

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**

**IDA FATIMAWATI BT ADI BADIOZAMAN**

**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

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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  
during 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.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	i
DEDICATION .....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	iv
LIST OF TABLES .....	xiii
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xiv
LIST OF APPENDICES .....	xvi
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1 Introduction to the Study .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.2 Research Context .....</b>	<b>3</b>
Historical overview of the Malaysian education system.....	3
<i>English in the Malaysian education system .....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Move to nationalisation .....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>The restructuring of Malaysian society.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>The shift to globalisation.....</i>	<i>5</i>
The Malaysian ESL writer .....	7
<i>The approach to writing in national secondary schools.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Pathway to higher learning.....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Bridging secondary and university level studies through Malaysian University</i> <i>English Test (MUET) .....</i>	<i>10</i>
Learning academic writing in a second language as part of academic literacy development.....	11
<i>Social and cultural complexities of learning academic writing in L2 .....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Linguistic challenges affiliated with learning academic writing in L2.....</i>	<i>15</i>
<b>1.3 Rationale and Significance of the Study .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>1.4 Overview of the Thesis.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>2.1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>2.2 Self Research.....</b>	<b>19</b>

The personal self-concept.....	20
<i>Self-concept and self-efficacy</i> .....	23
<i>Possible selves</i> .....	24
The social self-concept.....	25
The fluidity of the self.....	27
<i>Subjectivity in self-identification</i> .....	27
<i>Context as a frame of reference</i> .....	29
Academic self-concept.....	30
Summary of self research.....	33
<b>2.3 Student Engagement.....</b>	<b>34</b>
The development of student engagement.....	34
<i>Behavioural perspective</i> .....	35
<i>Psychological perspective</i> .....	36
<i>Socio-cultural perspective</i> .....	38
<i>Holistic perspective</i> .....	39
Academic engagement and disengagement.....	40
The perspective of student engagement adopted in the thesis.....	42
<b>2.4 Learning Academic Writing in L2.....</b>	<b>43</b>
L2 writing.....	43
<i>L2 academic writing</i> .....	44
Academic writer identity in a second language.....	48
Summary of research on learning academic writing in L2.....	51
<b>2.5 Chapter Summary.....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>3.1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>3.2 Selecting an Appropriate Methodology.....</b>	<b>54</b>
Pragmatism in selecting a research method.....	56
Selection of a mixed methods research approach.....	57
<i>Meeting the purpose of the research</i> .....	58
<i>Drawing on the strength of quantitative and qualitative approaches to answer the research questions</i> .....	59
<b>3.3 Mixed Methods Design.....</b>	<b>61</b>
Priority.....	62

Implementation.....	62
Integration.....	64
<b>3.4 Chapter Summary.....</b>	<b>66</b>

**CHAPTER FOUR: METHODS ..... 67**

<b>4.1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>4.2 Phase One: Questionnaire.....</b>	<b>68</b>
Rationale for questionnaire.....	68
Questionnaire development and design.....	69
Questionnaire Pilot.....	70
Phase One questionnaire participants.....	71
Questionnaire procedure.....	71
Questionnaire analysis.....	72
<i>Internal consistency for reliability.....</i>	<i>73</i>
<i>The use of descriptive statistics in the study.....</i>	<i>74</i>
<i>Grouped frequency statistics.....</i>	<i>76</i>
<i>Factor analysis.....</i>	<i>76</i>
<i>Correlational analysis.....</i>	<i>77</i>
<b>4.3 Phase Two: Semi-Structured Interviews.....</b>	<b>78</b>
Rationale for semi-structured interviews.....	78
Semi-structured interview development and design.....	80
Semi-structured interview pilot.....	81
Phase Two Semi-structured interview participants.....	84
Semi-structured interview procedure.....	84
Semi-structured interview analysis.....	85
<i>Transcription.....</i>	<i>85</i>
<i>Coding.....</i>	<i>86</i>
<i>Analysis and interpretation.....</i>	<i>87</i>
<i>Trustworthiness of qualitative findings.....</i>	<i>88</i>
<b>4.4 Ethical Considerations.....</b>	<b>89</b>
Informed and voluntary consent.....	90
Anonymity and confidentiality.....	91
<i>Pilot Phase.....</i>	<i>92</i>
<i>Phase One.....</i>	<i>92</i>

<i>Phase Two</i> .....	92
<i>Handling of data</i> .....	92
Cultural issues and researcher position .....	93
<b>4.5 Chapter Summary</b> .....	<b>94</b>

**CHAPTER FIVE: QUANTITATIVE RESULTS ..... 95**

<b>5.1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>95</b>
<b>5.2 Demographic Results</b> .....	<b>95</b>
Summary of Section A results .....	98
<b>5.3 Malaysian Learners' Self-Concept and Academic Writing</b> .....	<b>99</b>
Findings on self-concept in academic writing .....	99
Findings on students' self-concept as writers.....	101
Findings on self-concept of writing in English .....	102
Findings on item analysis in Section B .....	103
<i>Challenges to and the value of academic writing</i> .....	103
<i>The 'indiscriminate' self-concept</i> .....	104
Findings from grouped frequency for student profile .....	107
Summary of Phase One results on self-concepts in academic writing.....	107
<b>5.4 Malaysian Learners' Engagement in AW Class</b> .....	<b>108</b>
Findings on behavioural engagement .....	109
Findings on affective engagement.....	110
Findings on cognitive engagement.....	112
Findings on Item analyses of Section C .....	113
<i>Barriers to engaging with academic writing</i> .....	113
<i>The dynamic engagement continuum</i> .....	115
Findings from grouped frequency for student profile .....	116
Summary of Phase One results on Engagement.....	117
<b>5.5 Relationship between Malaysian Learners' Self-Concept in Academic Writing and their Engagement in the AW Class</b> .....	<b>118</b>
The magnitude and variation of self-concept in academic writing and engagement variables.....	118
Exploratory factor analysis for factor structure of self-concept in academic writing responses.....	119

Exploratory factor analysis for factor structure of engagement in academic writing responses.....	121
<i>Correlational analysis between extracted factors</i> .....	123
Summary of Quantitative Results.....	125
<b>5.6 Discussion of Quantitative Results .....</b>	<b>127</b>
The dynamic nature of self-concept .....	127
Frames of reference for self-concept in academic writing .....	128
The silver lining of the transition stage .....	129
Variation of student engagement in the AW class .....	129
Factors influencing student engagement .....	131
Independent academic engagement style in the writing class .....	132
The value of academic writing to students .....	133
Positive relationship between self-concept in AW and engagement .....	134
<b>5.7 Linking the Quantitative and the Qualitative Phases.....</b>	<b>136</b>
Development of interview protocol.....	137
<b>5.8 Chapter Summary.....</b>	<b>139</b>

**CHAPTER SIX: QUALITATIVE RESULTS ..... 140**

<b>6.1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>140</b>
<b>6.2 Imran: The Permeating Influence of L2 Interest.....</b>	<b>141</b>
Self-concept in academic writing .....	141
<i>Interest in L2</i> .....	141
<i>The influence of other self-concepts</i> .....	143
<i>Language learning self beliefs</i> .....	143
Engagement in the AW class.....	144
<i>Value of academic writing</i> .....	144
<i>The appeal of future self</i> .....	145
The relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement	146
<b>6.3 Ahmad: The Only First-year Student in Class.....</b>	<b>148</b>
Self-concept in academic writing .....	149
<i>Critical incidents from past learning experience</i> .....	149
<i>Instructor influence</i> .....	150
<i>Content knowledge</i> .....	151
Engagement in the AW class.....	152

<i>Goal of self-improvement</i> .....	152
The relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement	152
<b>6.4 Mustafa: Holding on to My L1 .....</b>	<b>154</b>
Self-concept in academic writing .....	155
<i>Learning culture of past institution</i> .....	156
<i>Conflicting policies</i> .....	156
<i>Protecting the core self</i> .....	157
Engagement in the AW class.....	158
<i>Immediate and future goals as catalyst</i> .....	158
<i>Recognition and acknowledgement</i> .....	159
The relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement	160
<b>6.5 Siew Lee: Fluctuation of Academic Identities .....</b>	<b>161</b>
Self-concept in academic writing .....	162
<i>Changes to language for instruction</i> .....	163
<i>English language challenges</i> .....	163
<i>Instructor as an external influence</i> .....	165
Engagement in the AW class.....	165
<i>The dynamic internal and external influences</i> .....	165
<i>Goals as mediators</i> .....	166
<i>Peers as a network of support</i> .....	167
The relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement	167
<b>6.6 Maya: A Case of Persistence in the Face of Adversity .....</b>	<b>170</b>
Educational background .....	170
Self-concept in academic writing .....	171
<i>Issues from past learning experience</i> .....	171
<i>Significant others as agents of influence</i> .....	172
<i>Value of academic writing</i> .....	173
Engagement in the AW class.....	174
<i>Goals as mediators</i> .....	174
<i>Interplay of cognitive and affective dimensions</i> .....	175
The relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement	176
<b>6.7 Joanne: Self-Improvement for a Better Future.....</b>	<b>178</b>
Educational background .....	178
Self-concept in academic writing .....	178

<i>L2 self-concepts as influences</i> .....	179
<i>L2 position in past institution</i> .....	179
<i>Inconsistency in medium of instruction</i> .....	180
<i>Teaching-learning approach in the AW class</i> .....	180
Engagement in the AW class.....	181
<i>Performance and mastery goals as mediators</i> .....	181
<i>Instructor influence</i> .....	182
<i>Task value</i> .....	182
The relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement	183
<b>6.8 Eliza: Motivating Role of Agency</b> .....	<b>185</b>
Educational background .....	185
Self-concept in academic writing .....	186
<i>Self-concept in English</i> .....	186
<i>Success from past learning experience</i> .....	187
<i>Current challenges in learning academic writing</i> .....	187
Engagement in the AW class.....	188
<i>Goal as a mediator</i> .....	188
The relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement	189
<b>6.9 Nurul: The Outsider Looking In</b> .....	<b>190</b>
Educational background .....	190
Self-concept in academic writing .....	191
<i>Critical incident</i> .....	191
<i>Learning culture of past institution</i> .....	192
<i>Protecting the core self</i> .....	193
<i>Academic writing as a foreign subject</i> .....	193
Engagement in the AW class.....	194
<i>Conflicting goals</i> .....	194
The relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement	195
<b>6.10 Chapter Summary</b> .....	<b>197</b>
<b>CHAPTER SEVEN: QUALITATIVE DISCUSSION</b> .....	<b>200</b>
<b>7.1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>200</b>
<b>7.2 Ecology of self-concept in academic writing</b> .....	<b>200</b>
Internal factors .....	201

<i>Language learning self beliefs as instruments of self-concept</i> .....	201
<i>The influence of other internalised self-concepts</i> .....	203
<i>The impact of future self</i> .....	204
External factors.....	205
<i>Authority figures as internalised agents of influence</i> .....	205
<i>The influence of past institutions</i> .....	207
<i>The lasting influence of national educational policies</i> .....	208
<i>The influence of the present institutional context</i> .....	210
<i>The influence of academic writing perceptions</i> .....	211
The interrelated influences of internal and external factors .....	211
The trajectories of self-concept in academic writing – Reconciling stability and change.....	214
Redefining ‘me’ in the AW context .....	217
<i>Motivating the self</i> .....	217
<i>(Re)structuring the self</i> .....	219
<b>7.3 Ecology of Student Engagement in the Academic Writing Class.....</b>	<b>221</b>
Influences on student engagement .....	222
<i>Internal factors influencing student engagement</i> .....	223
<i>External factors influencing current student engagement</i> .....	226
Student engagement in the AW class .....	234
<i>Cognitive engagement: Regulating learning strategies in the AW class</i> .....	234
<i>Behavioural engagement: Persevering and taking risks</i> .....	236
<i>Affective engagement in the AW class</i> .....	238
<b>7.4 The Relationship between Self-Concept in Academic Writing and Student Engagement .....</b>	<b>241</b>
Self-concept and engagement in AW: A reciprocal relationship .....	242
The complementary nature of factors in the ecology .....	247
<b>7.5 Chapter Summary.....</b>	<b>249</b>
<b>CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>250</b>
<b>8.1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>250</b>
<b>8.2 The Study Revisited .....</b>	<b>250</b>
Limitations of the study.....	251
<b>8.3 Theoretical implications .....</b>	<b>253</b>

Link between self, engagement and context.....	253
The influence of context and self-concept.....	254
An ecological perspective of student engagement .....	255
<b>8.4 Implications for Research Methodology .....</b>	<b>255</b>
<b>8.5 Implications for Practice and Policy .....</b>	<b>256</b>
Implications and recommendations for students .....	256
Implications and recommendations for instructors .....	257
Implications and recommendations for institutions .....	258
Implications and recommendations for curriculum designers .....	259
Implications and recommendations for policymakers.....	260
<b>8.6 Suggestions for Future Research .....</b>	<b>261</b>
<b>8.7 Concluding Remarks .....</b>	<b>263</b>
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	265
APPENDICES .....	290

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table 1.1</b>	Malaysian National Examinations at Secondary School Level.....	7
<b>Table 1.2</b>	SPM and STPM Grade System .....	7
<b>Table 1.3</b>	Malaysian University English Test (MUET) Grade System.....	11
<b>Table 2.1</b>	Representations of the Self.....	27
<b>Table 4.1</b>	Overview of Coding Steps using NVivo 8.....	87
<b>Table 5.1</b>	Breakdown of Cross Tabulation of Hours for Studying Academic Writing (per week) by Respondents' Academic Year.....	97
<b>Table 5.2</b>	Breakdown of Cross Tabulation of Hours for Studying Academic Writing (per week) by Respondents' MUET Results .....	98
<b>Table 5.3</b>	Distribution of Responses for Self-Concept in Academic Writing .....	100
<b>Table 5.4</b>	Distribution of Responses for Self-Concept as a Writer .....	101
<b>Table 5.5</b>	Distribution of Responses for Self-Concept of Writing in English.....	102
<b>Table 5.6</b>	Item Difficulty for Self-Concept in Academic Writing Items.....	104
<b>Table 5.7</b>	Point-Biserial Correlation for Self-Concept in Academic Writing Items .....	105
<b>Table 5.8</b>	Student Profiling based on Self-Concept in Academic Writing Scores .....	107
<b>Table 5.9</b>	Distribution of Responses for Behavioural Engagement Items .....	109
<b>Table 5.10</b>	Distribution of Responses for Affective Engagement Items .....	110
<b>Table 5.11</b>	Distribution of Responses for Cognitive Engagement Items .....	112
<b>Table 5.12</b>	Item Difficulty for Engagement Items .....	114
<b>Table 5.13</b>	Point-Biserial Correlation for Engagement Items .....	116
<b>Table 5.14</b>	Student Profiling based on Engagement Scores.....	117
<b>Table 5.15</b>	Coefficient of determination ( $r^2$ ).....	118
<b>Table 5.16</b>	Factor Structure of Self-Concept Items.....	119
<b>Table 5.17</b>	Factor Structure of Engagement in Academic Writing Items .....	122
<b>Table 5.18</b>	Correlation between Extracted Factors of Self-Concept in Academic Writing and Engagement.....	123
<b>Table 6.1</b>	A summary of Students' Self-Concept and Engagement in Academic Writing Results according to the Quantitative Phase.....	140
<b>Table 6.2</b>	Summary of Emerging Themes from Self-concept in Academic Writing.....	198
<b>Table 6.3</b>	Summary of Emerging Themes from Student Engagement in the AW class.....	198
<b>Table 6.4</b>	Summary of Emerging Themes from the Relationship between Self-concept in Academic Writing and Student Engagement in the AW class.....	199

## LIST OF FIGURES

<b>Figure 3.1</b>	Designing and conducting mixed methods research.....	63
<b>Figure 3.2</b>	Visual model for the Sequential Mixed Methods procedures.....	65
<b>Figure 4.1</b>	Schedule of data collection and analysis for Phase One and Two.....	67
<b>Figure 4.2</b>	Flow chart for the exploration of the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement in the pilot and study.....	83
<b>Figure 5.1</b>	Overview of the emerging themes based on the quantitative analysis.....	126
<b>Figure 5.2</b>	The potential structure of self-concept in academic writing for Malaysian learners.....	127
<b>Figure 5.3</b>	Student engagement in the AW class.....	130
<b>Figure 5.4</b>	Visual model of the positive relationship between self-concept in academic writing and student engagement based on Phase One.....	135
<b>Figure 5.5</b>	Piecing it all together.....	137
<b>Figure 5.6</b>	Linking Phase One and Phase Two.....	138
<b>Figure 6.1</b>	Imran's conceptualisation of the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement in the Academic Writing class .....	146
<b>Figure 6.2</b>	Ahmad's conceptualisation of the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement in the Academic Writing class .....	153
<b>Figure 6.3</b>	Mustafa's conceptualisation of the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement in the Academic Writing class .....	160
<b>Figure 6.4</b>	Siew Lee's conceptualisation of the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement in the Academic Writing class .....	168
<b>Figure 6.5</b>	Maya's conceptualisation of the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement in the Academic Writing class .....	176
<b>Figure 6.6</b>	Joanne's conceptualisation of the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement in the Academic Writing class.....	184
<b>Figure 6.7</b>	Eliza's conceptualisation of the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement in the Academic Writing class .....	189
<b>Figure 6.8</b>	Nurul's conceptualisation of the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement in the Academic Writing class .....	196
<b>Figure 7.1</b>	Ecology of self-concept in academic writing .....	200

<b>Figure 7.2</b> Internal and external factors influencing students' self-concept in academic writing..	213
<b>Figure 7.3</b> Learners' ecology of engagement in the Academic Writing class. ....	222
<b>Figure 7.4</b> A model of the relationship between self-concept and engagement in the AW class. ....	242

## LIST OF APPENDICES

<b>Appendix A</b>	Questionnaire .....	291
<b>Appendix B</b>	Information Sheet for Pilot Questionnaire.....	297
<b>Appendix C</b>	Participation Consent form for Pilot study.....	299
<b>Appendix D</b>	Confidentiality Agreement for Pilot Study.....	300
<b>Appendix E</b>	Letter Requesting Access to Institution.....	301
<b>Appendix F</b>	Institution Consent Form .....	303
<b>Appendix G</b>	Information Sheet for Questionnaire in English .....	304
	Information Sheet for Questionnaire in Malay .....	306
<b>Appendix H</b>	Interview Guide.....	308
<b>Appendix I</b>	Sample Illustrations for Student Engagement.....	312
<b>Appendix J</b>	Sample Venn diagrams.....	315
<b>Appendix K</b>	Information Sheet for Interview in English .....	319
	Information Sheet for Interview in Malay .....	321
<b>Appendix L</b>	Participation Consent Form for Interview in English.....	323
	Participation Consent Form for Interview in Malay.....	324
<b>Appendix M</b>	Authority for the Release of Tape Transcripts in English .....	325
	Authority for the Release of Tape Transcripts in Malay.....	326
<b>Appendix N</b>	Confidentiality Agreement for Translator .....	327
<b>Appendix O</b>	Detailed Breakdown of Distribution of Responses for Section B Item Analysis... .....	328
<b>Appendix P</b>	Detailed Breakdown of Distribution of Responses for Section C Item Analysis... .....	329
<b>Appendix Q</b>	Detailed Breakdown of Exploratory Factor Analysis Results for Section B...330	
<b>Appendix R</b>	Detailed Breakdown of Exploratory Factor Analysis Results for Section C...332	
<b>Appendix S</b>	Scree Plots.....	334
<b>Appendix T</b>	Coates (2007) Typological Model of Student Engagement Styles.....	335

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### Scenario One

In an Academic Writing class, students are brainstorming the topic, 'My definition of success'.

**Teacher:** *Those are good points. What an interesting way to define success.*

**Student:** *Umm ... but my grammar is bad. I will not get a good mark.*

### Scenario Two

In an Advanced Academic Writing Class, the teacher is giving feedback on the first draft of the literature review.

