, narrative inquiry should develop a space for learning not only for the self but also for others, which may then provide insights and allow connection between people.

Speaking of narratives as a tool for meaning making, narratives, then, can also be seen as a means to understand one's identity. Through narratives, people do not only make sense of the world and their relationship to the world, but also the relationship between themselves and their selves. In light of this, according to Ricoeur (1991), identity is produced through narrative. Lawler (2002) also points out that in order to find out how people make sense of the world and of their own selves, "we will have to attend to the stories they tell" (p. 255). With this being said, in narrative research, narrative thus holds a crucial role in understanding the self, others, and the world.

The view that "life is lived forward and understood backwards in a 'spiral movement' of constant interpretation and reinterpretation" (Lawler, 2002, p. 251) is an important tenet in narrative inquiry; the act of interpreting (and reinterpreting) is key to understanding people's experiences and the nature of their identities. However, the act is not without challenges and limitations; issues surrounding accuracy of memory, its reliability and validity often arise as people recall their experiences, which may then affect how these narratives are interpreted. In view of this, narratives cannot be said to *exactly* represent life, as they, in the act of telling, are commonly "rearrange[d], redescribe[d]...and revise[d]" (Bochner, as cited in Gandana, 2008, p. 25). Likewise, interpretations of past narratives should not be seen as static; they can change from time to time, continually being reinterpreted in light of one's present self and understanding. This then leads to the existence of multiple 'truths' embedded within one's narratives. As Lawler (2002) explains:

Stories are actively worked up by social actors, though not, of course, from an endless repertoire of social narratives: only some things can be said at all; and only some things can be said from any specific social and historical location. The 'truths' people produce through such stories are not 'truths' as conventionally understood in positivist social science: nevertheless, they do speak certain 'truths' about people's (socially located) lives and identities (p. 254).

The most important issue about the argument is that, in qualitative inquiry, multiple interpretation is valid. As the aim of this research is to understand the construction of my identity, the “post-modern subject” (Hall & Du Gay, 2006, p. 277), through recalling and making meaning of my experiences in the postmodern world, there should be no expectation on the part of the readers to obtain one generalized and objective truth; rather, this study offers a subjective worldview within which exists multiplicity of truths. Furthermore, the majority of literature regarding narrative inquiry argue that the study of narrative cannot be perceived as traditional quantitative study which foregrounds scientific methods and facts.

Despite the challenges and limitations, narrative inquiry is believed to be the most preferred method used by researchers who “are particularly interested in understanding and depicting the complexities of human experience and in capturing the richness of meaning” (Gandana, 2008, p. 26). In addition, narratives of one’s experiences provide insights of certain aspects of life and pathways for others to learn something from. This is in line with one of the main purposes of narrative inquiry which is “to provoke, challenge, and illuminate” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 20). In view of the aforementioned reasons, I therefore consider narrative inquiry as the most suitable method in order to understand the process of my identity construction.

3.2 Research Question

This self-study is conducted to seek the answer of the following question: How has the exposure to English contributed to shaping my sense of ‘who I am’—my identity—as an Indonesian?

3.3 Research Participant and Data Source

As this research is a self-study, the source of the data is myself, Luthfiah, a Sundanese-ethnic, Indonesian-born woman. This study was motivated by my own experience of going abroad with no prior advanced proficiency in the English language and thus being ‘forced’ to use it at school in order to ‘survive’. My first ‘real’ encounter with English abroad brought long-life impacts on my perceptions towards English. Although I only spent two years living in Qatar and attending an

international school there, the language has affected some parts of my life and contributed to shaping who I am now. Thus, this self-study drew on my own lived experiences, which I wrote in the form of narratives. Through this study, I believe that not only can I gain a better understanding about myself and the world around me, but also allows the readers to learn something and gain some insights into aspects of life.

3.4 Data Collection

The data used in this study were in the form of written personal narratives. The narratives were written soon after I had decided to embark on a narrative inquiry study; using a research question as a point of departure, I pondered upon the significant moments I had with English, the particular dimension of identity that I wanted to talk about, and experiences in relation to the selected dimension of my identity. Therefore, the narratives were based on my personal lived experiences that revolved around my exposure to and perceptions of the English language, which I feel to have given a significant contribution in shaping my identity as an Indonesian. It took me two months to write these narratives as recalling memories was not always easy. Therefore, in reconstructing my narratives, there were some ‘tools’ that I used to help me recall and narrate my experiences; among these tools were photographs, diaries, school notebooks, and social media status. There are five narratives which are titled as follows: (1) My First Encounter with English, (2) Being a Student in an International School and What Follows, (3) Falling in Love with English Literature, (4) English as My Major, (5) My Identity Markers. During the process of constructing and reconstructing my narratives, it was a bit difficult to keep the ‘voice’ I had in the context of the past from shifting to the present time. Thus, there are parts of the narrated past stories that, I think, have been interpreted in view of the present knowledge. Thus, besides the past voices, my present voice was also scattered throughout my narratives. To avoid the confusion as well as maintain the authenticity that my narratives remain in the context of the past within my understanding from the past, the present voice has been italicized.

