



## **PLURILINGUAL IDENTITIES OF ELT STUDENTS: A PRELIMINARY STUDY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Plurilingualism is another breakthrough of multilingualism. It is believed to be able to promote learning in cross cultural settings. This study focuses on finding out students' plurilingual identities within the context of Indonesian higher education students majoring in English Language Teaching (ELT). This is a mixed-method study that used a survey to get quantitative data and a focus group to help the researcher get the qualitative data. More than sixty students of a private university in Banggai Regency have participated in the survey, however only five that had been taken to participate in the focus group. The results found that most of the students come from mixed marriage parents from different ethnicities backgrounds. Within more than six months of acquaintance with the students, various ways have been revealed from the way the students explain their plurilingual identity. Many students could not identify and describe their plurilingual identities properly during the survey study. In the focus group, students were asked to describe their plurilingual identities through pictures description. The pictures were drawn by the students. The data were analyzed through content analysis. Finally, this paper is expected to portrait plurilingual identities of ELT students as well as strengthens their cross-cultural understanding in the Indonesian higher education context.

**Keywords:** Plurilingualism, Plurilingual Identity, ELT Students

### **INTRODUCTION**

Language learning develops essential 21st century skills that require learners to participate in face-to-face interactions via technology, internships and volunteer opportunities in the community, apply their competence in a new language to their career and personal goals, broadening their thinking beyond self-serving goals, and also become more skillful in understanding diverse cultural perspectives and their own identity (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), n.d.).

“Understanding others makes possible a better knowledge of oneself: any form of identity is complex, for individuals are defined in relation to other people – both individually and collectively – and the various groups to which they owe allegiance, in a constantly shifting pattern.”

(UNESCO, 1996)

This means all individuals must feel free to explore the uniqueness of their culture and identity while developing understandings of the cultural diversity that exists in the world around them and that denying cultural expression means limiting the expression of unique

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perspectives on life and the transmission of knowledge from generation to generation (Australian Government NSW Department of Education, 2000). In the context of learning foreign languages, language learners are also exposed to the culture of that target language (s). This is important since understanding culture allows language learners to give the right meaning to each word, in the larger context, because they'll be able to think in the foreign language (Clear Words Translations, 2017).

From this fact, the notion of learning foreign languages can decrease someone's affection and respect to his or her country is totally wrong. Besides, Cook (2001) and Cimbmanda & Mokgwathi (2012) in Nilsson (2016) found that perceiving languages as separate compartments of learning could not identify students' abilities and prior knowledge that inhibit them in language learning. Instead, Cimbmanda & Mokgwathi (2012, p.22) suggested that educators realize and use the supportive roles of different languages, and view these as tools for learning. From this point of view, practices involving L1 could be consciously used in multilingual classrooms. Teachers can encourage students to draw parallels between their mother tongues and English in order to increase understanding of grammatical structures (Ekman (2015) in Nilsson (2016).

In spite of the low level of English proficiency of its people, Indonesian's government removed English lesson in elementary school, and limited the access of students who did not take language department in senior high school to learn English by reducing the length of English lesson (Nuen, 2018). This was just because of a classical but debatable reason: for the sake of nationalism. If learning foreign language can decrease someone's nationalism then Indonesian former president, one of the national founding fathers, Ir. Soekarno may also be categorized as not having a good nationalism. In fact, President Soekarno could speak four languages: English, Dutch, German, and French, to help him held a great diplomacy with the leaders of other countries (Archer, 1968).

One thing that Indonesian government should be thankful for and perhaps out of their consideration in that time was the fact that Indonesia is the home of more than 500 local languages. In 2018, Indonesia has approximately 718 local languages throughout the country (<https://labbineka.kemdikbud.go.id>). In Central Sulawesi, where the researcher live and work, there are: Totoli, Tombatu, Taa, Seko, Sangihe Talaud, Saluan, Pipikoro, Pamona, Lauje Malala, Kulawi, Kaili, Dondo, Buol, Bungku, Besoa, Banggai, Balantak, Balaesang, Bajo, Bada, Jawa, Bugis, Makassar, Bali, Toraja, Sundanese, Malay, Gorontalo languages, and possibly other undiscovered languages. Based on the data from Banggai regency government (2013) about the population pyramid of Banggai Regency, the pattern describes the structure of the young population. This shows that fertility is a factor that affects the structure of the population. The people who live in Banggai Regency come from various ethnic groups, cultures, customs and religions. The ethnic groups in Banggai Regency include the Saluan, Balantak, Banggai, Javanese, Balinese, Sasak, Bugis, Bajo, and others. Meanwhile, the religion adopted by the majority of the population of Banggai Regency is Islam (Dinas Komunikasi dan Informatika Kabupaten Banggai, 2015).