**Teacher:** *I think you have done quite well for the first draft. One comment I would make is to also include your viewpoints. If not, it might read like a summary.*

**Student:** *I don't dare. They are the 'experts'. I am not.*

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This thesis focuses on the relationship between Malaysian learners' self-concept in academic writing and their engagement in the academic writing class. My interest in this study began during my teaching experience as an English instructor in a higher learning institution in Malaysia. The two excerpts above were some of the most common exchanges within the academic writing classes that I taught. These exchanges intrigued me, not only at a personal level (as I am also a second language learner), but also at a professional level, as an academic writing instructor. I started to think about the question of students' self-concept: *If what students think and believe about themselves profoundly influences their actions, how is this belief manifested in their learning in the writing class and what exactly are the students' perceptions about academic writing in*

*English?* It was a combination of these questions, as well as the need to understand the factors that influence students' actions in the academic writing classroom which persuaded me to explore the relationship between self-concept and engagement in this thesis.

I turned to the current literature to better understand the writing processes and challenges for these language learners. Unfortunately, there are limited publications on the writing experiences of Malaysian second language learners at tertiary level, particularly for academic writing. From what is known, the picture painted is very bleak. Students are depicted as using limited writing strategies (M. R. Abdullah et al., 2011, p. 85), having a tendency to plagiarise (Smith, Ghazali, & Noor Minhad, 2007) and as being plagued with proficiency deficits in their academic reading (Shafie & Nayan, 2011) and writing outputs (Othman & Mohamad, 2009).

In the literature, descriptions of the challenges facing second language learners do not seem to accurately represent the issues in the two writing scenarios above. In fact, the opportunity to instruct and interact with these learners made me aware that the writing process, for some Malaysian learners, transcends proficiency challenges. Lack of motivation would also be an oversimplification of the issue. This study is my attempt to understand the Malaysian students' experience in the writing classroom, investigating links between the person, behaviours and context. I firmly believe that the quantitative and qualitative responses provided by these students illuminate a more complex issue of learning academic writing in English, within a postcolonial context such as Malaysia.

Accordingly, the study aimed to explore the relationship between Malaysian learners' self-concept in academic writing and their engagement in the Academic Writing<sup>1</sup> class. In doing so, it will identify areas and opportunities for improvement in the academic writing curricula.

The following section provides information on the research context. At the end of this section, the rationale and significance of the research problem will be described.

---

<sup>1</sup> In this study, the academic literacy paper offering academic writing skills is entitled Academic Writing.

## **1.2 RESEARCH CONTEXT**

The research context is a crucial component in this study. English language not only shaped the educational structure of the country, it has also had a tremendous impact on Malaysian students' learning experiences. This section is discussed in three parts. The first part presents a historical overview of the Malaysian education system. In doing so, it traces the multiple positions of English within the education system. In the second part, information on Malaysian students as second language writers of English is presented. This includes the various writing experiences (in English) they have had as part of their academic journey, prior to entering the university. Finally, background information on academic writing within one Malaysian university is provided. The discussion includes some of the complexities and challenges that learners often face, as they attempt to learn and engage in academic writing in a second language.

### **Historical overview of the Malaysian education system**

#### **English in the Malaysian education system**

Malaysia, once part of the British Empire, achieved independence in 1957. Malaysia has a multicultural, multilingual population of 28.3 million, comprising three main ethnic groups: Malays (53.3%), Chinese (26.0%) and Indians (7.7%). The non-Malay indigenous people, make up another 11.8% of the population (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2011). The Malays and non-Malay indigenous people together make up the *bumiputera* (natives of the soil) group and thus form the majority group in Malaysia.

Due to the nature and history of the country, the role of English has shifted frequently over time – in parallel with the focus of the education system (B. Foo & Richards, 2004). During British rule, there was an absence of uniformity within formal education in Malaysia. Under the colonial education system, separate schools offered different mediums of instruction and curricula for the main ethnic groups: Malays, Chinese and Indians. The two dominant types of schools were the English and the vernacular medium schools.

### **Move to nationalisation**

Malaysia, “upon independence in 1957, inherited a British-oriented national infrastructure, including an education system, ranging from grade schools to higher education with its Western intellectual, ideological, and political conventions” (Subramani & Kempner, 2002, p. 233). Education was reserved for the elite groups and it was not free. As a result, the colonial education system created severe social and economic disparity, which led to racial tension.

The ultimate objective of the education system post-independence was for national unity (Rajendran, 2005). Education was seen as a medium that would facilitate the objective of national unity and thus, in 1957, all existing schools were converted to National or National-Type schools. Malay medium primary schools were renamed national schools and English, Chinese and Tamil schools became national-type schools. While *Malay* was the language of instruction in national schools, the languages of instruction in national-type schools were English and the vernacular language (Mandarin or Tamil). The national language, *Bahasa Melayu* (Malay language), was made a compulsory subject in these national-type schools, but English remained as one of the official languages used in the country (Zaaba, Ramadan, Anning, Gunggut, & Umemoto, 2011).

### **The restructuring of Malaysian society**

During the period from 1975 to 1985, social and economic issues shaped the development of education. This was the period of New Economic Policy (NEP), which was a socio-economic policy designed to achieve national unity and development, by focusing on the eradication of poverty and the restructuring of Malaysian society, in order to eliminate the identification of race, through economic function and geographical location. Although the NEP has been argued “to favour affirmative action programs” (Jamil, 2010, p. 158) to assist the economically disadvantaged groups (e.g. the Malays and the Bumiputeras), national integration “became ‘the over-riding objective’ of the education system” (G. Brown, 2007, p. 321) during this period.

Thus, the new Integrated Curriculum for Primary Schools and the new Malaysian National Syllabus for Secondary Schools were implemented during this period and *Bahasa Melayu* was the main medium of teaching and communication. The English language was slowly phased out as the language of instruction (B. Foo & Richards, 2004) in all levels of educational institutions.

Since the prior British higher education model did not address national issues or the welfare of Malaysian society, this period saw education become a state-controlled system governed by the Ministry of Education (Subramani & Kempner, 2002). Tan and colleagues (2011) summed up this top-down approach of the Malaysian education system as being “highly centralised” and noted that “education in Malaysia is a federal responsibility and so the education system comes under the Ministry of Education which functions at the federal level” (p. 138).

### **The shift to globalisation**

The last decade of the twentieth century witnessed a change in Malaysia's education policy, where English was reinstated as the medium of instruction in secondary schools and at tertiary level. Unlike the change in the medium of instruction post-independence, which was principally driven by nationalistic sentiments, this more recent change in language policy (in 2003) was driven by concerns about globalisation (B. Foo & Richards, 2004), the “knowledge economy” and “development-oriented nationalism” (Gill, 2006, p. 84). As a result, an immediate major restructuring of the education system was implemented. At secondary level, new subjects were introduced (e.g. English for Science and Technology) and the medium of instruction for Mathematics and Science was changed to English.

In higher learning institutions, both private and public universities incorporated English as their medium of instruction, especially for science and technology-orientated subjects. English was elevated to the medium of instruction for science, engineering and medical courses since it was believed to have “the highest capital linguistic value” (Gill, 2006, p. 84). In addition, many new public and private universities were developed. Intensive collaboration was set up with local and overseas universities, in order to provide more opportunities for higher learning. Amendments to the University College Acts 1996 also

allowed universities to have greater autonomy to manage and operate their institutions. This was in line with Vision 2020, which was the government's aspiration to achieve developed nation status by the year 2020. Institutions of higher education "play an important role in training the people necessary for the academic as well as the manpower needs of the nation" (Higher Educational Institutions Act 1996 in B. Foo & Richards, 2004, p. 238).

In 2009, however, with a change of leadership it was announced that:

... the teaching of science and mathematics in English at the primary and secondary educational levels will be phased out by 2012. The government plan is to improve the teaching of English at the primary and secondary levels to ensure that the implementation of teaching science and technology in English at the higher education institutions will become more effective. (Zaaba, et al., 2011, p. 162)

This latest policy '*Memartabatkan Bahasa Malaysia Memperkukuhkan Bahasa Inggeris (MBMMBI)*' introduced by the Ministry of Education in 2009 aims to raise the status of the Malay language and strengthen the English language (Ujang, 2009). The MBMMBI policy also acts as a transitional phase in which the teaching of Science and Mathematics in English will cease in 2015 when the last batch of students completes their secondary studies. After 2015, Science and Mathematics will be taught entirely using the national language (Hammim & Othman, 2011).

It is evident that the language policies within the education system of Malaysia constantly fluctuate, due to the competing demands of globalisation and nationalism. Nonetheless, it can also be stated that mastery of both languages (English and Malay) is advocated by the education system (whereby opportunities are created for students to acquire both languages). Abdullah (2008) commented that "the situation reflects a state of co-existence of two languages" and bilingualism in Malaysia "must be regarded as an asset rather than a liability" (p. 70). The following section discusses the issues for learners who are at the receiving end of language policy inconsistencies within the Malaysian education system.

## The Malaysian ESL writer

The Malaysian education system provides eleven years of basic education. Lee (1999) explained, "The educational structure is 6-3-2, that is, 6 years of primary education, 3 years of lower secondary education, and 2 years of upper secondary education" (p. 88). Students are required to pass an English paper as part of the Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM) examinations (in Form 5) or Malaysian Higher School Certificate (STPM) in Form 6, before they are awarded with a certificate (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1

### *Malaysian National Examinations at Secondary School Level*

Level		National Exams
Lower Secondary	Form 1 (1 year)	-
	Form 2 (1 year)	-
	Form 3 (1 year)	Lower Secondary Assessment (PMR)
Upper Secondary	Form 4 (1 year)	-
	Form 5 (1 year)	Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM)
	Form 6 (2 years)	Malaysian Higher School Certificate (STPM)

A pass in the Malaysian national exams at secondary school level can range from 8E to 1A (see Table 1.2).

Table 1.2

### *SPM and STPM Grade System*

SPM		STPM Subject Grade	STPM Subject Grade Value
1A	Excellent	A	4.00
2A		A-	3.67
3B	Credit	B+	3.33
4B		B	3.00
5C		B-	2.67
6C		C+	2.33
7D	Pass	C	2.00
8E		C-	1.67

<b>9F</b>	Fail	<b>D+</b>	1.33
		<b>D</b>	1.00
		<b>F (Fail)</b>	0.00

*Note.* Adapted from *Peperiksaan Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia (STPM)* by *The Malaysian Examinations Council*, 2011. Copyright 2011 by the Malaysian Examinations Council.

The learners involved in this study would have been directly impacted by the numerous policy changes (at secondary and university level), which have been previously discussed.

### **The approach to writing in national secondary schools**

In Malaysia, pedagogical and instructional materials for English have always concentrated on the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. According to the Ministry of Education (2000):

The purpose of teaching English in schools is to enable school leavers to use the language for daily life, knowledge acquisition and future work situations. The curriculum specifies three broad areas of language use: personal, informational and aesthetic. The four language skills are integrated into the three areas mentioned. (p. 1)

The English classroom in secondary or primary schools typically has 30-40 students and the duration of one session is approximately 40-45 minutes. A normal week would consist of four contact hours. The typical English classroom would be teacher-centred. Group work is seldom undertaken, due to class size limitations and time constraints. The highly standardised education system also means that a textbook is assigned for the subject of English and the curriculum is designed according to the themes in the allocated textbook. In the writing component, learners are taught how to write descriptions, instructions, reports, articles and simple speeches. There is also an emphasis on grammatical accuracy, and research by Foo (2007) has identified that writing instruction is still “predominantly form-focused” (p. 6).

There is also an ‘examination-culture’ pervading the secondary school system. As a result, reading and writing skills take precedence over listening and speaking skills. Tan and Miller (2007) have even gone so far as to state that English writing in Malaysian high schools is a “discourse of examinations” (p. 124). This may be attributed to the fact

that in order to pass the Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM), and enter university, these learners have to obtain at least one pass with credit in English (see Table 1.2 for an explanation of grades required for 'credit').

For students entering the university through STPM qualifications, which uses a cumulative-grade-point-average system (C.G.P.A.), a minimum of 2.0 is required. The C.G.P.A. requirements may vary depending on the university and the degree being applied for (e.g. Engineering / Medicine requires  $\geq 3.5$  C.G.P.A.). Therefore, students in the Academic Writing class may be seeking different English proficiency levels to achieve entry to various career pathways.

### **Pathway to higher learning**

Students with a SPM qualification often go through a preparatory stage (known as pre-university, foundation or matriculation), before they pursue their undergraduate degree. This matriculation-orientated programme generally takes one year to complete. On the other hand, students with a STPM qualification may skip this level and commence their degree studies (Malaysian Examinations Council, 2012). In fact, "there was a general perception that the STPM examination is of higher standard than the matriculation examination because students have to study an extra year before they can sit the STPM examination" (Raman & Sua, 2010, p. 126). Furthermore, "STPM qualifications have been described as the Malaysian version of the Cambridge Advanced or A-level examination in a secondary school in Malaysia" since these are endorsed by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (K. S. Lee, 2004, p. 3).

Matriculation programmes (with the exception of International Islamic University, Malaysia and University of Malaya) are fully managed by the Matriculation Division of the Ministry of Education Malaysia (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2011). The duration for pre-university programmes is two semesters. In addition, as of 2004/2005, all Mathematics, Science, Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Informatics Science subjects are being taught in the English language.

## **Bridging secondary and university level studies through Malaysian University English Test (MUET)**

The Malaysian University English Test (MUET) was introduced in 1999, “for the purpose of bridging the gap in English language proficiency between the final year of secondary school and university level study” (Abdul Samad, Syed Abd Rahman, & Norbaiti, 2008, p. 58). Initially introduced to bring about a higher level of English proficiency for those entering university, MUET has become a mandatory requirement for admission into public universities (Malaysian Examinations Council, 2011). Students wishing to pursue their studies at public universities typically register with their respective schools or institutions and they often sit for this examination prior to their actual degree studies (e.g. during matriculation) or after the SPM or STPM examinations.

MUET is comprised of four components: listening, speaking, reading comprehension and writing. The maximum scores for each component are 45 for listening and speaking, 75 for writing and 135 for reading. The scores are graded in six bands: Band 6 being the highest and Band 1 the lowest (see Table 1.3). This examination thus determines the number of English language preparatory courses students have to attend at university. For example:

In Universiti Putra Malaysia, students who obtain Bands 1 or 2 in the MUET are required to take 3 English language proficiency courses; those who obtain Bands 3 or 4 need to take 2 English language proficiency courses; while those with either a Band 5 or 6 are exempted from any such courses. (Abdul Samad, et al., 2008, p. 58)

In the university context for this study, a minimum Band 3 requirement and pass in the English for Preparatory Purposes paper are imposed on students wishing to enrol in the AW paper. Although there have been criticisms regarding the validity of MUET as an instrument to measure ability in language use (e.g. unequal weighting in the language components) (Abdul Samad, et al., 2008), in the context of this study, the main concern regarding MUET is that it does not measure students' academic English, but it is commonly used for placement purposes in the tertiary context. The impact of this disparity is described in the next section.

Table 1.3

*Malaysian University English Test (MUET) Grade System*

Band	Description
Band 6	<b>Very good user.</b> Very good command of the language. Highly expressive, fluent, accurate and appropriate language; hardly any inaccuracies. Very good understanding of language and contexts.
Band 5	<b>Good User.</b> Good command of the language. Expressive, fluent, accurate and appropriate language but with minor inaccuracies. Good understanding of language and contexts. Functions well in the language.
Band 4	<b>Competent user.</b> Satisfactory command of the language. Satisfactorily expressive and fluent, appropriate language but with occasional inaccuracies. Satisfactory understanding of language and contexts. Functions satisfactorily in the language.
Band 3	<b>Modest user.</b> Modest command of the language. Modestly expressive and fluent, appropriate language but with noticeable inaccuracies. Modest understanding of language and contexts. Able to function modestly in the language.
Band 2	<b>Limited user.</b> Limited command of the language. Lacks expressiveness, fluency and appropriacy: inaccurate use of the language resulting in breakdown in communication. Limited understanding of language and contexts. Limited ability to function in the language.
Band 1	<b>Extremely limited user.</b> Poor command of the language. Unable to use language to express ideas. Inaccurate use of the language resulting in frequent breakdowns in communication. Little or poor understanding of language and contexts. Hardly able to function in the language.

*Note.* Adapted from *Malaysian University English Test (MUET)* by The Malaysian Examinations Council, 2011. Copyright 2011 by the Malaysian Examinations Council.

## **Learning academic writing in a second language as part of academic literacy development**

At tertiary level, students are often required to take English language preparatory courses as part of their academic literacy programmes. The number of English language courses that students have to attend at university is determined by their MUET results. The required preparatory papers may have different names, but they have the similar objective of preparing learners with the necessary skills and knowledge required at degree level and also to build up their academic literacy. In short, the English language courses aim to equip students with the necessary language skills, to enable them to function effectively within an academic environment. An example of a typical course objective from one university is as follows:

The course focuses on writing for specific purposes, in particular technical writing that students are expected to produce. Students will be given practice in the techniques of gathering technical information and critical writing. In addition, students will be

exposed to techniques of gathering technical information, proper language usage and acceptable writing standards. (Universiti Teknologi Mara, 2012)

In general, academic literacy refers to the knowledge and ability to read and write for academic purposes, in order to function effectively at tertiary level. For second language (L2) learners, academic literacy is defined as follows:

For non-native English writers, second language (L2) advanced academic literacy encompasses knowledge of the rhetorical, linguistic, social and cultural features of academic discourse as well as knowledge of English as used by their academic disciplines. Literacy is acquired through a socialization process embedded in social practice, patterned by social institutions and interactions between learners and their academic discourse community members. (Ferenz, 2005, p. 339)

Based on the definition, there are many aspects involved in the acquisition of academic literacy, and even more so for second language learners. These include having knowledge of one's own discipline and reading and writing skills.

Within the Malaysian tertiary context, academic writing can be perceived as a platform that provides these learners with academic literacy. At this level, learners are taught different types of academic conventions; the incorporation of multiple sources in their writing; the correct acknowledgment of these sources and engagement in academic criticism. Linguistic features and knowledge of the discipline are also embedded in the curricula of academic writing. However, recent research on Malaysian learners' use of English in higher learning institutions (for L2 learners) has revealed that students still face challenges. Despite having learned the subject for eleven years, they "struggle to comprehend advanced level reading texts in English ... lack reading skills and are not critical readers" (Shafie & Nayan, 2011, p. 2). This problem also affects their writing skills.

That the national language was used for decades as a medium of instruction at all educational levels in Malaysia also contributes to the minimal role that English plays in certain parts of the country. Gill (2005) contended that "in the rural areas where there was almost no environmental exposure to the language, English was virtually a foreign language" (p. 244). A critical issue this raises is that the English level that students have

reached upon entering university will clearly vary and there will be a gap between students who are urban-based and students who are rural-based. This would add further complexities and challenges to the learning experience of academic writing at tertiary level.

Students also need to “adapt quickly to both the academic and social culture of their host environments, and the personalities and demands of their teachers, academic advisors, and classmates” (Braine, 2002, p. 60). A study by Fong, Kim, Stapa and Darus (2009) identified that the “culture of writing in secondary school [in Malaysia] is different from the culture of writing in postsecondary education, making transition [to universities] possibly problematic and intimidating to students” (p. 46). The ability to write in English (amongst Malaysian university students) has been reported as being “not at the most satisfactory level” (Shamsudin & Mahady, 2010, p. 1) and “low proficiency students are still struggling to write” (Puteh, Rahamat, & Karim, 2010, p. 580). The fact that students are not taught academic writing in their first language in secondary school may also further augment the learning challenges. This suggests that students entering university still grapple with fundamental skills for reading and writing in English.

What can be derived from the discussion above is that there are two main challenges of learning academic writing in L2 for Malaysian learners: the social and cultural context, and linguistic medium. Complexities rising from contextual and linguistic issues are noted briefly in the following section, and a wider discussion will be provided in Chapter Two.