3.5 Data Analysis

The analysis of the data was done through several steps. First, the collected data, the narratives, were read carefully with close reading technique; it enabled me to highlight some major events in the narratives that indicate the process of my identity formation through the exposure of the English language. These major events were then categorized into several themes. There were three recurring themes emerging from the data: (1) being fascinated with English, (2) feeling superior because of English, and (3) expanding the Self through English. The themes were helpful to make meaning of the data within the focus of the research. After categorizing the narratives into several themes, the narratives were listed in a table form and then interpreted as well as analyzed using Bhabha's theory of hybridity and the theory of multilayered cultural identity by Gomzina (2012). The underlying meanings or significance from the narratives were described by re-framing or re-storying the narratives of each theme in light of research literature.

3.6 Data Presentation

The data, in this case the narratives of my significant lived experiences revolving around my exposure to the English language, were put into a table. The table is made up of three columns: (1) the narrative in which the theme occurs, (2) the theme, which is either being fascinated with English, feeling superior because of English, or expanding the Self through English, and (3) the textual evidence drawn from the narrative. The interpretation and discussion that provides the context of my narratives and its analysis are presented below the table. The table is presented as follows:

Narrative	Theme	Textual Evidence
Narrative 2	Expanding the Self through English	I didn't quite grasp whether it was a sense of belonging as well. It was, like, I didn't consider myself to be 'more English' as I hadn't learned much about it and I had no trouble with my <i>Bahasa Indonesia</i> , nor that I considered myself to be more "Indonesian" as I was more attached to English than my own national

		language.
Narrative 2	Expanding the Self through English	What was worse was that I felt inferior as I watched other participants delivered the stories so well and interestingly. <i>That's where I got the lesson about never being arrogant and boastful; to be always humble with what you gained and always spare some room for self-improvement.</i>
Narrative 3	Expanding the Self through English	However, exalting English above <i>Bahasa Indonesia</i> , the language of where I came from, somehow has made a gap and a hole inside me, as well as a distance from what it means to be an Indonesian.

Table 3.1 *Examples of narratives reflecting the theme ‘expanding the self through English’*

The narratives above tell about my exposure and my perceptions toward English, and which I later compared to *Bahasa Indonesia*. When I was younger, I had the opportunity to cross national borders and lived in Qatar for a couple of years. Equipped with very little of English skills when I first set foot in Qatar, I became a self-taught English learner because I was ‘forced’ to use it at the international school I was enrolled in, so that I can participate in the community and ‘survive’. I learned and gained English skills directly through my interactions with friends and teachers as English was the medium of instruction. Because of this, I developed a great interest in learning English and the interest turned into some sort of fascination towards the language, manifesting in my claimed ‘ownership’ of the language, which, later, became a strong attachment to the language.

Upon returning to Indonesia, my strong attachment to English made me feel superior and become overly competitive as I was so ambitious to be above most of my peers’ English language proficiency. Yet, there was a time when I was involved in a storytelling contest, that I realized that there were students who were better than me and that I had no reason for boasting. However, I remained intimately attached to the English language, which resulted in my contrasting

feelings and perceptions towards *Bahasa Indonesia* and English. The different perceptions towards the two languages had put me in the state of 'in-betweenness'. It was the feeling of being in-between and in ambivalence through the 'doublings of languages', which made me unable to determine my sense of belonging. I could not position myself in terms of my cultural identity. However, it was through the encounter with English and its impact it had on me, that had opened the way for me to look back and question my identity. It was because of the gap and the hole inside me which, later, allowed me to revisit myself.

3.7 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has presented the methodology that I used in conducting this study. The research design employed as well as the reason for using narrative inquiry have been elaborated. Description of the data and the research participant, how the data is collected and analyzed in order to answer the research question of this study, has also been elaborated. The findings from the data analysis and its discussion will be presented in the next chapter.