The Head of the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture's Language and Literature Development and Development Center Gufron Ali, as reported by (Fathurrohman, 2019), assessed that efforts to preserve regional languages are also increasingly constrained by the implementation of field rules, such as difficulty accessing rural areas. Another threat factor comes from the home environment. According to Gufron, there are still many parents who do not teach local languages to their children. They are still trying to encourage local governments to run their own language learning programs in their own villages. This program requires children to speak their mother tongue at home and play with friends. The students should have raised their language awareness in order to give better reflections on their language identities.

Some researchers put their attention to the issues of language identities (Creese & Blackledge, 2015; Galante, 2018; Hatam & Sa, 2017; Hu, 2018; Reimann, 2011; Villegas-torres & Mora-Pablo, 2018). Villegas-Torres & Mora-Pablo (2018) inquired the life of their research's participants' migration experiences in three different contexts: family, academic,

and social. In such settings, migrants face opportunities and challenges that contribute to the formation of their self-image.

This research focused on identifying languages identities of ELT students in a private university in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia. According to Galante (2017), plurilingual identity includes languages and cultures people have learned so far (even if knowledge is limited) and others people wish to learn in the future. Plurilingual identity cannot be separated from plurilingualism. Like have been cited from Marshall, S., Moore, James, Ning, & Dos Santos (2019), it has some characteristics that emphasize the existence of multiple languages in interactions, the principle of languages as hybrid rather than discrete, plurilingual/pluricultural competence as uneven and changing competences, based on people's experiences, the plurilingual speaker as a social agent, strongly focus on pedagogy, and mediate plurilingual and intercultural.

Based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), plurilingual competence or plurilingualism involves the ability to switch from one language or dialect to another, express oneself in one language and understand the other, call upon the knowledge of a number of languages to make sense of a text, recognize words from a common international store in a new guise, mediate between individuals with no common language by bringing the whole of their linguistic equipment into play, experiment with alternative forms of expression in different languages or dialects, exploiting paralinguistic, radically simplifying their use of language (Council of Europe OP Services on Vimeo, 2018). In this research, the notion of *plurilingual* refers to plural linguistics capitals that might be possessed by the students in a multiethnic society in Luwuk Banggai.

As part of plurilingual pedagogy, various studies on this field have been in a good track for the last ten years. One of them was a study conducted by Aitken & Robinson (2020) in considering the importance of plurilingual pedagogies to First Nations through the case of a remote community school in Canada, where students enter Kindergarten with a strong oral use of the Indigenous language, Naskapi. By using the example of a Grade 3 intergenerational project involving grandparents, the authors illustrate how teachers created spaces for translanguaging and employed critical literacy approaches as students produced identity texts in multiple languages. Over the course of the project students began to take ownership of their learning of English; they experimented with ideas, took risks, engaged in peer mentoring and showed signs of developing metalinguistic awareness. As they began to create their own strategies for learning English, they revealed a confidence and resourcefulness that countered broader deficit discourses in the school. With the project, the teachers disrupted the predominance of monolingual practices, fostered teacher and community collaboration, and drew attention to how language, culture, power and identity intersect in the school setting. While projects such as the one described in this chapter may not lead to immediate changes in how Indigenous language is characterized by all within the school, it brings diverse stakeholders together to observe, discuss and celebrate what can be accomplished when students' plurilingualism is centered.

Therefore, the urgency of this research is to revitalize the students' knowledge about their linguistics repertoires to help them understand what they have as the learning capital and what should they need to improve as their learning goals.