### **Social and cultural complexities of learning academic writing in L2**

Due to Malaysia's historical exigencies, language policies during the post-independence period have always been affiliated with nationalistic sentiments. The enforced imperialism during British rule has resulted in the need to re-legitimise certain ethnic groups' positions within the country, post-independence. This is evidenced in the reinforcement of the national language as an official language and as a medium of instruction at all levels of education. Nevertheless, at the present time, the demands of globalisation require that this post-colonial nation incorporate English as the medium of

instruction, in particular at higher learning institutions as part of the nation's development. The global spread of English and its socio-economic importance has made this inherited language into a commodity due to its promise of social mobility (Rajadurai, 2010).

In the Malaysian context, learning academic writing in English may present social and cultural challenges. In fact, Rajadurai (2010) found that the meaning represented by the English language and the act of learning English could be interpreted by some Malaysian students as an erosion of their national and cultural identity. Students of certain ethnicities may perceive that learning academic writing in English contradicts the early initiatives of relegating English to the status of a foreign language. Consequently, the cultural conflict represented by English (as a medium of instruction) may result in students' ambivalence, partial tolerance and resistance, and even absolute rejection of the language and the subject (Canagarajah, 1999). Since Malaysia has a complex linguistic situation, due to its post-colonial history, the position of English language use is contentious.

The constant policy changes faced by the learners, over the duration of their academic studies, are not easy to adapt to, and challenges are to be expected. In fact, Mohamed (2008) maintains that:

The greatest dilemma of Malaysian education system has been its inability to understand the ethno linguistic complexity of bilingual education and its impact on student, classroom and society in such a way as to enable teacher and instructor to make informed decisions or [sic] about practice in classroom setting [sic]. (p. 89)

Lee's (2003) study of Malaysian students' motivation in language learning explains, "English is not the native language of the people in Malaysia but was 'inherited' as a result of history and is a legacy of the former colonial masters ... making identity issues far more complex and multilayered" (p. 140). Therefore, the influence from the Malaysian educational context may permeate students' perception and treatment of the language as part of their learning experience.

There is also a general consensus in research that learners draw on their prior learning experiences when attempting a writing task (Macbeth, 2010). This may include their

knowledge of content and their level of writing skills and language abilities. In the case of Malaysian students, their past learning experience of writing (in secondary schools) may be irrelevant or may even conflict with their experience at tertiary level. Tan and Miller (2007), in their study on writing in English in Malaysian secondary schools, discovered that “students’ focus on acceptable writing for school and examination purposes did not encourage them to develop their writing skills beyond these requirements, but to adopt a range of pragmatic and expedient tactics” (p.124). This view is important since it suggests that linguistic knowledge taught in school may be a mismatch with what is expected at university level. This may also lead to an erroneous understanding of what constitutes learning academic writing in English, at a university.

### **Linguistic challenges affiliated with learning academic writing in L2**

It is assumed that second language writers, who are still in the process of acquiring linguistic competence, will probably face difficulties when attempting to become competent in a rhetoric-specific area, such as academic writing. Anstrom and colleagues (2010) offered an explanation in their research, when they stated that academic English is the reason for the discrepancy between English language learners and English-proficient students. Similarly, Zhang and Mi (2010) identified language difficulties as one of the major obstacles for international students’ academic endeavours. L2 writers learning academic writing in English not only have to master English, but also gain advanced writing skills.

Although tertiary institutions would ideally prefer their students to both gain content acquisition and raise their English language levels, this feat is infused with pedagogical challenges. To illustrate, despite the claims of academic writing being explicit, an ongoing debate within the research of academic writing is that academic writing is rather tacit (Elton, 2010; Green, 2010) for native speakers. In particular, Lillis (2001) argued that the focus should be transferred from students’ ‘problematic’ language to the institutional practices of teaching academic writing, whereby “the language of disciplines and the pedagogic practices in which these are embedded usually remains invisible” (p. 22). Thus, an experienced student writer may be able to interpret disciplinary requirements accordingly, but less experienced students may face challenges, as a result of these implicit expectations. This situation is exacerbated for English as a second language (ESL) students since “ESL instruction often carries a

remedial stigma” (Matsuda, Canagarajah, Harklau, Hyland, & Warschauer, 2003, p. 155). Consequently L2 writers may be perceived as ‘deficient’ or ‘incompetent’ due to the assumption that academic writing conventions are homogenous.

In short, learning to be competent in academic writing in English is a challenging task for both experienced and inexperienced ESL writers, since it implies advanced academic literacy acquisition in another language.

### **1.3 RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This study acknowledges that considerable research has investigated L2 experiences in writing (Leki, Cumming, & Silva, 2008). Although this has produced important findings on L2 writing in English, the research context has been predominantly Western where English is used as a main language, and students are in the ‘minority’ groups. Therefore, this study extends current literature by providing a perspective from the multicultural postcolonial context of Malaysia, and by investigating influences of self-concept on students engagement of academic writing (in L2) in a higher learning institution, in a setting where English is a second language.

In light of historical language changes, investigating the Malaysian learner’s self-concept in academic writing and its relationship with their engagement in the writing class is thought to have useful implications for both instructors and students, since it provides a better understanding about the nature of challenges and issues that these tertiary learners face as they learn academic writing in English in Malaysia. In particular, awareness of self-concept has merit for students as it allows them to reflect on and evaluate their behaviour and actions. By reflecting on their self-concepts, learners can actually become more aware of and better understand their learning process and become empowered within their learning experience as they may make the connection between their self-concepts and actions in the Academic Writing class. In doing so, learners’ understanding of how they operate makes it possible for changes and development to occur since learners would also become more aware of factors that influence their success, as well as factors that pose challenges, in learning academic writing in English. Thus, this study’s investigation of Malaysian learners’ self-concept and its relationship

with their engagement within a tertiary context provides a useful perspective in understanding how students interpret and respond to contextual changes within the Malaysian education system.

The focus on academic writing in this study is also due to the role of writing in tertiary education (Othman & Mohamad, 2009). Students' achievement at tertiary level is evaluated mainly on written assessments, be it in the form of large extended writing (e.g. projects, proposal and reports) or short response essays (e.g. examinations and quizzes). Nonetheless, writing (in English) for Malaysian learners at university level is still reported to be unsatisfactory (Ali & Yunus, 2004), and in comparison with speaking and listening, has been identified to be one of the most difficult skills to master (Yah Awg, Hamzah, & Hasbollah, 2010).

Consequently, this study highlights opportunities for improvement within the writing curricula since curriculum designers and educational policymakers may learn more about the students' experience in learning academic writing in English. This may lead to a more fitting educational policy for improving academic literacy levels. When considering these potential contributions, research on the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and student engagement in the Malaysian ESL context becomes an issue worth investigating.

## **1.4 OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS**

Chapter One has identified and justified the research problem and objectives, and provided background to the study, including information about the educational system in Malaysia and academic writing in Malaysian tertiary institutions. It has also presented issues related to the shifting role of English within the Malaysian educational context.

Chapter Two reviews the literature on key aspects of self-concept in academic writing, student engagement and writing in a second language. It provides the conceptual framework in which the three areas are linked as part of the learning experience in the AW class, focusing particularly on the relationship between self-concept in academic

writing and engagement. The chapter ends by identifying gaps in the literature addressed by the research questions.

Chapter Three presents a philosophical discussion, rationale for the chosen mixed methods research design and the qualitative-quantitative balance.

The practical implementation of the research approach is discussed in Chapter Four. This includes detailed descriptions of the setting, research design and procedures, the methods of analysis for both phases of the study and ethical considerations relevant to the study.

Chapter Five presents findings from the Phase One questionnaire on Malaysian learners' self-concept in academic writing and their engagement in the Academic Writing class. The results include those from the descriptive analysis, item analysis and grouped frequency statistics, as well as results from the exploratory factor analysis and correlational analysis. This chapter ends with discussion of the quantitative findings and links the quantitative results to the following qualitative phase of the study.

The findings from the qualitative phase of the study are presented in Chapter Six. The cases of Imran, Ahmad, Mustafa, Siew Lee, Maya, Joanne, Eliza and Nurul are presented. Each case ends with a summary of the emerging themes, some of which are unique to each individual.

Chapter Seven draws together the findings of Chapter Six and presents an overall discussion of these results, in line with the research questions.

Finally, Chapter Eight concludes with a summary, suggestions for future research and implications from the study, including implications for theory, methodology, students, instructors, institutions, curriculum designers and policymakers.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents the conceptual framework for the study. It reviews the research connected to the central areas of self-concept, engagement and learning academic writing in English, discusses how these insights relate to Malaysian learners, and highlights gaps in the literature that are addressed by the current study.

The chapter is organised as follows. In Section 2.2, an overview of self-concept research is presented. This includes an historical overview of self-concept, the personal self and the social self, culminating in discussion of the notion of the fluidity of the self. Section 2.3 reviews literature on student engagement and examines the perspectives underpinning the various definitions of student engagement and key findings on engagement and disengagement research. The lack of research into student engagement in Malaysia is also identified. Building on the context and background for Malaysian university students who are learning academic writing (in English) provided in Chapter One, Section 2.4 provides a more in-depth overview of research on learning academic writing in a second language. In doing so, it also discusses the issues of legitimacy and identity as being part of the challenge for Malaysian students when learning academic writing in a second language. The chapter ends by identifying the research questions.

#### **2.2 SELF RESEARCH**

Most reviews which attempt to explicate the notion of self, typically tend to comment on the plethora of self-related articles and monographs. This is rightly so, as the self (especially self-concept) has been extensively studied and can be traced back to the early 1890s. Hence, self-concept has undergone a tumultuous process of legitimatization and validation over time. Therefore, the review of self-concept research, which has spanned more than a century, will be intertwined with the preferred

epistemology and methodology of the coinciding period in time. Inevitably, it also includes criticisms and validations by proponents and opponents of self-concept.

In particular, this section of the literature review discusses literature that explicates the historical overview of self-concept and it highlights the seminal work of key researchers. Specifically, it focuses on the development of self-concept as a construct to better illuminate the relationship and the role it plays, especially with regard to actions displayed by students in a learning process. The discussion firstly focuses on the personal self and secondly, the social self. The subsequent part explicates the theoretical position of the study, and the delineation of the self is argued due to its fluid nature. Therefore, the current study moves away from the early psychological notion of individual/personal identity as a fixed trait, and takes a balanced stance that includes both the personal and social aspects of self.

### **The personal self-concept**

Early studies in self and self-concept research have their roots firmly planted in the field of psychology. Work by James (1890) spearheaded the interest in this area and provided the foundation of subsequent research of self. James's work made the distinction between the architecture of the 'I' and the 'Me', *the self as the subject* and *the self as the object* respectively. The concept of *Me-self* (*the sum total of all a person can call his or her own*) was further developed by James into a multidimensional and hierarchical view of the material self, social self and the spiritual self.

Another concept still relevant is James's work on the multiplicity of selves in what he describes as '*conflict of the different Me's*'. James posits that the multiplicity of the social selves can at times be harmonious, and at times can be in dissension. This statement is up for debate; for example, Blumstein (2001) argues that individuals generally strive to harmonise their inner selves' personal sameness. What is perhaps less debatable is the fact that this multiplicity creates a mechanism through which learners manage and negotiate their conflicting selves in the learning context in order to suit their perceptions of the different learning demands. The Jamesian perspective is therefore relevant to this study since the socio-cultural context of Malaysia in which the

students are embedded presents a rather interesting setting for exploring the multiple identities that learners might have, and identify with in learning academic writing in L2.

Research on the self gained momentum in the 1950s when non-behaviourist researchers (e.g. existentialist psychologists) such as Snygg and Combs, (1949) felt that behaviourist-oriented models for self-studies were rather limited in their ability to explain the dynamic phenomenon of self. It was during this period that self-concept research began to prosper and eventually established its position as a worthy construct in the field of psychology (Stets & Burke, 2003). A seminal work by Wylie (1961), provided a critical review of self-concept research and its theory, which led her to the conclusion that “the literature was growing in chaotic profusion” (p. vii). Theories postulated by researchers at that time were not empirically tested (due to the issue of construct validity) and this situation led to ambiguity, vagueness and contradictions of propositions (Rosenberg, 1989). To illustrate, Shavelson, Hubner and Stanton (1976) who attempted to amalgamate operational definitions from self-concept studies identified 17 conceptual definitions in their metaanalysis. Consequently, this impacted on the instruments and design of various self-concept studies.

The literature from social psychology has drawn a distinction between the *personal self* and the *social self*. This delineation posits that the personal self or individuated self-concept is defined as the person's sense of unique identity, which is differentiated from others (M. Brewer & Gardner, 1996). The personal self-concept enables the individual to claim uniqueness and distinctiveness from others. This sense of self includes idiosyncrasies and attributes which differentiate the person from others (M. Brewer, 1991; M. Brewer & Gardner, 1996). It also “embodies personal history ... shapes cognition, and anchors a range of goals, motives, and needs” (Turner and Onorato, 1999, pp. 15-16). The personal self-concept can be identified from statements which are both descriptive (e.g. “I like writing in English”) and evaluative (e.g. “I always do well in the writing assessments”), and also subject specific (e.g. Mathematics or English) (Shavelson, et al., 1976).

Shavelson et al. (1976) proposed that self-concept is a hierarchical and multifaceted construct. ‘Multifaceted’ relates to other self-concepts such as social, physical and academic self-concepts. ‘Hierarchy’ indicates levels of importance and suggests that

some self-concepts are more central, and others more peripheral. Unlike other models of self-concept, the hierarchical representation perceives the self as dynamic, that is: “active, forceful, and capable of change” (Markus & Wurf, 1987, p. 299). This approach is highly relevant to the current study as it takes into account the context that a learner is embedded in, in order to explicate the architecture of their self-concept. Thus, considering the socio-historical background of the Malaysian learners, learners may have strong national sentiments (post-colonial era) and also have high-regard for the English language in academia. Consequently, learners may also have multiple self-concepts in academic writing (e.g. self-concept in English, self-concept in writing in English and self-concept in academic writing) in which some are central, and some are peripheral. Since students are multilingual and have had more exposure to L1, this alludes to L1 self-concepts as being more central and self-concept in academic writing, as peripheral.

The existence of a substantiated model, and the availability of a valid and reliable instrument post 1976, provided the impetus for research on the development of self-concept (Bracken, 1996). Studies were conducted with the different facets of self-concept at different age levels ranging from children, pre-adolescents and adolescents, to adults. This also became a catalyst for research on self-concepts' antecedents and consequences, such as gender (Woon & Wang, 2005), ability grouping, academic major (R. Bennet, 2009; Chiu & Klassen, 2010), socio-economic status (Rinn, Jamieson, Gross, & McQueen, 2009), and predominantly academic achievement (Guay, Ratelle, Roy, & Litalien, 2010; H. W. Marsh & Martin, 2010). These studies helped facilitate the identification of academic risk factors and deficits (Au, Watkins, & Hattie, 2010) and avoided academic stereotyping (Okeke, Howard, Kurtz-Costes, & Rowley, 2009) in the educational setting.

This study adopts Byrne and Shavelson's (1986) definition of self-concept whereby it is defined as “self-perceptions about one's abilities and competences” (p. 474). Accordingly, in this study, the framework of learners' self-concept in academic writing includes how they perceive their abilities and competences in academic writing. This may be further interpreted by and manifested in their actions in the classroom. Furthermore, this current study takes a step toward a more complete understanding by exploring the self-concept development as learners move from the high school to the

university. Different educational environments may be at odds with learners' current self-concepts and may also introduce new academic or non-academic aspects into the learning experience.

### **Self-concept and self-efficacy**

It would be impossible to discuss self-concept without making reference to another self-construct, self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is defined as the "individuals' perceived capabilities to attain designated types of performance and achieve specific results" (Pajares, 1996, p. 546). Self-efficacy also tends to be task and situation specific (Bandura, 1986). Self-efficacy which involves "perceived confidence about successfully performing a given academic task" (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003, p. 10) is dependent on the experience (success or failure) and exposure to the relevant task. In fact, Bong and Skaalvik maintain that, "as students acquire more enactive and vicarious experiences ... their competence perceptions toward the task or domain gradually become more stable" (p. 31).

Bandura's work on self-efficacy (1977; 1986) highlighted self-efficacy as having the power to influence human actions. Furthermore, Bandura maintained that people's beliefs in their capabilities have been revealed to mobilise motivation, cognitive resources and determine courses of action. In fact, self-efficacy has been found to consistently predict academic achievement (Bong, 2008) and is able to explicate why students expend effort and persist in the face of adversity (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2008). The fact that both self-concept and self-efficacy are linked with academic achievement affords the opportunity to explain learner engagement. A sense of belief built on positive experience impacts on the learner as it fosters a strong sense of self which is adaptable to change, and also impervious to hardship. This is because the experience of academic achievement (or academic failure) has provided the learners with resources of appropriate strategies to further maintain or influence certain self-concepts.

Nevertheless, as the students in the study would have had very limited experience with or prior exposure to academic writing, it was felt that an academic self-concept would be a more appropriate lens in understanding the varied links that may exist between the self and each student's engagement. The current study acknowledges the contribution of

self-efficacy research and perceives that both self-concept and self-efficacy, may have an important mediating role (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009) in that they illuminate the link between thoughts and actions, particularly in regard to learner engagement. Nonetheless, in this study, self-concept is perceived as a general and more dominant self-construct, while self-efficacy is just one subset within this construct.

In line with the discussion on perceived competency and perceived confidence, it is also anticipated that some elements of self-regulation would emerge in the study. Self-regulation, is discernable through acts which students' proactively "self-initiate the processes for improving their methods and environments for learning" and thus "become masters of their own learning processes" (Zimmerman, 2001, p. 13855). Nonetheless, a crucial component of effective self-regulated learning is positive beliefs about one's own abilities (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2006). Thus, it is likely that students who hold positive self-concepts in academic writing may also display some self-regulated learning strategies.

### **Possible selves**

Another area that should not be overlooked in discussing the notion of the personal self is the concept of *possible selves*, which emphasises a future orientation of the self. This was first proposed by Markus and Nurius (1986) who postulated that all individuals possessed many possible selves. They elaborated on the notion of possible selves as representing individuals' ideals of what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming. Langan-Fox (1991) also connected goals to *future selves*, thus linking the self to motivation. Possible selves (that hold multiple roles) may provide incentives, as well as context of meaning, for the now self (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 963).

Inglehart (1987) further added that possible selves contribute to motivation in two ways: (i) providing a person with specific goals, thus structuring both thoughts and actions, and (ii) motivating the person by providing emotional energy to persevere. Similarly, Garcia and Pintrich (1995) and Anderman and Anderman (1998) also contributed to the knowledge on multiple selves, indicating how the lens of possible selves helps in understanding self-regulation and motivation, as well as performance and mastery goals. Since then, there have been studies which used the lens of future selves to better

understand academic performance, including engagement (and disengagement) (Buhs, 2005; Mornane, 2009) and achievement (Barker, Dowson, & McInerney, 2006; Hoyle & Sherrill, 2006; Y. Kivetz & T. R. Tyler, 2007; Leondari, 2007).

In the case of university learners, the stage that they are in signifies a crucial period of their lives as they begin to establish the directions of their future. The appeal of the future selves becomes substantial to learners' self-regulation and motivation (Oyserman, 2004). The need to succeed and avoid situations that may lead to failure orients students' actions such as goal-setting and other meaningful pursuits. Hock and colleagues (2006) posit that learners' commitment to learning is established once learners perceive and acknowledge the link between academic knowledge, skills, and their future goals. In short, the notion of possible selves paved the way for better understanding of the malleable nature of self-concept. Since the systems of affective-cognitive schema regulate individual behaviour (Markus & Nurius, 1986), potent motivators of self-concept may help elucidate the link between self-concept and actions.

