Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.
A STUDY ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MALAYSIAN LEARNERS’ SELF-CONCEPT IN ACADEMIC WRITING AND THEIR ENGAGEMENT IN ONE HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTION

A dissertation presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

at

Massey University, Palmerston North,
New Zealand

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2012
ABSTRACT

Tertiary students, in a postcolonial context such as Malaysia, often face multifaceted challenges. These challenges come about in part because they are required to develop academic literacy in a second language (English). This study aimed to explore the relationship between learners’ self-concept in academic writing and their engagement in the Academic Writing class.

This study utilised a mixed methods approach, with an initial survey of 170 students, followed by two semi-structured interviews with each of eight student participants. The quantitative findings ascertained that a positive relationship existed between self-concept in academic writing and student engagement. Further exploration in the qualitative phase affirmed this and identified the nature of the links between the two constructs.

The findings revealed that students’ self-concepts in academic writing and engagement were dynamic constructs in that they were influenced by multiple internal and external factors from students’ past and present contexts. They were therefore, susceptible to change, and developmental in nature. Both self-concept in academic writing and engagement were found to play an important role in helping students adapt to their new academic context and learning demands, since the intertwining ecologies of self-concept in academic writing and engagement appear to tap a common motivational element related to goals and future self. It was ascertained that the relationship between Malaysian learners’ self-concept in academic writing and their engagement is reciprocal. The findings also present a greater understanding of how self-concept in academic writing and engagement are situated and constructed dynamically within context, creating unique ecologies. In particular, the nature and combination of internal and external factors that is available to students influenced the nature of academic legitimacy and literacy outcomes in the Academic Writing class. It is therefore suggested there is a link between learners’ self, engagement and context.

The findings of this study suggest that students may benefit from writing support and writing curriculum that is discipline-specific to help enhance their self-concepts, academic identity and academic legitimacy. It is also suggested that an extensive professional development programme be provided for instructors and institutions to cope with any major curriculum and policy changes.
DEDICATION

In the name of God
the most compassionate, the most merciful

first

to my family
my husband
Stephen Walker
and my daughter
Naima Sofia Walker
who sacrificed so much to make this journey possible

second

to my parents
my father
Dr. Adi Badiozaman Tuah
and my mother
Fatimah Abdullah
who set the foundation for my education

third

to my brother
Adi Khairulzaman
&
his family (Nik and Nia)
who provided my family and our parents with the comfort of an extended family life
donating my long absence from home
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This professional journey is made possible through the support and encouragement of many people. I am eternally grateful to all of them and wish to record my sincerest thanks.

I thank Dr. Penny Haworth, my chief supervisor, for her scholarly support, guidance and knowledge throughout the course of this study. In this academic journey, your insights and innumerable lessons regarding academic research were essential to the completion of this dissertation. I am also grateful for your continuous support and encouragement as I navigated my way through PhD, work and motherhood.

My sincere appreciation also goes to the co-supervisors; Dr. Linda Leach and Dr. Jane Prochnow, for valuable suggestions and constructive criticism they have contributed to this study. I have been very fortunate to work with such great people who helped me chart the path of this academic exercise through their insights and in-depth understanding.

I am indebted to the Sarawak Government, for granting me a full-time doctoral scholarship, making it possible for me to complete my PhD studies. I gratefully acknowledge the professional and administrative support of the institution for their contribution and cooperation. To the research respondents and informants who have willingly and enthusiastically participated in this study, thank you for sharing your stories.

I wish to also thank the wonderful and dedicated librarians in the College of Education, Hokowhitu and IT support in Turitea, for their continuous assistance throughout the study. This journey has also been enriched by my fellow research colleagues from Australia, Malaysia, Canada, Thailand, Vietnam and Samoa. You have been a great network of support and thank you for your friendship.

And finally, my eternal gratitude to my husband Stephen, for your love, patience and unfailing support throughout this journey. Thank you for believing in me even at times, when I did not. To my daughter, Naima, your curiosity and determination to learn new things, your enthusiasm and energy to start each new day, is both inspiring and humbling. To my father, Dr. Adi Badiozaman and my mother, Fatimah Abdullah who have been great role models in my life, and continue to be a source of inspiration. Thank you for your love, your belief in me, and your prayers.
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