## METHOD

This research applied mixed method to help the researcher collect data. The data are in the form of qualitative and quantitative data. The two data bases might be kept separate but connected (Creswell, 2009). The quantitative phase is essential to give general understanding on participants. After that, the qualitative phase can help in analyzing data by identifying participants in a more in-depth way.

The sampling method of this research is convenience sampling, which based on the availability and feasibility to get the information from the participants, and also relies on self-

selection (Farrokhi & Mahmoudi-Hamidabad, 2012). There were more than 50 students who had been given the questionnaire to fill but only five who were available to be involved in the qualitative phase. The setting of this study is in a private university in Banggai regency. The private university which is located in the city of Luwuk, the capital of Banggai regency, has several faculties, include teachers' training and education. As the initial place where students as candidate teachers develop their pedagogical, personal, social, and professional competences (Undang-Undang Nomor 14 2005 (10:1), 2005), the faculty on behalf of the university offers some study programs. Officially opened in 2015, English study program has already had its graduates since 2019.

This study has included all students who are currently studying from the first until the third year as the population. The process of collecting data was during the first semester of 2021. However, based on the availability and the feasibility of the students, some reductions were applied in the case of the number of the participants and the suitability of the research's purpose both in quantitative and qualitative phases. In the quantitative phase, some close and open ended questions in a Google form link was shared to the students. Then, five students were selected in the qualitative phase to have some follow-ups, include drawing a plurilingual profile of their own, and describe the pictures when they finished drawing. The students were interviewed to find some intrinsic information behind the pictures.

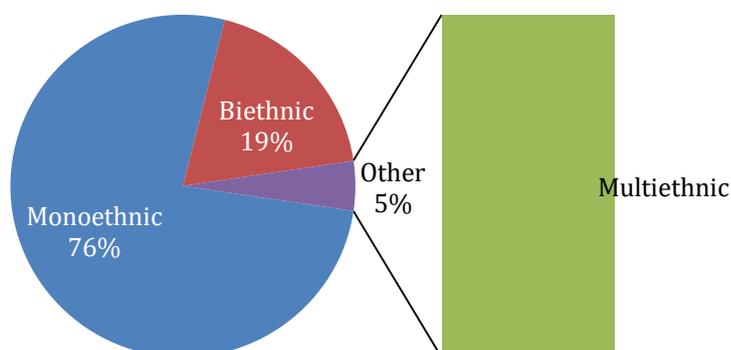
## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

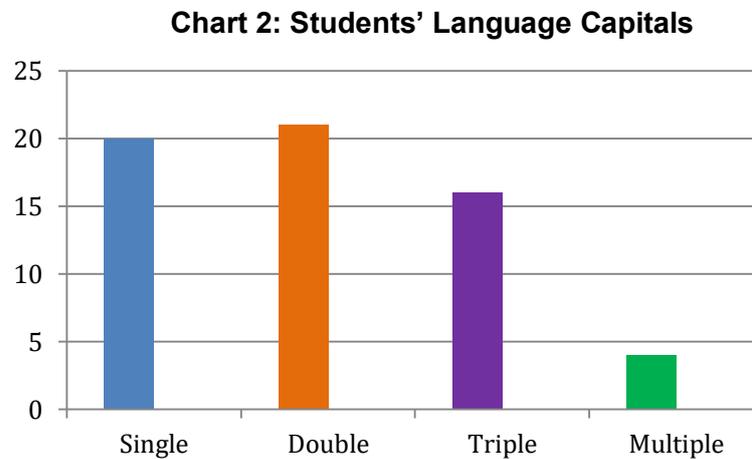
The purposes of this research are to take preliminary identification of the students' cultural identities and to invent the languages that the students speak or simply understand. The numbers of sixty six students have submitted their answers on the Google form link that has been distributed for each of them. From the sixty six students, two students did not give complete answers so they had been excluded. So, it is sixty four of total participants in the quantitative phase.

In terms of ethnicity (see chart 1), most students (76%) are mono-ethnic based on their answers in the questionnaires distributed through Google form. 19% students come from biethnics family and other 5% students come from multiple tribes parents.

Besides the ethnicity background, students were asked to list any language they understand or speak. Most students listed two languages and fewest chose to list more than three languages as their linguistic capitals. The complete details can be seen in the chart 2.