This section on the personal self has identified that it is evaluative and descriptive in nature, hierarchical, multifaceted, and is shaped by the context in which the learner is embedded. It has also been noted that self-concept has been linked very consistently with academic performance and this is purported to be due to the fact that the vision of future selves underscores the incentive for what individuals strive to become. The next section moves on to examine the social self-concept.

### **The social self-concept**

An array of definitions has been offered to describe the *social self*. For example, the social self has been understood as "involving the extension of the self beyond the level of the individual" (M. Brewer, 1991, p. 476) and "a sense of self as connected to the others" (M. Brewer & Gardner, 1996). The social self is often discussed in tandem with social categories (e.g. ethnicity or gender) and social roles (e.g. student or daughter). The notion of social self underlies the connections of the self to the social world. Social self-concept "depersonalises the self-concept, whereby *I* becomes *we*" (M. Brewer, 1991, p. 476). Ruble and colleagues (2004) suggest that there are certain values and emotional significances attached to the related role or category membership. Thus, a

different social self may serve a different motive, and each may have considerable interpersonal consequences, such as social inclusion.

Theories relating to socially constructed identity have revealed how personal self-concept and social self-concept (identity) are both contingent in linking cognition, motivation, and behaviour (Pierce, 1995; Seta, Schmidt, & Bookhout, 2006). To illustrate, when a learner decides on a particular course of action, he or she may be inclined to associate with groups that share and reinforce similar values. Therefore, examining the context that a learner is in is critical as it may illuminate the factors involved in the creation of their social self.

In tandem with discussion of the social self, it is useful to refer to the notion of the *self ecology*. This notion, which underlines the significance of context, emphasises the dynamic nature of the self as proposed by Hormuth (1990), who maintains that self exists as part of an ecological system that is acquired and developed through social experience. He indicates that the ecology of self includes other people, environments and objects and that: "these elements serve as the sources and setting, instrument and symbols of social experience" (p. 1). The relative stability of the ecology of self is purported to have an effect on self-concept since self-concept change is deemed to exist in interdependence with the ecology of related others, objects and environment. Powell (2009) further clarifies this in arguing that, "the changing environment encourages self-evaluation since each individual must adapt to changes in order to succeed" (p. 32). This notion is not new and in fact its tenets parallel that of James (1890), Cooley (1902), Mead (1934) and Shavelson, Hubner and Stanton (1976).

The ecological perspective is important as learners construct their academic self-concept (which is also intertwined with their identity) based on the cues they receive from their environment, specifically in the higher learning context. Taking an ecological perspective affords the opportunity to explore the development of self-concept (both personal and social) within the specific transitional setting of students' first year at university and their unique interrelated interactions within the environment.

With regard to this study, as the social self is contextually-bound, relevant cultural, societal and institutional norms impact on its formulation. This may imply that factors

such as campus environment, academic culture, interactions with others and expectations of the majority culture could either encourage or discourage the growth of certain identities. In fact, when moving into a new institution, social and cultural (academic) experience is significant in facilitating transitions (Hussey & Smith, 2010). This might adversely affect certain learners as they may need to negotiate and reconcile multiple (possibly competing) social identities into their general sense of self. For this reason, this study perceives identity as the collective aspects of the social and personal self. In doing so, it answers the call by Marsh, Craven and McInerney (2003) for research on self as part of the identity, and answers Hattie's (2003) call to explore self-concept as a process rather than a static concept.

### **The fluidity of the self**

Having discussed the nature of both personal and social self, the review moves on to discuss subjectivity and context as part of informing individuals' representation of the self. In particular, subjectivity in self-identification and context are argued to play a role in the fluidity of the self.

### **Subjectivity in self-identification**

Brewer and Gardner (1996) maintain the dynamic nature of self and present a framework to better understand the differential levels of representation of the personal and social self (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1

#### *Representations of the Self*

Levels of analysis	Self-concept	Basis of Self evaluation	Frame of reference	Basic social motivation
Individual	Personal	Traits	Interpersonal comparison	Self-interest
Interpersonal	Relational	Roles	Reflection	Other's benefit
Group	Collective	Group Prototype	Intergroup comparison	Collective welfare

*Note.* The representations of the self. Reprinted from "Who is this "We"? Levels of collective identity and self representations" by M. Brewer and W. Gardner, 1996, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 71 (1), p. 84. Copyright 1996 by the American Psychological Association.

In Table 2.1, representations of the self are broken down at the individual level, the interpersonal level and the group level. At each level, the frames of reference differ. The individual tends to use interpersonal comparison, and tends to use reflection as a frame of reference. Conversely, at the group level, the frame of reference tends to be intergroup comparison.

Brewer and Gardner (1996) propose the notion of social identity “as a reconciliation of opposing needs for assimilation and differentiation from others” (p. 91). In particular, they assert that social identity offers a compromise between self-categorisation, since the latter theory has been argued to be either too personalized or too inclusive. The saliency of self-representations (personal and social) under social identity provides an explanation of the motivation behind group identification (or non-identification).

One of the central insights from social identity is the fact that the interpersonal-intergroup continuum posited allows certain self-concepts to be derived from social group, perceived to be relevant by the individual. In particular, within the social identity approach, “the self comprises both personal and social identity and neither is seen as in any sense more fundamental or authentic than the other” (M. Bennet & Sani, 2004, p. 1). In this manner, the social self and the social identity are similar. Thus, it can be inferred that the social self could permeate and become internalised as part of the self-conceptions. This then raises the issue of whether learners' self-definition of *I* and *me* could actually mean *us* and *we*, particularly in a collectivist culture such as Malaysia. Indeed, Markus and Kitayama (2010) have argued that “self is perceived as a cultural product and process” (p. 420), making an individual's independence (the personal) and interdependence (the social) in self-categorisation rather fluid.

While social identity theory (Turner, 1981) highlighted the elements of the social self, self-categorisation theory elaborated on the developmental aspects. Self-categorisation theory claims that accessibility of groups varies for the individual and is contingent on (both individual and group's) perceived ‘readiness’ and ‘fit’ (Turner & Onorato, 1999). Based on this premise, the categorisation process often reveals: (i) personal identity transitioning into group identity, and (ii) conflicts of personal identity.

Turner and Onorato (1999) also discussed the fluidity of self-concepts in which the peripheral self is perceived to be more susceptible to changes. The flexibility of the peripheral self allows the individual to adapt to various social situations and adopt various roles and group identities (Korte, 2007, p. 168). This can be seen when as part of the interaction with salient reference groups, there are instances that require self-strategies such as self-enhancement or self-protection (Alicke & Sedikides, 2009), self-verification (Hattie, 2003) and self-improvement (Sedikides & Hepper, 2009).

It appears that different researchers use different terms to refer to the fluidity of self-concept. Based on the understanding that self-concept is a developmental process (Demo, 1992; Hattie, 2003), there is a need to differentiate between central and peripheral self-concept (as used by Turner & Onorato, 1999). The central self-concept tends to be enduring in nature, while the peripheral self relates to a self-concept that is more receptive to change. Further discussion on the notion of fluidity in relation to context is presented in the following section.

### **Context as a frame of reference**

Context plays a pivotal role in both the personal and social self. In fact, it has been argued that levels of the self can shift, be it from personal to collective, and from relational to collective (e.g. Brewer, 1991, 1996). The genesis of this fluidity has been purported to stem from the contextual frame of reference in which the self is embedded, resulting in certain selves being activated and certain selves being deactivated.

Similarly, Powlishta (2004) argues that the saliency of the self depends on the social context. Certain contexts will heighten the salience of personal identity, and other contexts will heighten the salience of social identity. In the context of the study, moving from secondary school and university signifies a key period in the learner's sense of self. This is due to the fact that these two institutions are substantially different. Therefore, the sense of self becomes more complex as learners are exposed to new social environments in which they need to learn new roles, new rules and new expectations. The interactions that occur may require learners to develop new social roles and revise their current social identities.

Furthermore, researchers have claimed that a gap remains, specifically in the individual processes underlying developmental changes in social identities and their integration within the self (Amiot, De la Sablonniere, Terry, & Smith, 2007; Breakwell, 1992). Thus, this study aims to help fill the gap by examining self-concept as a process during a critical transitory period when students change their environments from secondary schools to tertiary institutions.

To recapitulate, the view of self presented in this section is not an either/or issue. This study acknowledges the value of both the personal self-concept and the social self. Particularly for students who are entering a new stage of their academic life, the lines between the personal self and the social self may potentially be murky. In fact, this study may afford an optimal opportunity to explore the antecedents which underline stability or fluidity in self-concept. Further, the diversity presented by the composition of students in this study necessitates that both aspects of the self be included in the exploration. To illustrate, although students are multilingual, having to learn academic writing in L2 in a postcolonial context which has collectivist culture clearly presents a dynamic interaction between the personal and social self.

Additionally, a majority of the studies exploring the personal self that were reviewed above have been predominantly quantitative. In contrast to the personal self, social self studies have been predominantly qualitative. This study proposes to fill that gap by utilising both methodologies, exploring both the personal and social self through a mixed methods approach. This is further explained in Chapter Three. Prior to that, however, the notion of academic self-concept needs to be examined.

### **Academic self-concept**

Academic self-concept is often viewed as an important educational outcome and is particularly pertinent to this study. Defined as “knowledge and perceptions about themselves [learners] in achievement situations” (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003, p. 6), awareness of academic self-concept has contributed immensely to assisting educational attainments. In fact, academic self-concept has cemented its position in psychology and educational psychology, as can be seen through rigorous research on self-concept resulting in recommendations for instructors to enhance positive self-concepts in the

academic setting (Chiu & Klassen, 2009; Kornilova, Kornilov, & Chumakova, 2009; Rodriguez, 2009).

The importance of academic self-concept is largely due to the fact that it has strong correlations with motivation and academic achievement. Researchers have capitalised on this knowledge to test the causal ordering of self-concept and achievement (H. W. Marsh, Craven, & McInerney, 2005; H. W. Marsh, Koller, Trautwein, Ludtke, & Baumert, 2005) and to interpret students' educational performance (Areepattamannil & Freeman, 2008; Choi, 2005; H. W. Marsh, Hau, & Kong, 2002; Ommundsen, Haugen, & Lund, 2005; Silverthorn, Dubois, & Crombie, 2005). The mutually reinforcing nature of self-concept and academic achievements have paved the way for researchers to better understand learners by looking at their past to better understand who they are today, and how this may possibly shape who they will become in the future (prior achievement affects subsequent academic self-concept and vice versa).

Although Baumeister et al. (2005) raised some concerns regarding the viability of self-beliefs in predicting academic achievement, numerous studies have since proven this claim to be unfounded. In fact, Marsh and Craven's (2006) meta-analysis study identified consistent support for the reciprocity between self-concept and achievement. Additionally, recent research by Marsh and Martin (2011) which identified that self-concept plays a mediating role for academic achievements, provides further proof of the reciprocal effects model (H. W. Marsh, Lüdtke, & Trautwein, 2009; Pinxten, Fraine, Damme, & D'Haenens, 2010). This reciprocal effects model identified by Marsh and colleagues (in 2006) has paved the way for exploring the link between self concept and motivation in an educational context. This saw self-concept research being discussed in tandem with motivational theories and its domains such as self-regulation (e.g. Hoyle & Sherrill, 2006; Ommundsen, et al., 2005), deep-surface level approaches in learning, goals (J. Lee, McInerney, Liem, & Ortiga, 2010), self-protecting behaviour (Seli, Dembo, & Crocker, 2009) and self-handicapping strategies (Thomas & Gadbois, 2007).

With the unmistakable presence of agency and reflexivity, academic self-concept provides useful insight into human behaviour (Markus & Kitayama, 2010). Learners' academic self-concept may be reflected in aspects of students' behaviour and their engagement. In particular, the predictive power of academic self-concept is vital to this

study as it may provide possible explanations for the learners' pursuit or abandonment of academic writing challenges as seen through their engagement in the learning process. However, this exploration can only be achieved if the issue of context specificity is addressed adequately. Marsh and O'Mara (2008) sum it up aptly by saying: "When the focus of a study is on educational outcomes, it is important to focus on academic components of self-concept" (p. 548).

Early research on academic self-concept such as the study by Marsh (1986) proposed the Internal/External model to represent the comparative processes involved in formulating academic self-concepts. To illustrate, for an external frame of reference for math self-concept, students would "compare their self-perceptions of their own math and verbal abilities with the perceived abilities of other students in their frame of reference" (Marsh, 1986, p. 133). Conversely, for an internal frame of reference, students would form their math self-concept on the basis of their self-concepts in other academic areas. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2002) expanded on the notion of internal and external frames of reference and the possible sources of external frames of reference. In their study, social comparison includes processes whereby "a student compares his or her own performance with the perceived performance of another, which may be a comparison group or a comparison person" (p. 234).

More recent research in academic self-concept has ascertained that learners' academic self-concepts are influenced by the cues they receive from their environment, specifically in the higher learning context; the expectations put on them by the institution (Erkman, Caner, Sart, Borakan, & Sahan, 2010; Hu & Kuh, 2002; Powell, 2009); parental involvement and values (Bong, 2008; Chiu & Chow, 2010; Fan & Williams, 2010); the artefacts provided by the instructors (Day, Kingtona, Stobart, & Sammons, 2006; M. Komarraju, Musulkin, & Bhattacharya, 2010; Mornane, 2009; Stewart, 2008); relationships with instructors (Erkman, et al., 2010); and relationship with fellow peers (Gest, Rulison, Davidson, & Welsh, 2008; Simons-Morton & Chen, 2009). These findings also underline how the development of self-concept seems to occur in interaction with the environment.

In addition to the aforementioned contextual factors, metacognition too informs academic self-concept. In fact, Mandelman and colleagues (2010) proposed that

“academic self-concept is formed by the synthesis of external (environment and significant others) and internal sources of input (metacognition)” (p. 76). The theoretical impetus behind this proposition is Sternberg’s (1997) theory of intelligence. This conception of intelligence involves the ability to adapt upon understanding and acknowledging one’s weaknesses and strengths. This high level of awareness thus offers the options for learners to cope, to be analytical and to be creative by drawing on external sources (e.g. peer support, artefacts) from various channels (e.g. parents, instructors, institution).

Although knowledge is increasing about what influences the academic self-concept, the extensive literature with regard to academic self-concept has also revealed the gap in terms of non-Western participants and context. While no one can argue the differential cultural values between Western and non-Western contexts, one must ask what elements are critical in explicating Malaysian learners’ self-concept in order to better understand the procedural nature of self-concept. Based on the current literature on self-concept, it is possible that Malaysian learners’ academic self-concept, specifically self-concept in academic writing, could be influenced differently within the Malaysian educational setting.

Thus, in this study the architecture of academic self-concept will be intricate. Artefacts, conditions, frames of references, and characteristics of a particular context may shape each learner’s personal and social self-concept. In addition, the basis of learners’ responses, when they are required to reflect on their particular self-concept (self-concept in academic writing), may be reinforced from sources such as parental values, their ability compared to peers, their scores from assessments, or even the teacher’s appraisal. These influences make the academic self-concept unique to a particular context. Accordingly, the framework of learners’ self-concepts about academic writing includes what they feel and their perception of the value of writing as being personally and socially constructed. This is then further interpreted through their reported actions in the classroom.

### **Summary of self research**

This study takes the view that self-concept constitutes both the personal and social self and is a product of the relationship the individual has with his or her environment,

significant others and their metacognition. Additionally, the study also recognises that there is fluidity between the personal and social self. This study takes the position that the different aspects of the self may result in cognitive, affective and behavioural variations, as shaped by the context in which the individual (or the learners in the case of the study) are embedded. This is because the saliency of each self may stem from different antecedents.

As there are interplays related to how the environment and the individual interact, self-concept (personal and social) becomes a multidimensional construct where learners may have different self-perceptions in different contexts. The fact that these self-concepts may differ and may be influenced by external and internal factors also means that self-concept may not be constant or permanent, since the individual constantly re-evaluates and redefines his or her self-concept. As people are both individuals and social group members, neglecting either self would be a serious omission in further understanding the relationship between self-concept and behaviour. Thus, the current study does not wish to limit its scope to merely examining whether learners define themselves in terms of personal or social self, but rather it aims to explore the context in which the possible self-representation occurs and the influences or mediating factors that shape the different variations of self.

## **2.3 STUDENT ENGAGEMENT**

This section reviews literature on student engagement. It is organized into three parts. Firstly, different definitions of engagement are outlined. The perspectives that underpin each definition highlight the development of ideas about student engagement. Secondly, key literature on student engagement and disengagement are presented. In doing so, the review identifies a lack of research into student engagement in Malaysia. Finally, the position taken in this study is discussed.

### **The development of student engagement**

Over the last three decades, engagement research has been perceived as vital in understanding student learning and development (Coates, 2010; Hu & Kuh, 2002). At the same time, research on engagement still faces conceptual issues, which call for a

clear definition. It is therefore useful to review the development of engagement research. In doing so, the review highlights the fact that definitions of student engagement were influenced by the different perspectives taken by different authors.

### **Behavioural perspective**

Early perspectives of student engagement tend to reflect a behavioural perspective. Engagement was understood as involvement, time and quality of effort students put into their learning (Pace, 1980). Hu and Kuh (2002) defined student engagement as “the quality of effort students themselves devote to educationally purposeful activities that contribute directly to desired outcomes” (p. 555). Another student-oriented definition was offered by Krause (2005) as, “the time, energy and resources students devote to the activities designed to enhance learning at university” (p. 3). Three decades of research linked students' positive educational outcomes with their expended time and effort (e.g. G. Kuh, 2009; Pace, 1980; Pace & Kuh, 1998), and explains why these earlier definitions tended to describe engagement predominantly as students' responsibility.

Understandings of student engagement shifted and institutions were perceived to be accountable for engagement, especially in higher education (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Kuh (2009) maintained that policies and practices of “how the institution allocates its resources and arranges its curricula, other learning opportunities, and support services” (p. 685) could greatly enhance student engagement. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) assert that “it is important to focus on the ways in which an institution can shape its academic, interpersonal, and extracurricular offerings to encourage student engagement” (p. 602). Student engagement also began to be perceived as an indicator of collegiate quality (G. Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2007).

With increasing research and interest in student engagement, the understanding of this construct became more developed. Kuh (2009) merged the two views above and defined engagement as, “the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college *and* what institutions do to induce students to participate in the activities” (p. 683). Coates (2007) added another facet of engagement in the tertiary context as including non-academic aspects and defines it as

“a broad construct intended to encompass salient academic as well as certain-non-academic aspects of the student experience” (p. 122). The academic and non-academic aspects such as level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences and supportive campus environment (G. Kuh, 2003) formed the basis of many surveys on student engagement such as the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) (Trowler, 2010).

Government reports and policies in countries such as Australia, the UK and the USA, citing student engagement as an educational goal (Harris, 2010) depicted another development in terms of how engagement was understood. Trowler's (2010) definition, which was based on her metaanalysis of engagement, highlighted how the focus was on 'success', and how engagement is a measure of 'quality' for the institution.

Student engagement is concerned with the interaction between the time, effort and other relevant resources invested by both students and their institutions intended to optimise the student experience and enhance the learning outcomes and development of students and the performance, and reputation of the institution. (p. 3)

Furthermore, surveys such as the NSSE and AUSSE were regarded as benchmarks for conceptualising student engagement (Kezar & Kinzie, 2006). Kahu (2011) raised her concern regarding this behavioural perspective: “... these surveys are becoming the definition of student engagement” (p. 2).

### **Psychological perspective**

The psychological perspective views engagement “as an internal psycho-social process that evolves over time and varies in intensity” (Kahu, 2011, p. 4). Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004) listed three dimensions of the psychological perspective on student engagement; behavioural, affective and cognitive. Each dimension of student engagement has “a positive and negative pole and students can engage either positively or negatively along these dimensions” (Trowler, 2010, p. 5).

Cognitive engagement is one of the most well-researched dimensions of engagement (Fredricks, et al., 2004). Newmann, Wehlage and Lamborn (1992) define cognitive

engagement as “a student’s psychological investment in and effort directed towards learning, understanding, or mastering the knowledge skills or crafts” (p. 12). This may be observable through students’ preference for hard work, willingness to make an investment and also engagement of the mind (Darr, Ferral, & Stephanou, 2008). Zimmerman (1990) suggests that the intensity of students’ cognitive engagement can be identified through self-regulated metacognitive strategies used. In fact, self-regulatory processes have been linked predominantly to the study of academic achievement, in terms of strategic learning behaviours, cognitive engagement or specific academic performance measures (Bandura, 1997 as cited in Chong, 2007, p. 63). In this manner, cognitive engagement can help differentiate students’ engagement through the range of strategies they adopt (e.g. deep processing strategies and effective strategy use).

Behavioural engagement has three elements: positive conduct, involvement in learning and participation (Fredricks, et al., 2004). Furlong (2008) states that “behavioral engagement is reflected in attendance ... active participation in classes (e.g. asking questions, participating in discussions)” (p. 366). Glanville and Wildhagen (2007) added to the notion of participation in that it “encompasses both basic behaviours such as attendance, following school rules and avoidance of disruptive behaviours” (p. 1021). Conversely, Finn and Voekl (1993) extend the notion of participation to a wider school context (e.g. participating in extracurricular activities) in his participation-identification model. In this model, “most children begin school as willing participants, encouraged to become involved in classroom activities by parents and teachers. Continued participation over the years, accompanied by a degree of academic success, leads to an internalized sense of identification with school” (Finn & Cox, 1992, p. 144). This model provides a useful link between emotion and behaviour as part of understanding student engagement and disengagement.

In the psychological perspective, affective dimensions were included as an important component for understanding student engagement. Affective engagement refers to dimensions of feelings and connection, sense of belonging, safety and attachment (Furlong et al., 2003). Fredricks et al. (2004) also includes “interest, boredom, happiness, sadness and anxiety” as part of affective engagement. Kahu (2011) argues that this dimension of engagement can discern learners’ instrumental (e.g. high grades) and intrinsic motivation (e.g. interest).

### **Socio-cultural perspective**

Consistent with a more developed understanding of student engagement and the increasing diversity of student composition at tertiary level, a somewhat broader perspective emerged; the socio-cultural perspective. This perspective focuses on the influence of social context on engagement and often is reflected in studies about disengaged, marginalised or disenfranchised students (e.g. Boylan, 2010; Wallace, 2009; Yonezawa, Jones, & Joselowsky, 2009).

The notions of *capital* and *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977) offer useful insights into engagement research in diverse populations (e.g. Fan & Williams, 2010; Gillies, et al., 2010; Oropeza, Varghese, & Kanno, 2010). Capital, in particular, has provided useful insights into why some students engage or disengage in higher learning. This is because social class and socioeconomic status are understood as having significant effects on students' engagement. While there are several forms of capital (economic, social and symbolic), it is cultural capital that is seen as the most valuable in the educational field (Lareau & Weininger, 2003; Oropeza, et al., 2010). Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) discuss cultural capital as "the cultural habits ... and dispositions inherited from the family, which are fundamental to school success" (p. 14). In this view, dominant socioeconomic groups are perceived to have greater advantage in providing their children with high cultural capital (e.g. attitudes and knowledge) necessary for higher education.

Some students are unable to access resources, and consequently the opportunities provided by their respective learning institutions (McInnis, 2001). Challenges which impede students' learning experience are discussed in the context of minority groups (Oropeza, et al., 2010), students from lower socio-economic groups (Yorke & Thomas, 2003) and first-year students at higher learning institutions (e.g. Krause & Coates, 2008; Nelson, Duncan, & Clarke, 2009). A longitudinal schools-university project which focused on 'at-risk' students, identified that this particular group tended to be first generation university students (Bland, 2008). Consequently, they had no clear understanding of what university education would entail (tertiary awareness).

In this socio-cultural perspective, the learning environment is influential in determining the engagement process and outcome (D. McInerney, 2010). The environment includes social, cultural and historical factors such as teachers, peers, communities and families (D. McInerney, 2008). Influential factors from context include peers (Chen, 2008; Simons-Morton & Chen, 2009; Stewart, 2008; Yazzie-Mintz, 2007), self-constructs (Chong, 2007; Fan & Williams, 2010; Martin & Dowson, 2009), and institutional support (Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006; Holland & Ramaley, 2008; Tinto, 2010). Pascarella (1991) describes what can be termed as the engagement ecosystem as a “dynamic web of influence” (p. 458). This web of influence is also indicative of the nature of engagement as contingent on the environment in which the student is embedded.

This socio-cultural perspective adds another facet in understanding student engagement. Kahu (2011) states that its strength lies in the ability to provide insights on “why students become engaged or alienated at university, with a particular emphasis on non-traditional students” (p. 7). This is particularly important considering that massification of education especially in higher learning has allowed a more diverse group of students to pursue post-secondary education.

### **Holistic perspective**

The holistic perspective is an attempt to integrate the aforementioned perspectives: behavioural, psychological and sociocultural perspectives.

Unlike the earlier discussion, the holistic perspective acknowledges the “the importance of emotion” (Kahu, 2011, p. 7). In fact, Pekrun and Linnenbrink-Garcia (2012) maintain that “emotions are ubiquitous in academic settings, and they profoundly affect students’ academic engagement and performance” (p. 259). This notion is not new as a study by Astin (1993) revealed that the level and quality of student interaction with peers and university personnel (instructors, administrative staff) played an important role in determining students’ persistence in higher learning institutions.

Bryson and Hand (2007) who adopted this perspective of student engagement argued “learners ... are more likely to engage if they in turn are supported by teaching staff

who engage with: students, with the subject, and with the teaching process” (p. 349). A more recent study by Meeuwisse et al. (2010) concluded that “informal relationships with fellow students were what led to a sense of belonging and [sense of belonging] did further academic progress” (p. 349).

Although the holistic perspective still grapples with issues of categorisation, antecedents and consequences (Kahu, 2011) and definition, it has contributed to a more profound understanding of the dynamic nature of engagement. Zepke, Leach and Butler (2010) developed a conceptual organiser based on a review of student engagement research, which consisted of six main dimensions: motivation and agency, transactional engagement (in which students engage with teachers, and students engage with each other), institutional support, active citizenship, and non-institutional support. The conceptual organiser incorporated ‘active citizenship’ as a dimension of engagement. This was particularly interesting as it perceives student engagement as being contingent on both the students’ and universities’ support in creating meaningful opportunities to help nurture students’ “personal development” (Russell & Slater, 2010, p. 15) for academic study.

### **Academic engagement and disengagement**

Hockings et al. (2008) stated that “engagement and disengagement are complex concepts” (p. 192). Consequently, the identification of academically engaged or disengaged students is an intricate process. It is useful to refer to NSSE, which “focuses on dimensions of quality in undergraduate education and ... assess[es] the extent to which they [students] engage in educational practices associated with high levels of learning and development” (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2011, p. 2). In recent findings, it was identified that effective and frequent use of learning strategies by engaged students included “taking careful notes during class, connecting course content to things already known, and identifying key information from readings” (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2011, p. 16). The survey findings reflect an earlier study by Hockings and colleagues (2008) in which an academically engaged student was found to be “intellectually, socially and personally involved in learning what has meaningful outcomes for her” (p. 192).

Since engagement is a process that develops over time, and patterns of student engagement may change and evolve (e.g. McInnis, 2001; Wigfield & Cambria, 2010), the notion of engagement as a continuum has been offered. For example, Bryson and Hand (2007) maintain that “there is a continuum of engagement from disengaged to engaged and a number of levels within which the same student may exhibit different degrees of engagement” (p. 353). Hockings et al. (2008) expand on this stating that “a student could show signs and degrees of dis/engagement over short or long periods, within a task or session, or over the period of a module or course” (p. 192). Based on their study, indicators of disengagement may include students who “take a ‘surface’ approach to learning (copying out notes, focusing on fragmented facts and right answers, jumping to conclusions, accepting)” (p. 350).

McInnis (2001) noted that disengagement was detectable through the declining level of commitment to university. In particular, this was evident in the time spent on campus, motivational issues, study habits and also difficulty in managing study workload. Additionally, mismatched expectations (Tinto, 1993) and inadequate preparation for higher learning (Deil-Amen, 2011) have also been argued to be reasons why students disengage.

McInnis (2001) emphasised the need to “reconceptualize the undergraduate experience as a process of negotiated engagement rather than assuming that disengagement is an intractable problem and that students are to blame” (p. 1). This implies that there are many causes that lead to disengagement, other than the students themselves. For example, studies have found that student engagement or disengagement is reliant on the nature and quality of feedback and interaction from peers and teachers, and the overall experience in the learning context (G. Kuh, 2003). A longitudinal study by Price (2011) investigating the process of engaging students with assessment feedback, identified that, “each stage (of engagement) can trigger further engagement or disengagement” (p. 10).

Research on student engagement has ascertained that it is an important factor for improving student retention (R. James, McInnis, & Devlin, 2002). However, studies have consistently identified the highest level of drop out occurring in the first year of higher education (Delen, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1982, 2010). This is disconcerting since it not only alludes to disengagement, but also the issue of

unsuccessful transition to higher learning (Kift & Moody, 2009) and students' inability to adjust (Heirdsfield, Walker, & Walsh, 2008) at a crucial stage of their academic experience. Students who feel a sense of disconnect and isolation in their learning experience are prone to withdraw from the course or the institution (Tinto, 2009). Tinto thus advocates the need for both academic and social integration to improve retention. Attempts have also been made to meet students' expectations (Longden, 2006) and ease the adjustment process into higher learning through a transition pedagogy (Kift, Nelson, & Clarke, 2010; Krause, James, & Jennings, 2010). Indeed, it is crucial that students' learning experience be supported effectively as it is a means of establishing foundations of successful later years of study (Astin, 1993; Krause & Coates, 2008; G. Kuh, 2001).

Although there have been a few studies (Abdol Latif & Bahroom, 2004; Abdol Latif, Sungsi, & Bahroom, 2009) investigating student retention in online higher learning in Malaysia, an extensive search located no studies on student engagement in the Malaysian tertiary setting. In particular, there have been no studies exploring students' engagement in a discipline-specific context. This current study, addresses this gap.

### **The perspective of student engagement adopted in the thesis**

Engagement provides a crucial framework for understanding students' actions in class. The current study acknowledges that the many perspectives of student engagement have contributed great insights to the understanding of the construct. However, the position taken on the study is the psychological perspective. As indicated in Section 1.1, the aim of this research was to explore the relationship between Malaysian learners' self-concept in academic writing and their engagement. The psychological perspective of engagement thus provides an opportunity to focus on the internal processes of engagement (behavioural, affective and cognitive) in individual students. In doing so, it is hoped that engagement could provide a better understanding of learning academic writing in a second language (L2) in a higher learning institution, in a setting where English is a second language.

In this thesis, the term student engagement is used in a broad sense to refer to students' cognitive, behavioural and affective dimensions in relation to academic writing and their participation in academic writing-related tasks. The term disengaged is used here

to characterise students who do not feel they belong in the Academic Writing class and have withdrawn significantly from learning-related activities.

## **2.4 LEARNING ACADEMIC WRITING IN L2**

The final section in this chapter discusses the issues that surround learning academic writing in a second language from a broader perspective. It first discusses the notion of L2 writing before focusing on academic writing for second language learners, with a particular focus on the interplay of first and second language influences, and cognitive and affective influences. The connection between writing and identity is also examined highlighting that the learning experience of these students imbues the interplay of cognitive demands and social practice.

### **L2 writing**

In contrast to the theories of self-concept and engagement which were previously discussed, research on second language writing is relatively new. Nevertheless, the past 25 years have seen this research area grow tremendously. Hence, L2 writing research “has become progressively better informed, theoretically and methodologically”, and “understandings of literacy itself have become considerably more sophisticated” (Leki, et al., 2008, p. 3).

Prior to further exploring academic writing in a second language, it is useful to refer to what writing constitutes. Defazio et al. (2010) assert that regardless of the different types of writing:

Writing is a skill that is grounded in the cognitive domain. It involves learning, comprehension, application and synthesis of new knowledge. Writing also encompasses creative inspiration, problem-solving, reflection and revision that results in a completed manuscript. (p. 34)

The above quote suggests that writing requires a series of processes which lead to a completed product. These processes are contingent on multiple cognitively-oriented skills ranging from simple to complex and demanding. L2 writing also “requires a

sufficient level of lexical, syntactic and spelling knowledge in the target language in order to express ideas in correct linguistic form” (Ransdell & Barbier, 2002, p. 3). Therefore, writing in a second language is contingent on learners' ability not only to successfully communicate their thoughts, ideas and opinions, but to do so in the target language.

## **L2 academic writing**

The context for this study is an academic writing class in English in a Malaysian university. The current literature on academic writing tends to shy away from providing a definition of this subject area. In particular, researchers tend to describe its features, characteristics and function or make comparisons to other writing genres (MacDonald, 1987). Academic writing has been described as “dry and impersonal” (Hyland, 2002b, p. 351) and encompasses notions of self-representation such as that of authorial identity (Hirvela & Belcher, 2001; Hyland, 2002a; R. Ivanić, 1998). Additionally, academic writing incorporates elements of hedging (Gillaerts & Van de Velde, 2010; Swales & Feak, 2004), nominalisations (Biber & Gray, 2010) and voice (Matsuda & Tardy, 2007). Notwithstanding the various operational terms, the general consensus is that academic writing entails high-level cognitive functions (Sheldon, 2009) and grammatical complexity. It involves skills such as identifying, locating, analysing and synthesising information.

Academic writing necessitates an active production of all the above within the accepted academic writing conventions (Canagarajah, 1999; Steinman, 2003). Zhu (2004) suggests that academic writing “serves different purposes in different courses and requires students to assume different social roles, and that communicative conventions are intricately intertwined with the content for, the aims of, and student roles in writing” (p. 30). Academic writing can therefore be discipline-specific (e.g. Science and Humanities) and may vary in terms of its conventions. This has implications for the academic writing class in Malaysian universities, where students may be studying in different disciplines.

The challenge is further intensified for L2 writers, because competence in academic writing requires a series of complex processes and a sophisticated awareness. Learners

need to be aware of the conventions of academic writing, be knowledgeable of content, assume a specific role as a writer and be able to write to a particular audience. Thus, it is not surprising that much of the literature on academic writing in a second language refers to weakness in L2 proficiency (Leki, et al., 2008; Santos, 1988). In addition, students who are unfamiliar with Western writing practices are often accused of plagiarism (Abasi & Graves, 2008; Duff, 2007; Wette, 2010; Yigitoglu, 2010).

The next section will discuss the two main influences on learning to write in a second language: the interplay between first and second language, as well as cognitive and affective influences.

### *Second language influences on academic writing*

There is a range of second language influences on academic writing identified by literature. These include: L2 writing abilities, L2 proficiency, L2 writing development, L2 reading, L2 writing confidence, L2 writing grammatical ability and L2 writer perceptions as playing an important role (Leki, et al., 2008). It has been claimed that the writing strategies (e.g. self-editing, planning and revising strategies) used are what differentiate successful and less successful writers (Ferris, 2010; Kieft, Rijlaarsdam, Galbraith, & van den Bergh, 2007). This has been further evidenced by the way in which successful student writers were able to construct a variety of sentence-level (syntactic) and word-level (lexical) structures (Ong & Zhang, 2010).

Evidently, effective writers are also said to possess a high degree of proficiency in the target language, and spend a considerable amount of time reading L2 materials (Norris & Ortega, 2010). Both factors appear to contribute to the high efficacy in their writing abilities in both academic and non-academic contexts (Horwitz, 2010; Klassen, 2010; Pajares & Cheong, 2003). This supports that notion that the amount of exposure to target language (Cumming, 2001) may be a reliable indicator of whether a student will be able to write well in L2.

In addition to the aforementioned factors, first language (L1) writing abilities, L1 education, L1 reading and confidence in L1 writing have been reported to shape the L2 writing experience (Leki, et al., 2008; Matsuda, Cox, Jordan, & Ortmeir-Hooper, 2006). In particular, L1 reading has been found to have a substantial impact on L2 writing

abilities (Janopoulos, 1986). For instance, a study by Riazi (1997) revealed that reading was part of the students' composing strategies, assisting them to identify items of vocabulary, content and structure that were useful in their own writing. Roy (2010) added to this, identifying reading strategies such as skimming, scanning and reading for comprehension that impacted on the "the overall score of the document production" (p. 143).

Kaplan's (1966) seminal work on contrastive rhetoric suggests that there are "cultural differences in the nature of rhetoric" (p. 1). As a result, the differences of writing practices in L1 could influence L2 writing significantly. As mentioned previously (see Section 1.2) Malaysian students were not taught academic writing in L1. Writing in L1 may also involve certain practices which are dissimilar to that of academic writing in L2 (e.g. paragraph construction).

The influence of L1 transfer on second language acquisition is also noted in the literature. Although some transfer may be positive, there are instances whereby negative transfer may have a detrimental effect on the writing outcome. This is referred to by Grabe and Kaplan (1996) as 'interference'. Saiegh-Haddad and Geva (2010) confirmed that "the difficulty in mastering certain L2 structures may be attributed to differences between the learners' L1 and L2; similar structures will result in facilitation, or *positive transfer*, whereas different structures will result in interference, or *negative transfer*" (p. 264). To illustrate, Ionin and Montrul (2010) found that L1 transfer caused confusion in students' interpretation of the plural forms and consequently its usage in the target language. Moreover, the work of Goddard (1997; 2001) has indicated that one challenge of translating from L1 to L2 is that at times, there are no exact equivalents. With regard to this study, the Malay language is considerably different from English in terms of structure (Jalaluddin, Mat Awal, & Abu Bakar, 2008). Therefore, students can be expected to face some challenges in their academic writing processes, especially if their writing processes involve translating from L1.

Steinman (2003) posited the idea of cultural collision in L2 academic writing and commented on the lack of impartiality in expecting L2 learners to adhere to Western academic conventions. Ramanathan and Atkinson (1999) summed up the argument succinctly in an earlier study asking "How realistic is it to regularly expect or demand

of our NNS [non-native speaker] students that they basically become someone else?" (p. 56). Thus, Malaysian learners learning academic writing in Anglophone conventions, in a non-Anglophone context, may have new self-concepts which may conflict with their established self-concepts.

According to Matsuda and Silva (2005), the more exposure, and the earlier the introduction and contact is made with the target language, the better the acquisition of the second language, including writing skills, could be. This was evidenced in research which identified study abroad experience (Sasaki, 2011), the differences between L2 graduate and undergraduate writing abilities (Leki, 2011), and L2 writing experiences (Storch, 2009) as additional factors influencing L2 writing. Research by Naves and colleagues (2003) provides further evidence to support the notion of exposure, whereby experienced L2 writers produced more complex and accurate writing product.

Nevertheless, there is research (e.g. Berman & Cheng, 2010; Flowerdew, 1999) that maintains 'experienced' writers still face numerous challenges in the writing process. This could be attributed to the fact that the challenges are faced in highly specialised contexts such as writing for peer-reviewed journals. In this study, Malaysian university learners are ESL students who have had contact with the English language formally for at least eleven years. It is anticipated that the exposure to the target language may facilitate students' L2 writing in the academic writing class. However, due to the fact that L2 writing in secondary schools did not involve advanced academic writing, challenges in the AW class may not necessarily be proficiency related, but rather about conventions of academic writing itself.

### *Affective influences*

Early research in L2 writing tended to revolve around cognitive issues but current literature on L2 writing has shifted its emphasis to also encompass psychological and sociological influences. Lam and Law (2007) maintain that "writing is an activity that is as much emotional as cognitive" (p. 145). Under these influences, emotions such as apprehension and anxiety (Cheng, Horwitz, & Schallert, 1999; Rubin, Katznelson, & Perpignan, 2005), as well as identity (Hyland, 2002a; R. Ivanic, 1998) and motivation (Pajares, 2003) have been cited as contributing factors in learning L2 writing.