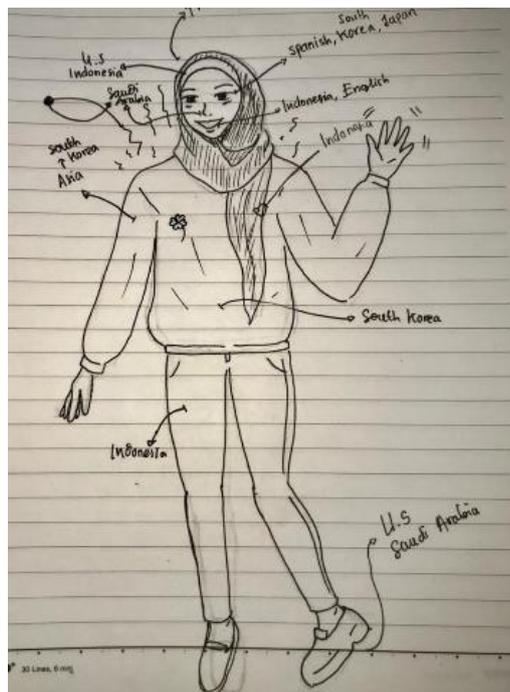
**Chart 1: Students' Ethnicity Background**





After distributing questionnaires to the students in the quantitative phase, five students have been selected to present their visual plurilingual identities. This is included in the qualitative phase. The selected students were from the sixth semester at the ELT program in the university. They were selected based on their availability of time. The students were involved in a discussion forum through online platform (zoom meeting and WhatsApp messenger) due to the condition of Covid-19 pandemics.

Picture 1: Student 1



## Extract 1

Student 1 (female) has double ethnicity parents. Her father is Buginesse and her mother is Javanese. However, based on the interview, Student 1 is rather called as Javanese more than a Buginesse.

*“Dad has moved to Luwuk for a long time. He knows Buginesse very little. My mom is Javanese and she still uses Javanese when she speaks (with me). So, I am more Javanese. Hahaha...”*

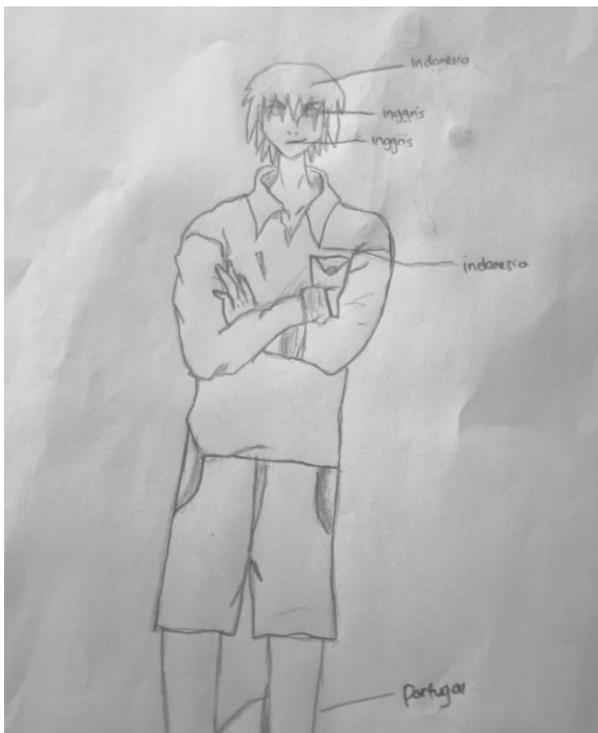
She also describes herself as be able to speak Indonesian and English, although she also speak Indonesian in Java dialect. She added:

*“I speak Java dialect sometimes when I’m in Java because when I speak with Luwuk accent they do not understand what I speak. But with people from Luwuk but meet up with me in Java I always use my Dialect and also accent from Luwuk, I will never forget about the dialect and accent. If I go overseas maybe I (will) use to try speak English with Native speaker, one of my dreams...”*

A different case happens when she was asked to reflect her plurilingual identities through her drawings. Such a beautiful drawing she drew and several foreign languages including English are spotted.

Indonesian was put right on the “heart” position for she loves Indonesian as part of her nationalism. Spanish, Korean, and Japan were put on the eye to indicate that she loves to watch Spain, Korean and Japanese dramas. She also has just started to get exposure to Spanish, Korean, and Japanese languages by watching the dramas. Indonesia and English have been generally used in her activities to chat with her friends and lecturers for academic purposes. That is why she put the languages on the mouth part. South Korea in the parts of her jacket and stomach because she said that she likes to wear Korean style jacket and eat Korean food. Still “Indonesia” on her trouser reflects her love to wear trousers which are made in Indonesia (Indonesian product).

## Extract 2:



Picture 2: Student 2

Student 2 (male) also has Buginesse parents. He explains that he speaks Buginesse and English.

*“... I speak more than one language that are English, and my ethnic Bugis. I speak Buginesse when my family gather from village or I go them as usual at family gatherings we are talking about the condition each other because this moment so rare just once a year. In this moment they are used Buginesse automatically I used Buginesse too to speak with them.”*

In the picture 2, he puts Indonesian on the head because the language is at the highest level of mastery above other languages. English is put on the eye and mouth, indicating that he is currently in the process of acquiring the language. He develops his English mastery through visual aids and speaking practice. He adds “Portugal” on the leg to refer to a certain

place he wants to go someday, inspired by his favorite football player from the country. When he was interviewed, he explained that he does not currently learn Portugal language. But he has curiosity to learn it because of his interest.

### Extract 3:

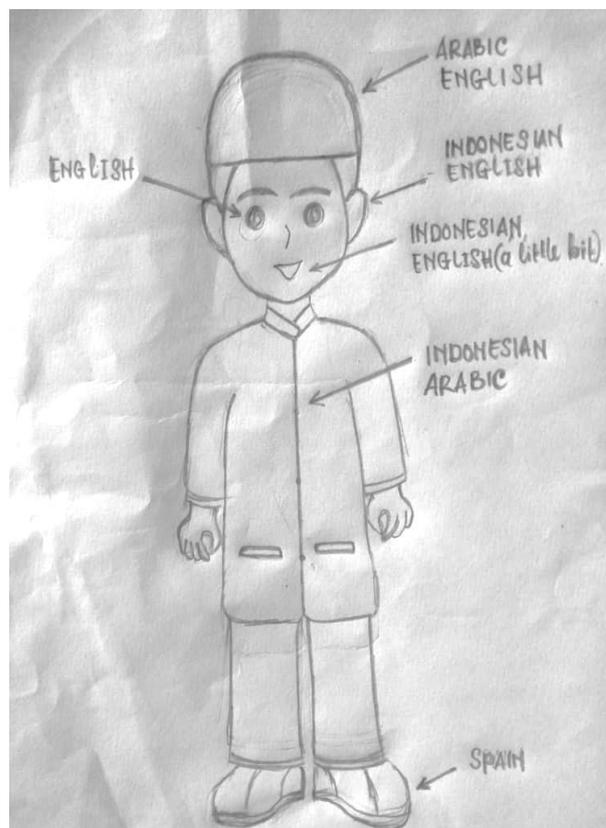
Student whose picture in this extract 3 comes from mixed tribes, namely Manado, Ambon, Philippines and Banggai.

*"I only understood a little and could speak a little when my mother's grandparents spoke the local language. When I didn't understand what my grandparents said, they would talk back to using Indonesian, which was a little formal. Whereas when I am alone, with some friends and with some family members who can speak English, I will speak little by little even though I am not very fluent."*

Writing the legend of all the languages pointed in this picture by using Indonesian indicate her high respect and intention towards Indonesian. Writing Japanese and English on the top is to describe her high motivation to master the two languages. English, Japanese, and Korean on her ear are to refer to his hobby in listening to the songs of each country. On her visual sense, she wrote Spanish, Korean, and Chinese because they are the languages of the dramas she loves to watch. English, Japanese, and Korean on the foot part are indicating the countries she wants to visit in the future. The most lovable languages according to student 3 are Banggai, Indonesian, and Japanese.