Researchers have argued that intrinsic motivation sustains students more in the writing process and this is further evidenced in the type of strategies that students utilise in their writing. To illustrate, students who display intrinsic motivation seem to incorporate not only appropriate and deep-level writing strategies, but also are more willing to utilise different types of strategies (e.g. individual and social strategies) (Nückles, Hübner, Dümer, & Renkl, 2010; Tuan, 2010). According to Leki and colleagues (2008), three types of intrinsic motivation are often associated with L2 writers:

- (i) intrinsic knowledge motivation (pleasure in satisfying intellectual curiosity and expanding one's knowledge), (ii) intrinsic accomplishment orientation (pleasure in the process of meeting a challenge and surpassing oneself), and (iii) intrinsic stimulation (enjoyment of the aesthetics of the experience, or the appeal of something rather more elusive). (p. 110)

Research has also suggested that anxiety issues that learners face with regard to language efficacy may impact negatively on their academic performance (Gang, Wei, & Duanmu, 2010; Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010). These anxiety issues appear to stem from learners' fear of being judged based on their L2 proficiency (Skyrme, 2010) and that these 'evaluations' may impact on their acculturation (and also acceptance) into the desired learning community (Cumming, 2001, 2006). Following on from the discussion on affective influences, the section now moves on to review academic writer identity in a second language.

### **Academic writer identity in a second language**

Although L2 writing literature uses the term 'identity', this study views self-concept in academic writing as embedded in identity. Since writing is as much a social act (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Lam & Law, 2007) as it is a cognitive act, this implies that learners form their self-concepts as writers based on their own self-evaluation and feedback from others. This is noted in literature where identity is socially constructed (Stets & Burke, 2003), but at the same time "individuals do not define themselves entirely in terms of group memberships" (R. Ivanic, 1998, p. 14). Identity has also been argued to consist of salient or constituent identities in a specific context (Breakwell, 1992, p. 3). Therefore, in this section, self-concept (in academic writing) is used interchangeably with (writer) identity.

The current studies on academic writing have ascertained that there is a link between writing and identity (Abasi, Akbari, & Graves, 2006; Burgess & Ivanic, 2010). It is useful to refer to a definition by Ivanic (1998) which explains how academic writing intersects with identity:

Writing is an act of identity in which people align themselves with socio-culturally shaped possibilities for self-hood, playing their part in reproducing or challenging dominant practices and discourses, and the values, beliefs and interests which they embody. (p. 32)

Thus, learning academic writing in a tertiary context involves the interplay of multiple writer identities, which makes the writing process demanding, and at times perplexing (Li, 2007a; Stacey, 2010). The different “identities students bring with them” and the “identities their instructors expect them to occupy” add another facet (Cox, Jordan, Ortmeier-Hooper, & Schwartz, 2010, p. xvii) to learning academic writing, particularly in a second language. These writer identities are fluid and capable of ‘transcending’ each other (Ortmeier-Hooper, 2010). Thus, when a stable identity is challenged by a new emerging identity, this may result in conflicts which need to be managed through negotiation, reconstruction or even loss of identity as learners attempt to redefine their sense of self as writers. Norton (2000) identified that shifts in identity are contingent on learners’ goals, their needs and their contexts (e.g. institution, classroom).

In order to perform successfully in the academic community, learners need to adopt the appropriate identity (R. Ivanic, 1998; Lave & Wenger, 1991). To illustrate this notion, a study by Huhtala and Lehti-Eklund (2010) revealed, “second language learning (L2) at university level as a process of identity formation and at the same time as a process of becoming a full member of the community of practice” (p. 273). In other words, their already established identity is challenged to transform, relocate and reposition the self as an academic writer (Harklau, 2006; Hirano, 2008; R. Ivanic, 2005). Thus, in the current study, the challenge is set for Malaysian learners who have an established and successful L1 writer identity. They may need to adopt a new writer identity, one that is deemed appropriate for the discourse (academic writing) and the larger community (university/ academia) in L2.

The reformation of 'appropriate' writer identities can involve multiple and at times conflicting identities (Gu, 2010; Hyland, 2010; R. Ivanic, 1998; Marshall, 2010). A study by Li (2007b) reported that L2 students expressed "double belonging and betrayal," and "awkward betweenness," as part of their writing experience. In fact, in the process of identity negotiation, an array of possibilities such as conflict, rejection, negotiation and transformation are possible. Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) have explored the ability of human agency in examining why certain learners resist and why others change the positioning of their identities so readily. The framework offered by Pavlenko and Blackledge identified three types of identities, which include: "(i) imposed identities (which are not negotiable in a particular time and place), (ii) assumed identities (which are accepted and not negotiated), and negotiable identities (which are contested by groups and individuals)" (p. 21). With regard to the current study, it will be interesting to see which type of identity will emerge, and what triggers the impetus for engagement.

As the students in the current study belong to different disciplines, the generic academic writing courses offered by the current institution may conflict with what is demanded by their content papers (Zhu, 2004). Petric (2006) postulates that disciplinary affiliations may impact on "students' academic achievement in their interdiscipline as some patterns of disciplinary affiliation may facilitate this while others may hinder it" (p. 120). For this reason, it is assumed that some learners may demonstrate ambivalence or resentment towards the academic writing subject. In the same way, a student who shows affiliation may not necessarily indicate recognition of that particular identity.

Furthermore, identity is not a static entity since "people's identities are networked across the activities in which they participate and are on a trajectory over time" (R. Ivanic, 2006, p. 26). Cox and colleagues (2010) confirm that "writers build their sense of identities over time and that each writing experience infuses and embeds certain perspectives into how these writers cast themselves in the writing experiences that follow" (p. 1). Writer identities are discursively constructed (Gu, 2010) and evolve with time as students become more familiar with the disciplinary norms and practice (Yi, 2010). Therefore, this study begins from the premise that students' personal and social writer identities are context-dependent and these are locally understood and constantly remade in social relationships.

Ivanic (2006) suggested that identity in the context of language learning is very dynamic in nature. In her study, the participants continuously reconstructed, re-evaluated and reformulated their identities through 'discoursal constructions' due to the inherent relational nature of identity. Additionally, each participant drew selectively on the "socio-culturally and historically shaped mediating means – discourses and genres- which are circulating in the activity in which he is participating" (p. 19).

Although the dominant literature posits that negotiating identities in L2 writing may be challenging for learners, it has been suggested that "belonging to multiple communities, or being native to a marginalised discourse could be a resource for critical expression" (Canagarajah, 1999, p. 169). In particular, learners writing in the additional language may construct "a new *third place* between the source language and the target language" (Huhtala & Lehti-Eklund, 2010, p. 273) to express and actualise their novice writer identities. The notions of a third place and hybridity, which originated from Kramsch (1996) and Bhabha (1994, 1996) are useful when referring to plurilingual individuals since "it is a transformative construction of the individual learners, an attempt by them to position themselves in the discourse community using the language" (as cited in Huhtala & Lehti-Eklund, 2010, p. 279). Hence, there is a call for "a keener sensitivity to the cultural background of periphery students, the agendas they bring to the ESL course, and the strategies they employ to negotiate the ideological tensions in the classroom" (Canagarajah, 1999, p. 85). Exploring students' experience of learning L2 writing, and the challenges to their identities within this, as indicated by their engagement (or disengagement) in the context is central to this study.

### **Summary of research on learning academic writing in L2**

This section has argued that learning academic writing in a second language entails more than just an accumulation of skills. It entails numerous complex processes which involve the cognitive, psychological and affective domains. This means that although the students face demanding cognitive challenges in the writing class, the interaction with resources and artefacts such as content, instructors, and peers, may also shape the learning experience. It is anticipated that as a result, the process will be embedded with many challenges and learners may have to negotiate and reconstruct appropriate and competent writer identities.

There are multiple factors influencing academic writing in L2. Nonetheless, this study is more concerned with psychological and contextual aspects of self-concept and engagement rather than L2 writing per se. Thus, it has been proposed L2 writing is not only distinct, but also is inundated with sociocultural issues. Clearly, the learners in the study are not homogenous as their needs, abilities and legitimacy to participate, will vary. The review so far indicates that Malaysian ESL students are also an under-researched population. Too little is known about how these students manage their academic learning, specifically in the context of learning academic writing in a second language. For this reason, attention to their differing student characteristics and writing experience may be an essential feature of meaningful research in this area.

## **2.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter has provided an understanding of the literature underpinning the study. This portrays students as social beings who are actively involved in their learning process (not passive recipients). It acknowledges that learners are both individuals and social group members. The literature review has also indicated that investigating self-concept, student engagement and Malaysian learner learning academic writing in a second language has methodological implications. It is imperative that the methodology chosen for this study is able to capture the dynamic nature of the issues being examined. This is described further in the next chapter.

As yet, there has been no research to explore the relationship between Malaysian learners' self-concept in academic writing and their engagement in the Academic Writing class. Additionally, international research has not investigated the links between self-concept, student engagement and academic writing in L2. This study attempts to address these gaps in order to offer critical insights into the dynamic nature of learning academic writing in a second language, and further improve the tertiary writing curricula in Malaysia and internationally.

Thus, the key research questions for this study were formulated as follows:

1. What self-concepts do Malaysian learners' have in the context of their Academic Writing class?
2. What are the influences on Malaysian learners' self-concept in academic writing?
3. What are the influences on Malaysian learners' engagement in academic writing?
4. What is the nature of the relationship between Malaysian learners' self-concept in academic writing and their engagement in the Academic Writing class?

Self-concept is a starting point to understand why learners behave in a certain way in the Academic Writing class. Upon determining what their self-concepts are, the emphasis will be on exploring the relationship between their self-concept in academic writing and their engagement in the class. Specifically, the nature of this relationship and its influences is explored to understand more about why learners engage or disengage in the writing classroom.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter focuses on the overall approach to the study design. It is presented in three sections. First, a brief historical perspective of the debate over quantitative and qualitative research approaches is outlined. This leads into the discussion of pragmatism as the underlying philosophical assumption for the mixed methods approach. Second, a definition of mixed methods, as used in this study is then presented, followed by a discussion of the rationale for choosing a mixed method design. Finally, the mixed method research design is outlined.

#### **3.2 SELECTING AN APPROPRIATE METHODOLOGY**

Quantitative investigations were the prevalent research paradigm in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Quantitative proponents “promoted research studies that were value-free, using rhetorical neutrality that resulted in discoveries of social laws, from which in time and context-free generalizations ensued [sic]” (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005, p. 269). The ontological position of quantitative paradigm is “that there is only one truth, an objective reality that exists independent of human perception” (Sale, Lohfeld, & Brazil, 2002, p. 44). Quantitative proponents believe that a social science inquiry should be objective and contends that “the observer is separate from the entities that are subject to observation” (R. B. Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 14). Procedures were predominantly mathematical, experimental and statistical, and used to control, measure, manipulate, and predict social behaviour through large samples (Scott & Usher, 1999).

In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, qualitative purists actively rejected quantitative-based research and the traditional scientific method. Instead, they “advocated the use of interpretive or hermeneutic approaches in the social and behavioural science field” (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005, p. 269) as they believed that social reality is constructed, and therefore constantly changing, making their ontological position that of multiple

truths and realities. In this paradigm, the investigator and the object of study can be linked, highlighting criticisms that qualitative research is value-laden. Furthermore, qualitative proponents contend that “context-free generalizations are neither desirable nor possible” (R. B. Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 14). The emphasis of the qualitative paradigm is on process and meaning (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Thus, qualitative research procedures tend to use a smaller sample and techniques that highlight in-depth and rich data.

The paradigm wars, which reached a peak in the 1980s, involved “fundamental incompatibilities between quantitative and qualitative paradigms” (N. K. Denzin, 2010, p. 419). The two opposing camps believed that these two paradigms could not co-exist, as their core beliefs about what constitutes reality and truth were fundamentally opposed. This schism resulted in the incompatibility thesis whereby merging qualitative and quantitative research methods through mixing research paradigms, was perceived as inappropriate and unacceptable (K. R. Howe, 1988). This was followed by the emergence of pragmatism and the compatibility thesis in the 1990s (R. B. Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). More recent literature on educational research however, has argued that the dichotomy between quantitative and qualitative research is misleading (Pring, 2000; Tunmer, Prochnow, & Chapman, 2003), and that both paradigms offer great contribution to empirical enquiries (N. K. Denzin, 2010; Dornyei, 2007) .

Taking sides in the paradigm wars, which has a dividing and segregating impact is not seen as useful, nor is it the intention of this study. The brief examination on the two dominant research approaches in this section helped identify not only their strengths and weaknesses, but also how these two approaches could complement each other. It is believed that “the corroboration of findings from both approaches may provide stronger evidence for a conclusion” (R. B. Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 21). Therefore, the debate regarding whether singular or multiple realities exist, or whether truth should be objective or subjective, may be better redirected to a more productive and pragmatic discussion as to which methods would best answer the research questions and address the research objectives. Thus, the researcher adopted the stance of pragmatism in selecting the methodology for this current study. This is further discussed in the following section.

## **Pragmatism in selecting a research method**

Pragmatism, which has been described as the third research paradigm, bridges the two conflicting paradigms in educational research (Denscombe, 2008; R. B. Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Sharp et al., 2011). This is because pragmatism is purpose-driven (D. McInerney, Walker, & Liem, 2011) and thus, “sidesteps the contentious issues of truth and reality, [and] accepts, philosophically, that there are singular and multiple realities” (Feilzer, 2010, p. 8). In fact, pragmatism is not concerned with the accurate representation of reality, but instead focuses on capturing an “accurate account of how things are in themselves” (Rorty, 1999, p. xxvi). Therefore, pragmatism encapsulates the plurality of worldviews and is underpinned by principles related to utility (Rorty, 1999), usefulness (Lather, 2006) and research purpose (Gorard, 2002).

The pragmatism philosophy thus links the paradigm–methodology–method continuum (R. B. Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004) in a more flexible manner. In the context of research application, this means that the researcher is not restricted to any particular research method, and is not focusing on a ‘correct’ or ‘incorrect way’ to conduct research. The pragmatic researcher “values both *qualitative observations* and *quantitative metrics*, believing that each one has its place and makes important contributions” (D. McInerney, et al., 2011, p. 26). Many researchers have opted for a more pragmatic and strategic outlook when discussing and selecting research methods (Donmoyer, 2006; Morgan, 2007; Niaz, 2008) as they believe that “more interesting and useful ways of knowing will emerge” (Lather, 2006, p. 53). The pragmatic research philosophy has been found to produce more robust findings and therefore has greater value to policymakers and practitioners (Sammons, 2010).

Furthermore, pragmatism argues that the complex nature of the social world requires a “more fluid understanding and application of the relationship between philosophical paradigms (assumptions about the social world and nature of knowledge), methodology (the logic of inquiry), and methods (techniques of data collection)” (Sharp, et al., 2011, p. 3). This fluidity and compatibility of theories from a variety of perspectives is particularly pertinent in this study. The literature suggests that the relationship between Malaysian learners' self-concept in academic writing and their engagement in the Academic Writing (AW) class, may involve both psychological and sociocultural

components, and the interaction between internal individual factors with elements in the immediate academic environment also needs to be taken into consideration. This indicates that there is likely to be interplay of individual and contextual factors. Thus, in the context of this study, the researcher believed it was relevant to look at variables associated with attributes of self-concept in academic writing and engagement in the individuals in the sample and also to include qualitative reports about the learning experience (in context) that occurs when learners engage in the AW class.

Pragmatism emphasises that combining multiple methods is plausible if it addresses the tenets of utility and purposefulness. Under pragmatism, quantitative and qualitative methods become compatible and complementary. In this study, quantitative data offer a broader perspective, but a qualitative approach also ensures that in-depth data are provided in context. Therefore, these multiple perspectives allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the topic. This stance is supported by Greene and Caracelli (2003) who “are committed ... to the acceptance of difference and the importance of multiple diverse perspectives. The complexity and the pluralism of our contemporary world demand such a commitment” (pp. 94-95). Pragmatism is therefore seen to be the most accommodating of multiple philosophical assumptions.

### **Selection of a mixed methods research approach**

The decision to favour pragmatism led to the selection of a mixed methods research approach. Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) define mixed methods research as follows:

Mixed methods research ... as a methodology, involves philosophical assumptions that guide the direction of the collection and analysis in the mixture of qualitative and quantitative approaches. As a method, it focuses on collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies. (p. 5)

The pragmatist position affords the opportunity for differing research approaches to be integrated effectively (Hoshmand, 2003) as it is based on the principle that “research approaches should be mixed in ways that offer the best opportunities for answering important research questions” (R. B. Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 16). In applied research, a mixed methods approach also allows for what Greene (2007) calls “multiple

ways of seeing and hearing” (p. 20) which are facilitated by different ways of collecting and analysing data.

The mixed methods approach was chosen based on these premises: (i) meeting the purpose of research, and (ii) drawing on the strength of quantitative and qualitative approaches to answer the research questions. Each of these rationales will now be discussed in more detail.

### **Meeting the purpose of the research**

In this study, meeting the research objectives required different approaches. The main aim of the study was to explore the nature of the relationship between Malaysian learners' self-concept in academic writing and their engagement in the AW class. In order to undertake this exploration, the study aimed to first capture learners' self-concept in academic writing and their engagement in the AW class. A quantitative means was initially appropriate as it afforded the opportunity for a systematic exploration for both constructs. Additionally, the quantitative treatment allowed for an initial investigation of the possible correlation between self-concept and engagement in a large target population (in excess of 100 students). Quantitative data also indicated the prevalence of particular explanations and their associations with particular categories of students.

In this study, in order to explore and understand how students engage with academic writing, self-concept was used as a point of reference. This interpretive orientation was intended to gain an in-depth explanation of the self-concept and engagement relationship. Qualitative data indicated the types of explanation that students offer for relationships that they perceive between self-concept in academic writing and engagement in the academic writing class. A qualitative orientation also allowed insights into the individual learners' decision to engage or disengage in the AW class. Thus, the qualitative approach ensured that data were interpreted meaningfully through consideration of its naturalistic context, the AW class. Qualitative researchers maintain that “the social world must be interpreted from the perspective of the people being studied, rather than as though those subjects were incapable of their own reflections on the social world” (Bryman, 2008, p. 385).

A further aim of the study was to identify areas and opportunities for improvement in the academic writing curricula, making it exploratory and descriptive in nature. Exploring self-concept quantitatively and qualitatively within a specific discipline at one tertiary institution provided the opportunity to understand how their self-concepts impacted on their engagement in the AW class. Understanding the relationship between the two constructs was seen as crucial to providing useful insights for both instructors and students. Consequently, opportunities for improvement in the writing curricula could be highlighted. Ultimately, if any future changes are to be made in the academic writing curricula, these changes would need to be supported by sound empirical rigour. The incorporation of both qualitative and quantitative data was seen as a way to ensure this.

### **Drawing on the strength of quantitative and qualitative approaches to answer the research questions**

Pragmatism principles acknowledge the strength of different paradigms. So, in this study, both quantitative and qualitative approaches were utilized. The strength of the approaches utilized in this investigation will now be discussed.

The first phase of the research aimed to capture a broad cross-sectional snapshot of Malaysian learners' self-concept in academic writing. The strength of a quantitative orientation was important in the preliminary stage of the study. Researcher's detachment from the participants eliminated judgment or preconceived notions. In this manner, facts and discoveries regarding self-concept in academic writing and student engagement could be ascertained appropriately. Griffiths (1998) aptly sums up the significance of facts being value-free as follows: "The aim is not to deny the inevitability of interpretations in research with people, but for such interpretations themselves to be independent of a particular observer - and her value positions" (p. 45). Therefore, the initial quantitative phase seemed likely to provide a sound foundation for the study, as Malaysian learners' self-concept in academic writing and their engagement in the AW class would be assessed without imposing the researcher's view.