Picture 3: Student 3



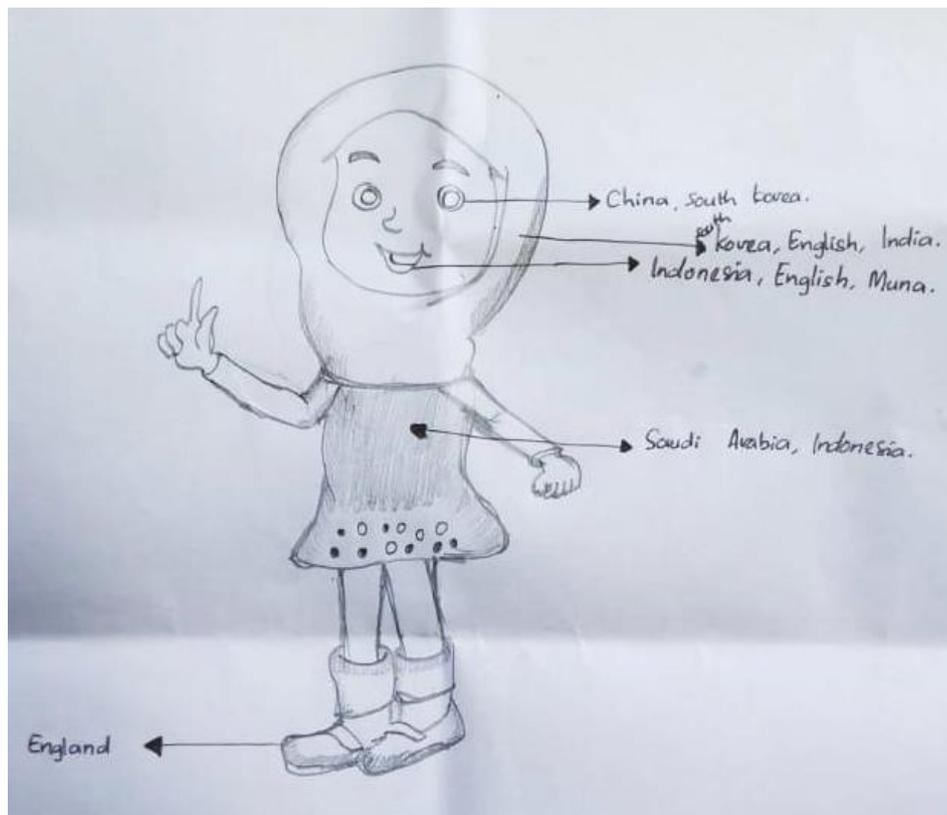
Picture 4: Student 4

## Extract 4:

Student 4 (Male) is able to speak Indonesian, English, and Buginese. He also understands Saluanesse and Bajonesse. He explained:

“I use Saluan when talking to my father and my father's family, I speak Buginese to my mother and my mother's family, and I speak Bajo to my friends who can speak the language.”

The picture drawn by student 4 reflects his religion. He drew a boy wearing hat which is identic to an Islamic praying hat. He put Arabic and English on the top of the body because he considered that the two languages are important for its religious and global demands. Indonesian and Arabic on the chest point refers to his love towards the two languages, also reflects his beloved national language and the language of the holy book, the Qur'an. He puts English on the eye's point to reflect his regular activity to keep in touch with English by using visual aids. Indonesian and English on the spot of the ear is to reflect his hobby: listening to Indonesian and English songs. Last but not least, he wrote Indonesian and English with the mark “*a little bit*” to sign that he hasn't been able to communicate English as fluently as his mother tongue, and wrote “Spain” along with the arrow pointing the shoes because he wants to visit the country.



## Extract 5:

Student 5 (female) comes from Buton family. She said that she can speak Indonesian language, English language, and my local language (Muna), as she explained:

“I usually use my local language, namely Muna, when I am at home or in a large family environment when I gather to hold family events. We use the local language so that we know and can understand our local language, and our parents also told us to use our

local language so we can understand what our father or family is saying when they speak Muna. Usually, also I use Saluan language even if only one or two words because, my neighbors, my friends at school, most of them are Saluan people so I can speak and understand even if only one or two words. Lastly, I usually use English because I majored in English so I have to be able to speak English to practice my speaking skills to make it even better, I use English when I am on campus or when talking and chatting with my friends on social media.”

Student 5 also seems to love watching Chinese and Korean dramas so she puts them on the eye. She also enjoys listening to Korean, English, and Indian songs that made her put it on the ear’s level. Since she speaks Indonesian, English, and Muna based on the situations she encounters in her daily life, she puts the languages on the mouth level. She said that she loves Saudi Arabia as one of her dreaming land and because of her religion that consider the highly important usage of Arabic that she put it on the chest level, together with Indonesia, her nationality. England is spotted on the shoe part to describe another place she wants to visit beside Saudi Arabia.

**Table 1: Students’ Ethnicity and Language Identity**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Ethnicity Preferences</b>	<b>Language Preferences</b>	<b>Language Capitals</b>
Student 1	Monoethnic	Indonesian, Indonesian with Javanese dialect, English, Korean, Japanese, Spanish, and Arabic.	1. Indonesian; Indonesian with Javanese dialect 2. English 3. Korean 4. Japanese 5. Arabic
Student 2	Monoethnic	Buginesse, Indonesian, English, and Portuguese.	1. Buginesse – Indonesian 2. English
Student 3	Multiethnics	Banggai, Manado, Indonesian, Japanese, English, Korean, Spanish, and Chinese.	1. Indonesian 2. English 3. Banggai 4. Manado
Student 4	Biethnics	Saluan, Buginesse, Indonesian, English, Bajo language, Arabic, and Spanish.	1. Saluan – Buginesse – Indonesian – Bajo 2. English 3. Arabic
Student 5	Monoethnic	Muna language, Indonesian, English, Korean, Arabic, Chinese, and Indian (Hindi).	1. Muna – Indonesian 2. English 3. Korean 4. Arabic

Table 1 presents demographic information of students’ ethnicity and plurilingual identity. Another additional column “repertoire” is to refer the students’ competencies in each language from the most fluent to the less (1 is indicated the most, the higher number means less fluency). There are several languages put in the same number because they are considered to be spoken in a similar level of fluency. By seeing the language preferences the students have, it can be said that they have prulilingual preferences. Besides, they also have plurilingual capitals. However, it’s interesting to see that there are some divergent case when comparing their language preferences and language capitals.

An ethnic identity is ascribed at birth, according to primordialism, making it difficult to change (Isajiw, 1993). According to the instrumentalism school of thought, it is logical for parts to organize along ethnic lines based on the advantages it provides to them (Williams, 2015). As for constructivism theory, ethnicity isn't set in stone and changes with inter-ethnic interaction and its goal is to keep people from getting along with each other for specific reasons (Jemma, 2006). Among five students who come respectively from various ethnicity backgrounds, some cases related to ethnicity emerge.

Student 1 chose to be seen as Javanese descent because of his unfamiliarity towards his father's side culture. However, student 1 also has a great sense of awareness of other languages that contribute and impress her life. According to Galante (2017)'s concept of language identity, student 1 is a plurilingual. In short, by considering her ethnicity preferences, she is then categorized as semi instrumentalist and constructivism plurilingual. Departing from the same considerations, other four students are then categorized respectively as constructivism plurilinguals.

The students are potentially plurilinguals based on their experiences in any kinds of plurilingual platforms like family, neighborhood, school, and larger communities (Coste & Simon, 2009). However, based on the observation, the high motivation of learning many foreign languages have not been fully proved and covered in their plurilingual repertoires to fulfill all the prerequisites of being plurilingual, especially in terms of linguistic mediation, experiment with alternative forms of expression in different languages or dialects, exploiting paralinguistic, and language simplicity (Council of Europe OP Services on Vimeo, 2018).

As final comments before the conclusion, the categorization of the students based on their divergent ethnic and language is not immediate and fixed. The students still have many possibilities and future experiences waiting them.

## CONCLUSION

This research has given initial description of the students' prulingual identity as well as ethnicity. Based on the results, the research participants were mostly born to a single ethnic couple. They possess various levels of plurilingual competence, which are respectively based on their family background and influenced by any types of plurilingual platforms they are involved within. By taking the students' diversity into account, educators can create environments that balance students of differentiated language capitals and cultural norms. However, other researches are still necessary to support why the students' plurilingual identity and plurilingual repertoires should be separated into two different concepts. Besides, more empirical proves on plurilingual competence of the students may also be needed.

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