The quantitative phase of the research was also intended to identify pertinent issues of the target population and the prevalent characteristics associated with it, at a specific

point in time. Quantitative methods are useful for generating a considerable amount of standardised quantifiable information (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). Additionally, quantitative data were expected to obtain a general explanation of the relationship between variables through inferential statistics. Collecting quantitative data in the initial phase on self-concept and engagement allowed for a correlational analysis between self-concept in academic writing and engagement to be carried out. The systematic investigation offered by a quantitative method facilitated the exploration of the direction and strength of relationships between the two constructs. In doing so, the nature of a relationship could be explained.

Nonetheless, a purely quantitative approach could not provide sufficient understanding of the multidirectional and dynamic processes of students' learning experience in terms of their self-concept and engagement. As Chapter Two highlights, there is individual variability and a range of contextual influences with regard to these dimensions. A mono-method approach therefore would not do justice to the complexity and abstractness of self-concept and student engagement since both concepts involve affective, social, contextual, cognitive and behavioural components.

Numerical data such as scores and mean values were viewed as being useful initially, but would not be able to uncover the intricate underlying process of individual learners' self-concept and its relationship with students' engagement in the writing classroom. As suggested by Dornyei (2007), "[scores and mean values] are generally not very sensitive in uncovering the reasons for the dynamics underlying the examined situation of phenomenon" (p. 34). Moreover, Creswell and Plano Clark (2010) argue that "quantitative research is weak in understanding the context or setting in which people talk" (p. 12). When the emphasis is on larger samples and statistically significant trends, the understanding of the individual is diminished, and the individual participant's voice is lost. Therefore, in this study, it was believed that a quantitative approach on its own would not be able to fully capture the relationship between Malaysian learners' self-concept in academic writing and their engagement in the AW class.

Qualitative research offers the understanding "of how people make sense of their lives" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 7) which resonates with Dornyei's (2007) belief that qualitative research excels at "making sense of complexity" (p. 39). Thus, as the aim

was to understand how 'relationships' between self-concept in academic writing and engagement come about and are given meaning by the students, a qualitative orientation was necessary. Through a qualitative inquiry, what was meaningful and culturally salient to the participants was gauged as their unique individual experiences were acknowledged. The emphasis on 'process' in qualitative research also allowed data to emerge and meanings to be uncovered (N. K. Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Firestone, 1987). In particular, the emphasis on students' perspectives through qualitative methods was intended to capture the intricacies and the nature of the relationship with regards to their learning experience, as context and other potential influences were all taken into consideration.

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) state that "qualitative methods assume that everyone has a story to tell" (p. xiii). The focus on the participants as a frame of reference provides rich descriptive data as human behaviour and its diverse influences are observed within contexts and natural settings (Dornyei, 2007, p. 8). An in-depth exploration and 'richness' of information (Mertens, 2010) from a qualitative perspective was able to further facilitate exploration of other possible influences (beyond the quantitative parameters) on students' self-concepts in academic writing and their engagement.

### **3.3 MIXED METHODS DESIGN**

A mixed methods design was seen as instrumental in providing comprehensive evidence with regard to the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement in the AW class. Incorporating both qualitative and quantitative approaches was intended to provide various types of data, thus giving the research the rigor, and also quantitative breadth and qualitative depth. This combination increases the confidence in and the value of the data in addressing the research questions and research objectives, which is an important consideration in mixed methods research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Sammons, 2010).

In this study, it was also important to capture the broader contextual issues regarding Malaysian learners' self-concept in academic writing and the subtle contextual influences that shaped the relationship between Malaysian learners' self-concept in

academic writing and their engagement in the Academic Writing class. Three key influences on the design of a mixed methods study noted in the literature: priority, implementation and integration as highlighted in Ivankova, Creswell and Stick (2006) will now be discussed.

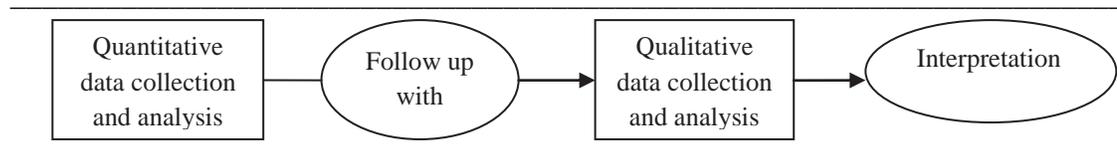
### **Priority**

According to Ivankova and colleagues (2006), “priority refers to which approach, quantitative or qualitative (or both), a researcher gives more weight or attention throughout the data collection and analysis process in the study” (p. 9). In this study, priority was given to the qualitative data collection and analysis because the purpose was to not only identify, but also to understand the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and student engagement in the Malaysian tertiary context. The first quantitative phase focused primarily on identifying the patterns and trends of self-concept and student engagement. Although this phase was crucial, it was unable to contribute greatly to the ‘why’ elements sought in the second research question. Thus, to obtain rich and in-depth description of the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and the influences for each construct necessitated that priority be given to the qualitative phase.

### **Implementation**

“Implementation refers to whether the quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis come in sequence, one following another, or concurrently (Green et al. 1989; Morgan 1998; Creswell et al. 2003)” (as cited in Ivankova, et al., 2006, p. 5). In this study, there were two consecutive phases.

The mixed methods design in this study is known as sequential mixed methods design (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Within this design, one type of data informs the collection of another type of data in a subsequent stage (Mertens, 2010). The sequence of the quantitative and qualitative data collection was determined by the study purpose and research questions. In this study, the researcher first collected and analysed the quantitative data. The next phase then involved the collection and analysis of qualitative data. Figure 3.1 illustrates the sequential progression of the study.



*Figure 3.1.* Designing and conducting mixed methods research. Adapted from *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research* (p. 69), by J. Creswell, & V. Plano Clark (Eds.), 2010. London: Sage. Copyright 2010 by Sage Publications.

The first phase quantitative data aimed to provide statistically significant findings regarding self-concept and engagement in academic writing. In particular, the correlational analysis between self-concept in academic writing and engagement also helped in determining the level of the relationship between the two constructs. The qualitative data was intended to further explain the nature of this relationship and the antecedents which had a bearing on the direction and magnitude of the relationship. In other words, the quantitative data and statistical results were expected to provide a general understanding of the issue at hand and the qualitative data and its analysis would then explain the meaning of the relationship for individual students.

In the second qualitative phase, student case studies (Stake, 2000) were utilised. Students who represented a range of perspectives from Phase One were selected for Phase Two case studies. Nunan (1992) maintained that case studies are advantageous as a great deal can be learnt “in general from a detailed study of one particular student” (p. 89). Case studies have also been argued to provide rich insights through depth of analysis (Gerring, 2007). In this study, the detailed data in the case studies were expected to reveal salient influences on the nature of the relationships between self-concept in academic writing and engagement, and insights into the outcomes of such influences. In particular, each case study might reveal how the interaction between a student’s self-concept and engagement are experienced and enacted at different levels (personal and social) within the AW class context. For this reason, a case study approach in Phase Two was chosen to “enhance our capacities for social explanation and generalisation” within the mixed-methods study (Mason, 2006, p. 11). In this way, accounts of the learners’ self-concepts in academic writing could be meaningfully connected to their actions and engagement in the classroom.

## **Integration**

Integration of data occurred in the final stages of interpretation and explanation of results. At this point, findings from both the quantitative and qualitative stage were integrated to ascertain whether commonalities or differences exist to further enhance the understanding of the topic. This integration into a coherent discussion in the final stages of the study was intended to “provide stronger evidence for a conclusion through convergence ... of findings” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 21). Further discussion of the data analysis procedures used in each of the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study is provided in Chapter Four.

Figure 3.2 provides a visual model of the sequential investigative procedures for this study. This shows the two phases with the respective procedures of data collection and data analysis. This visual model also elucidates the nature of data produced for each phase. These matters will be further discussed in Chapter Four which follows.

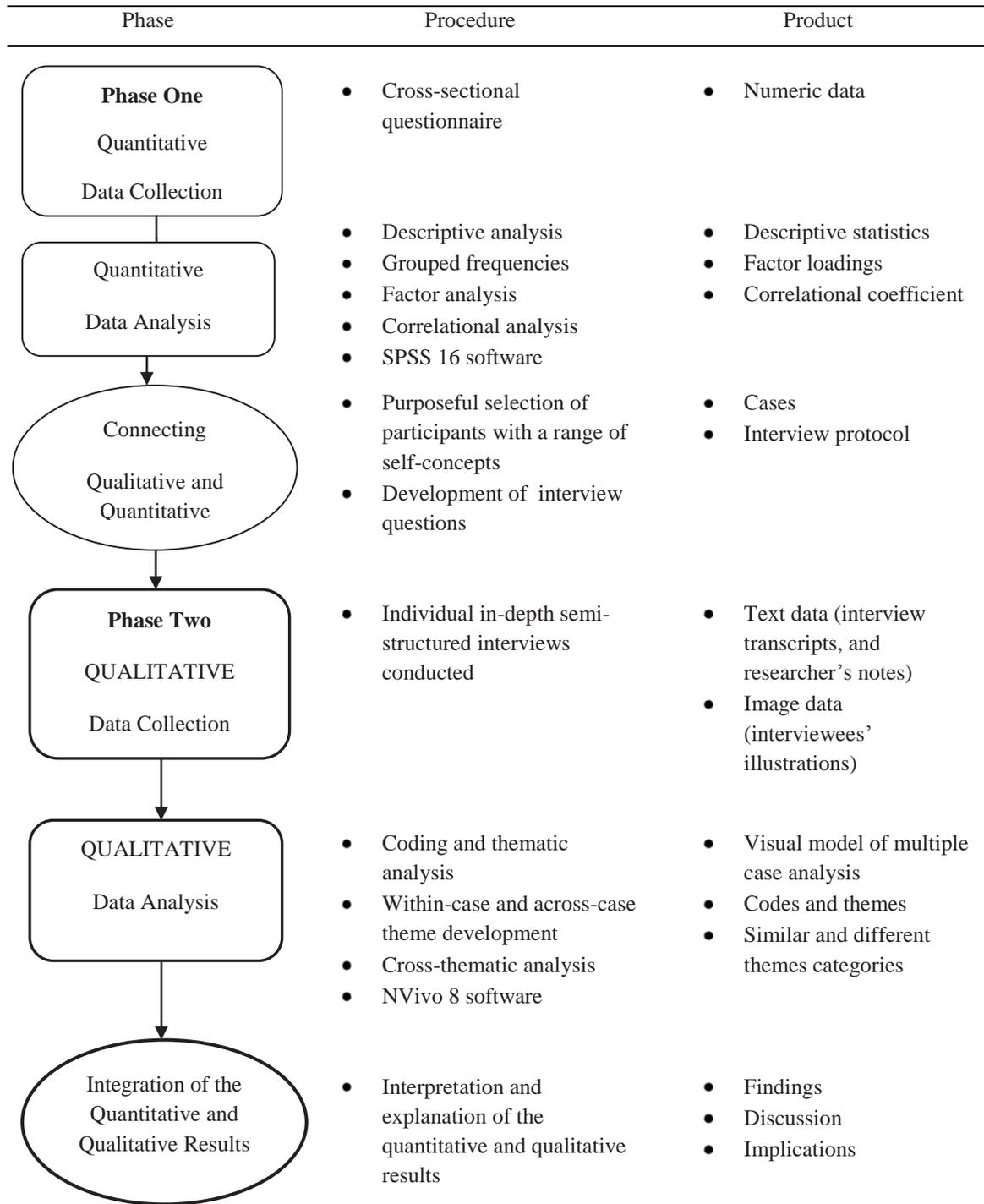


Figure 3.2. Visual Model for the Sequential Mixed Methods Procedures. Adapted from “Using Mixed-Methods Sequential Explanatory Design: From Theory to practice” by N. V. Ivankova, et al., 2006, *Field Methods*, 18, p. 16. Copyright 2006 by Sage Publications.

### **3.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

In this chapter, the researcher has provided a rationale for and discussed the use of mixed methods as the methodology of the study. The choice of this methodological approach was justified on the basis of the purpose of the research, and the notion that the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative approaches help to answer the research questions. The selection of a mixed methods design was a reflection of the pragmatic philosophical stance taken in the study design. The mixed methods design offers a way of advancing knowledge regarding the relationship between Malaysian learners' self-concept in academic writing and their engagement in the AW class. In doing so, it was ascertained that neither quantitative nor qualitative research alone would suffice to capture the trends and details of the relationship between Malaysian learners' self-concept in academic writing and their engagement in the AW class. The mixed methods design allowed for multiple methods to be used and was chosen due to the exploratory and descriptive nature of the study. The practical implementation of this approach is discussed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### METHODS

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on practical issues regarding methods and procedures in light of the research aims and the research questions the study seeks to address. The research process is described, including the design, and procedure for data collection and data analysis undertaken in the study. Finally, there is an examination of the ethical principles applied in implementing the sequential mixed methods design. Following the introduction, Section 4.2 discusses research procedures in Phase One of the study. Section 4.3 discusses research procedures in Phase Two. In both phases, information on rationales for the chosen methods, instrument design, pilot study procedure, data collection and data analysis procedure is provided. Finally, in Section 4.4 there is a discussion of the ethical considerations in relation to each phase of the study. The schedule of data collection and analysis for Phase One and Two is shown in Figure 4.1.

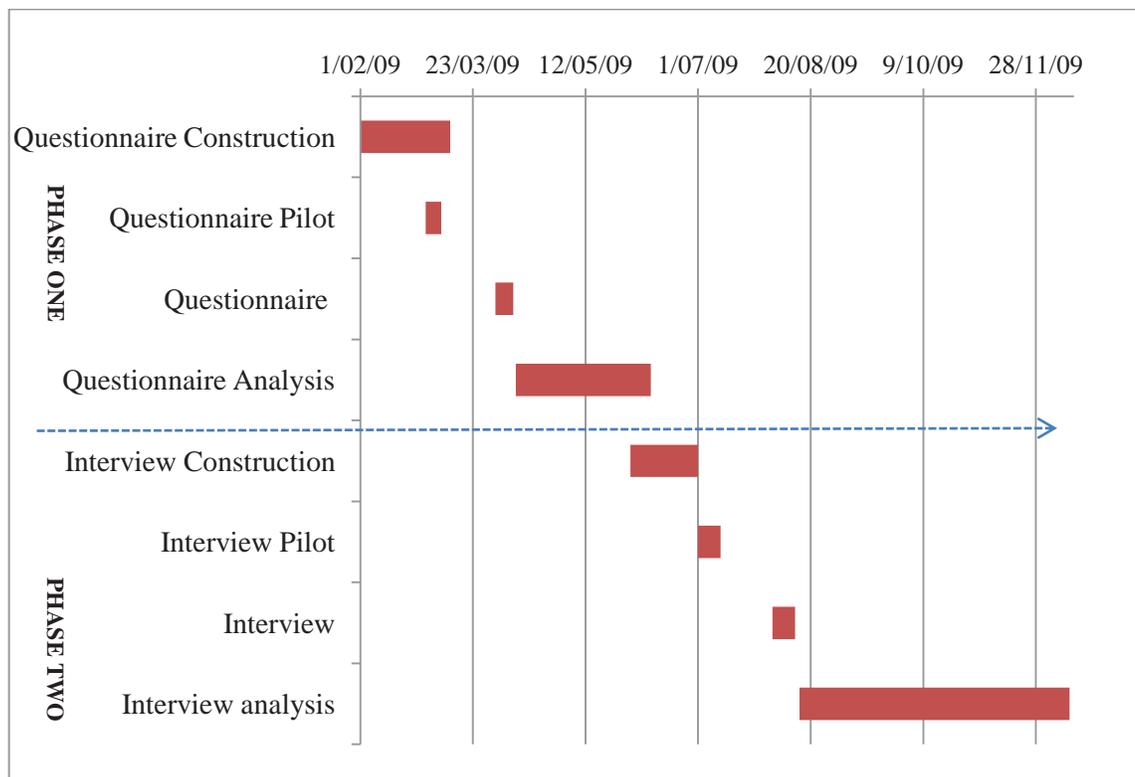


Figure 4.1. Schedule of data collection and analysis for Phase One and Two

Phase One began with the development of questionnaire items in February 2009. A pilot was carried out on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2009 and the questionnaires were finally distributed from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> April 2009. The analysis of the questionnaires took approximately two months and this overlapped with the development of interview items for Phase Two. Similarly, a pilot was conducted for Phase Two in mid-July 2009 and the interviews were conducted from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> August 2009. The interview analysis for Phase Two took approximately four months.

## **4.2 PHASE ONE: QUESTIONNAIRE**

### **Rationale for questionnaire**

The first phase of this study utilised a survey questionnaire. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) confirms the use of surveys in the initial phase of a study in that they “can be exploratory, in which no assumptions or models are postulated, and in which relationship and patterns are explored” (p. 207). The open characteristics of early questionnaires has been argued to be a “useful way of exploring the field, of collecting data around as well as directly on the subject of study, so that the problem is brought into focus and the points worth pursuing are suggested” (Moser & Kalton, 1972, p. 4).

In this study, the questionnaire afforded a systematic approach for the initial exploration of emerging themes of self-concept and engagement with a larger population. Items included in the questionnaire ensured that data collected were within the parameters of the research problem. Three categories of information were collected in the questionnaire: (i) background information of learner, (ii) the learners' self-concept in relation to academic writing, and (iii) their level of engagement. The questionnaire therefore allowed aspects of self-concept in academic writing and engagement of the large target population to be systematically identified.

Dornyei (2007) indicates that incorporating a survey questionnaire in qualitative research can be used to isolate typical and atypical individuals. The use of Likert scales, “in questionnaires combine the opportunity for flexible responses with the ability to determine frequencies, correlations and other forms of quantitative analysis. They afford

the freedom to fuse measurement with opinion, quantity and quality” (Cohen, et al., 2007, p. 327). Different self-concept and engagement levels in the AW class identified in the self-report established a variety of learner profiles as indicated by the grouped frequency distribution (Field, 2009). In this manner, the selection of appropriate participants for the Phase Two of the study was facilitated effectively. Furthermore, as the study dealt with self-concept, which may be considered a rather sensitive and personal topic to the students, the anonymity offered by the questionnaire helped increase the likelihood of obtaining accurate information which helped greatly in formulating another method of inquiry (e.g. interview questions) in Phase Two.

### **Questionnaire development and design**

The development of the questionnaire began in February 2009 (see Figure 4.1). The questionnaire (see Appendix A) consisted of three sections: Section A contained eight items on demographic information, Section B contained 18 items on self-concept in academic writing and Section C contained 18 items exploring engagement in the AW class. Responses for Sections B and C were rated on a 4-point Likert scale (1= False; 4= True). In this study, the 4-point Likert scale was specifically adopted to avoid having midpoints as an option. In doing so, participants' responses were thought to be more likely to clarify their positions on self-concept and engagement items. Items in the questionnaire were also worded to include positive and negative statements.

The items in the questionnaire utilised key points from the literature on self-concept and student engagement. This drew from the deductive framework. For self-concept in academic writing, questionnaires which specifically looked at academic self-concept, such as the Self-Description Questionnaire (SDQ 1) (H. W. Marsh, Relich, & Smith, 1983), Self-Description Questionnaire II (SDQ II) (H. W. Marsh, 1990), and Perception of Ability Scale for Students (PASS) by Boersma and Chapman (1977), were used as a reference, but more discipline-specific questions were constructed. For example, self-concept in academic writing was explored through statements such as *‘I feel successful when I show people that I am clever in writing’* and *‘Writing is one of my best subjects’*.

For engagement, several questionnaires such as Me and My School by Darr et al. (2008) and the Student Engagement Questionnaire (Australasian Survey of Student

Engagement [AUSSE], 2008), informed the development of items for this section of the questionnaire. Items were also contextualised to fit into the discipline-specific context of the AW class. Since the aim of the study was to explore the relationship between Malaysian learners' self-concept in academic writing and their engagement, the psychological perspective provided an opportunity to focus on the internal processes of engagement (behavioural, affective and cognitive) in individual students. For this reason, learners' engagement in the AW class was measured through items such as '*I often look for ways to improve my English*' (behavioural engagement), '*I look forward to going to the writing class*' (affective engagement) and '*Academic writing helps me to do well in my content papers*' (cognitive engagement).

### **Questionnaire Pilot**

Prior to data collection in Phase One, the questionnaire was piloted with eight students. Potential participants for the pilot study were identified by the Massey University Malaysian Students Association (MUMSA). The four Malay students and four Chinese students who participated in the pilot were Malaysian students who took similar language courses to academic writing in Malaysian universities prior to studying in New Zealand. An Information Sheet, Participation Consent Form and a Confidentiality Agreement were prepared for pilot-study participants (see Appendix B, C and D). An application to the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (MUHEC) was approved on the 27<sup>th</sup> March 2009 (MUHEC 09/04) (see also Section 4.4). A time and place to conduct the pilot were set that were mutually convenient. The pilot procedure included explaining the research to the students and informing them of their rights as participants. The average time to complete the questionnaire was 10-15 minutes. After completing the questionnaire, a discussion was carried out to help the researcher refine the questionnaire.

One issue that arose during the pilot discussion was the variety of, or inclusiveness of, the response options. The majority of students were content with the four-point Likert-scale options ranging from '*True*' to '*False*'. Nonetheless, two of the students preferred having a fifth option of a 'neutral' or 'unsure' response. When asked to clarify, the students explained that this gave them another choice when they were unsure where exactly they stood with regard to the item. However, they agreed that the four choices

did make them think harder about their answers, before settling on their response. Therefore, the four-point Likert scale options were retained.

Another issue that arose during the discussion with pilot participants was to include an item requiring students to indicate the hours they allocate to studying academic writing. The researcher decided to add this item to the questionnaire as it could prove to be another important aspect in trying to gauge student engagement in the AW class. The researcher also clarified the number of hours spent in a week. These ranged from zero to five hours.

One final issue raised during discussion with pilot participants was the length of the Information Sheet. The pilot group felt that it was too long and contained some vocabulary that participants may not understand. The researcher explained that it was the format required by MUHEC, but that all the documents would have a *Bahasa Melayu* (Malay Language) translation. No other wording or layout issues were raised by the students during the piloting of the questionnaire. In short, the pilot provided useful feedback in terms of management, administration and wording of the questionnaire.

### **Phase One questionnaire participants**

The participants in the first phase of the study were selected with opportunity and convenience taken into account (Bryman, 2008). As the chosen university offered the academic writing (AW) paper (in the AW class) to help students with their academic and language competencies as a requirement at this higher learning institution, all the students who were currently taking the AW paper were invited to participate. There were 199 students enrolled in the AW class in Semester One of 2009. The composition of these participants varied as they were from different faculties such as Economics and Business, Engineering, Computer Science and Information Technology, and Social Science.

### **Questionnaire procedure**

In identifying and recruiting the students for the questionnaire, the researcher liaised closely with the course coordinator of the AW paper, and the tutors teaching the paper.

This was to ensure that an appropriate time could be arranged for the researcher to introduce the study to the student participants in the respective AW classes at a time convenient to them. The liaising was done via email, since the researcher was residing in New Zealand at that time.

The researcher flew to Malaysia, for the fieldwork. The questionnaires were administered to the participants in the first phase of the study between 2<sup>nd</sup> April and 10<sup>th</sup> April 2009. There were eight classes, and three local tutors helped in distributing the questionnaires. Prior to distributing the paperwork, the researcher met the Dean of the language centre to gain consent and access to the facilities (see Appendix E and F). This was followed by an informal meeting with the coordinator and the tutors of the AW class. This meeting provided the chance for the researcher to introduce herself and explain briefly the objectives of the study. This meeting also made it clear that students would not be coerced to complete the questionnaire and that it was not an assessment of their abilities.

Once the introductions were made, the tutor distributed the information sheet (see Appendix G) and questionnaires, and invited students to participate. The researcher then read the information aloud, further explaining the students' rights in relation to participating in the study. The students were then invited to complete the questionnaire in their own time. This was to ensure that the identity of students who did not wish to participate would not be made known. The researcher informed students that a sealed box had been provided outside the language centre's reception for students to return the completed questionnaire. After two weeks, the box was collected by an appointed family member and posted to New Zealand as the researcher had returned there after administering the questionnaire.

### **Questionnaire analysis**

For the quantitative phase, the researcher analyzed the quantitative data deductively (i.e. theory informed the analysis) (Miller & Brewer, 2003). The quantitative analysis of survey data can identify "variables of interest" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 207). Statistical data obtained from the quantitative method employed allow the identification of basic tendencies and significant relations with regard to self-concept in academic writing and

student engagement. These data helped create baseline information and provided reliable explanation of the issue at hand (Drew, Hardman, & Hosp, 2008). In particular, these statistical data are useful in that they can be further investigated in the subsequent phase of the study. Since items in the questionnaire included both positive and negative statements, the responses for negative statements were reverse-coded in the analysis.

Five main forms of statistical analysis were conducted using SPSS 16 for Windows, (i) internal consistency for reliability, (ii) descriptive statistics, (iii) grouped frequency statistics, (iv) exploratory factor analysis, and (v) correlational analysis. These are described in detail below.

### **Internal consistency for reliability**

Internal consistency is the extent to which tests or procedures assess the same characteristics. It is a measure of the reliability of the instrument used to ensure that the items are assessing only one dimension, construct or area of interest (Salkind, 2010, p. 147). In this study, the internal consistency coefficient analysis (single administration) was conducted to ensure that the instrument was reliable in testing learners' self-concept in academic writing and engagement in the AW class. The reliability of the questionnaire items were gauged through Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951) whereby "the consistency of a person's response on an item is compared to every other scale item (item-item correlations)" (de Vaus, 2002, p. 184). A scale is deemed reliable if the alpha value is more than 0.7 (George & Mallery, 2003).

As Section A explored demographic information, only sections B and C were analysed individually for internal consistency. The Cronbach alpha value for the subscales of items in Section B (self-concept) was  $\alpha = .652$ . Although the value was not significantly high, due to the small number of items and the exploratory nature of the study, this number was deemed acceptable. In addition, as self-concept is a rather 'abstract' and less tangible construct than student engagement, it was anticipated that it would be difficult for students to report on, making it difficult to measure reliably. The Cronbach alpha value for Section C (engagement) was  $\alpha = .764$ . This value indicated that the measuring instrument possessed internal consistency.

### **The use of descriptive statistics in the study**

De Vauss (2002) believes that “descriptive statistics summarise patterns in the responses of cases in a sample” (p. 207). The analyses of the questionnaire in this study were therefore presented in graphical and statistical form. The graphical representation of data helped summarise the findings in a clear and understandable way (Nitko & Brookhart, 2007). The means and standard deviations through statistical representation elucidated information on the average degree of self-concept and engagement for participants. It was hoped that descriptive statistics as a preliminary analysis would uncover patterns and themes for further inferential statistics.

Item analysis was also conducted to further probe learners' self-concept and engagement items. Item analysis “is the process of collecting, summarising and using information from students' responses to make decisions about each item” (Nitko & Brookhart, 2007, p. 320). In particular, item difficulty and point biserial correlation analysis were carried out to identify items that would be statistically significant for further exploration.

#### ***Item difficulty***

Item difficulty for testing purposes is often defined in terms of the percentage of students answering correctly. For example, “the easier the item, the larger the percentage will be” (Anastasi & Urbina, 1997, p. 173). The item difficulty is indicated by the  $p$ -value. A high  $p$ -value indicates that the item is easy and vice versa. Since the analysis discerns the easiness or difficulty of items through the range of scores obtained, it is also a means of measuring the quality of the test. Having a range of difficult and easy items is preferable for maximum differentiation.

With regard to this study, favourable, i.e., true or mostly true responses to the items in the questionnaire were interpreted as reflecting positive self-concepts or high engagement. Likewise, unfavourable, i.e. false or mostly false responses to the items in the questionnaire were interpreted as reflecting negative self-concepts or low engagement. The item difficulty analysis ultimately identified which items in the questionnaire students felt very positively or very negatively about. Henceforth, favourable responses for self-concept in academic writing are regarded as positive self-

concept and unfavourable responses for self-concept in academic writing are regarded as negative self-concepts.

Reynolds et al. (2009) suggest that since the optimal item difficulty level is 0.50, "it is often desirable to select some items with  $p$  values below 0.50 and some with values greater than 0.50" (p. 149) for further investigation. This was done by recoding the answers from the Likert scale to make the results dichotomous, whereby positive self-concepts in academic writing were coded as 1 and negative self-concepts were coded as 0. When the  $p$ -value is multiplied by 100, it converts to the percentage of students who responded to the items in ways reflecting either positive or negative self-concept in academic writing.

#### ***Point biserial correlation ( $r_{pb}$ )***

Point biserial correlations are "the correlations between the right or wrong scores that students receive on a given item and the total scores that the students receive when summing up their scores across the remaining items" (Varma, 2006, p. 3). Point biserial correlations function as an item discrimination index since it examines the degree of the relationship between responses on the item and the total scores. Item which correlate with a value of at least .20 with the total score indicates that the item discriminates well. In this analysis, a high scoring student getting an 'unfavourable' score would be considered an anomaly. Henceforth, in this study, the notion of 'favourable score' is interpreted as students reflecting positive self-concept and engagement regarding the items. Likewise, the notion of 'unfavourable score' is interpreted as students who answered negatively to the items in the questionnaire, reflecting their negative self-concepts or low engagement.

As with item difficulty, statements of self-concept in academic writing and engagement that are responded to positively, were given the value of 1, while negative responses to these constructs were valued as 0. The correlations can range between +1 and -1. The values recommended for quality of items are between .30 to .70 (Kornbrot, 2005). Positive values are desirable and they indicate that the item is good at differentiating between respondents with positive and negative self-concepts.

Items which were statistically significant (e.g. small item-correlation, negative item-correlation and large item-correlation) warranted further exploration in the next interview phase. The point biserial correlation analysis was also implemented for the purpose of cross-checking the previous findings related to item difficulty. This is due to the fact that point biserial correlation (as an index of discrimination) is greatly influenced by item difficulty. To illustrate, results containing negative point biserial can be further explained by the distribution of students' responses in item difficulty. In the same manner, a low difficulty value can be explained by examining the percentage of students who chose each response option.

### **Grouped frequency statistics**

A grouped frequency distribution was used to produce student profiles for the next phase. Ravid (2005) indicates that frequency distributions of scores allow the organising and graphing of data in such a way that distributions can be compared and patterns observed. Computing the range was done by subtracting the minimum possible score from the maximum possible score and adding 1 ( $R = X_h - X_l + 1$ ). The 'width' or interval (i) of each group (self-concept level) was an odd number to ensure that midpoints were integers instead of decimals. To help determine the number of groups, the formula  $\text{Groups} = R/i$  was utilised as a guide. The scores were then grouped based on the groups (e.g. scores from 18-26 are low self-concept, and scores from 45-53 are high self-concept). Each self-concept level was then assigned its corresponding frequency through a simple tally. This grouped frequency distribution thus helped facilitate the selection of a range of participants for Phase Two (e.g. high, medium and low self-concept in academic writing).

### **Factor analysis**

Kline (1999) defines a factor as essentially "a dimension or construct which is a condensed statement of the relationship between a set of variables" (p. 3). In this study, the two constructs being investigated were self-concept in academic writing and student engagement in academic writing. Factor analysis was carried out to ascertain the characteristics or underlying 'factors' which emerged from the responses to the questionnaire. Kline defines factor analysis "as a method for simplifying complex sets of data" (p. 12), whereby the meaning and interpretation of factors are derived from their loadings. The aim of this initial data reduction was to eliminate non-significant

items of self-concept and engagement in the questionnaire. This exploratory investigation was done so that only significant items were used in the subsequent correlational analysis.

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was chosen as the aim was “to explore the field, to discover the main constructs or dimensions” (Kline, 1999, p. 7). Although a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) could provide confirmation of the level of fit (for self-concept in academic writing), this deviates from the objective of the study and the *n* size was not sufficient for structural equation modelling. In fact, Kline contends that EFA is “a powerful tool in elucidating its important determiners and associated variables” (p. 9). This is particularly relevant as the construct of self-concept in academic writing and student engagement in the Malaysian context have not yet been explored. Therefore, the uncertainty of what ‘factors’ are important could be addressed through EFA. Additionally, the selection of the most important factors for each construct would facilitate the subsequent analysis of the relationship between engagement and self-concept.

The analysis of factors was dependent on factor loading values as indicated in the correlation matrix. In determining how many factors needed to be retained, factor extraction was established through eigenvalues and scree plots. Cattell (1996b) suggests plotting a graph of each eigenvalue in the *y*-axis against the factors in the *x*-axis. In doing so, the scree plot was produced. Cattell further suggests that the ‘point of inflexion’ on the curve should be the indicator of how many factors to select. Nonetheless, scree plots alone would not be sufficient for factor extraction. Thus, K1 - Kaiser’s ‘eigenvalue-greater-than-one rule’ (Kaiser, 1960) was also incorporated as it is one of the most established methods for factor extractions. Factors that have eigenvalues greater than one are retained for interpretation (Field, 2009).

### **Correlational analysis**

Correlational analysis was chosen in the initial phase as it “allows researchers to determine not only whether a relationship between variables exists, but also the degree of the relationship between them” (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 1999, p. 211). Gall et al. further emphasise that the act of establishing the relationship between two variables is necessary as “the focus on exploration and understanding a relationship is meaningful

whether the correlation coefficient obtained is low or high, positive or negative” (p. 220). Correlation coefficients can range from -1.0 to + 1.0.

Reynolds et al. (2009) stated that there are two parameters to be taken into consideration regarding correlation coefficients: (i) the signs of the coefficients, and (ii) the magnitude or absolute size of the coefficients. “A positive correlation coefficient indicates that an increase on one variable is associated with an increase on the other variable. A negative correlation coefficient indicates that an increase of one variable is associated with a decrease on the other variable” (p. 51). Based on this, in a positive correlation the trend in both variables go in the same direction, whether that is to increase together or decrease together. In a negative correlation they are going in opposite directions. Both correlations tell us something about what is happening in the data and the relationship between the variables.

Additionally, the magnitude of a coefficient would indicate the strength of the relationship between students' self-concept and engagement; values of a coefficient could indicate  $<0.30$ , weak;  $0.30-0.69$ , moderate and  $>0.70$  strong. Pearson's correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) was used to determine the relationship between self-concept and engagement, and Pearson's coefficient of determination ( $r^2$ ) was used to further determine the magnitude of the relationship. The coefficient of determination can be interpreted as the percent of variance in one variable that is in common with the variance in the other variable. In other words, a correlation of  $r = .6$  would have a coefficient of determination of  $r^2 = .36$  meaning that the two variable have 36% of their variance in common.

The following section discusses the rationale for the chosen method and research procedure for Phase Two.

### **4.3 PHASE TWO: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS**

#### **Rationale for semi-structured interviews**

In this study, interviews were chosen as they are able to provide depth to a particular issue. Fontana and Frey (2003) contend that interviews are “one of the most common

and powerful ways in which we try to understand our fellow human beings” (p. 62). Scott and Usher (1999) argue that interviews allow “access to past events, allowing access to situations at which the researcher is not able to be present, facilitating cross-checking against other data collected from different sources” (pp. 112-113). In this study, interviews allowed rich data to be gathered in order to understand learners' self-concept and engagement in the AW class.

Interviews were chosen as they also provide opportunities for learners to formulate and verbalise their views. Cohen and colleagues (2007) argue that “interviews enable participants to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard the situation from their own point of view” (2003). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) maintain that “good interviews produce rich data filled with words that reveal the respondents' perspectives” (p. 104). This is particularly relevant to the study as each learner's self-concept, engagement and learning experience in academic writing in L2 is unique and distinct from other students. Ivanic (1998) maintains that:

[the] degree of sincerity with which an identity is presented and the complex considerations leading to a particular self-representation cannot be usually traced in the linguistic characteristics of the text, and can only be accessed through in-depth interviews with the writers. (p. 216)

In the context of this study, interviews afforded the opportunity for capturing unique perspectives of self-concept in academic writing, engagement and the relationship between the two constructs which are influenced by each individual's distinct social history.

Interviews can be grouped based on the degree of formality, ranging from structured, through semi-structured to unstructured on a continuum (Nunan, 1992). In this study, semi-structured interviews were incorporated as an instrument in Phase Two. This type of interview was chosen for Phase Two of the study because “semi-structured interviews have a set of key questions that are followed in a more open-ended manner” (Mutch, 2005, p. 126). Semi-structured interviews therefore allowed for flexibility while also providing “comparable data across subjects” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 104). These interviews allowed the researcher to gain a more in-depth understanding of the topic of self-concept and the influence it has on learners' engagement.

A semi-structured interview which elicits open-ended responses ensures flexibility and lets “the analyses emerge” (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007, p. 79). Such analysis allows for issues, which the researcher did not anticipate, to emerge and evolve as part of the data collection and data analysis process. A structured interview with a set of prescribed questions would limit the scope and the wealth of information from participants. On the other hand, a semi-structured interview promises depth, as it can help clarify subtleties raised during the interview and the questionnaire. In this study, the accommodating nature of the semi-structured interview added not only depth to the quantitative results of the study, but also provided an opportunity for the researcher to explore and better understand the students through their own voices (Scott & Usher, 1999).

There were two semi-structured interviews with each participant in Phase Two. The first interview obtained general impressions of learners' writing self-concept and academic writing in particular. The second interview further probed and gained deeper insights into how self-concept was manifested in their engagement in the AW class through critical incidents or current learning experiences. This exploratory follow-up allowed the complexity and distinctness of self-concept and engagement to be further understood by the researcher through a selected profile of students, identified from the first phase. Finally, as this study also recognises that self-concept is socially constructed, the semi-structured interviews contextualized the findings and added insights to the distinct learning experiences reported.

### **Semi-structured interview development and design**

Prior to conducting the interviews, an interview guide was developed (see Appendix H). The topics for the interview were constructed based on themes emerging from the questionnaire data. In trying to elicit learners' self-concept and how it is manifested in their actions, questions were developed based on themes that would further explain who these learners were and the experiences that had shaped their self-concept in academic writing and their respective writer identities. Accordingly, the first interview obtained general impressions of learners' writing self-concept and academic writing in general. The second interview further probed and gained deeper insights as to how self-concept is manifested in their engagement in the AW class through critical incidents or current learning experiences.

## **Semi-structured interview pilot**

The pilot for the semi-structured interviews was carried out with eight Malaysian students in a New Zealand university to ensure (a) that the interview guide was adequate and (b) for administrative purposes to ensure the interview procedure would be realistic and workable. Some activities planned as part of the interview process, such as ranking and listing, were evaluated in the pilot. The pilot also identified logistical problems which might occur during the interviews.

One issue that arose during the pilot was that the students found terminology such as 'self-concept' and 'engagement' rather abstract. As a result of this, it was felt that having a handout with definitions and example statements for students to refer to would help their understanding of this terminology. The researcher first asked the students about their understanding of the concept, before showing them the definitions provided by literature. This was done to gauge students' comprehension of the main concepts in the questionnaire. In the case of 'self-concept in academic writing', the terminology became accessible once the students comprehended the general term 'self-concept'. The key components of 'self-concept' (knowledge about themselves, how they feel, value and evaluate themselves) in various contexts were made concrete through statements which depicted possible self-concepts, for example:

*Physical: I am good at athletics.*

*Moral: I am a good person.*

*Personal: I am kind and helpful.*

*Family: I am a responsible daughter.*

A later pilot revealed that students were better able to understand what 'self-concept' is after these statements were provided to depict how they felt and evaluated their abilities in the respective domains. Following this, some of the students managed to grasp the notion of self-concept in academic writing autonomously. Nonetheless, statements such as *I am a good writer, I make a lot of mistakes when writing in English* and *I think academic writing is important for my future*, as well as a definition from literature, were also provided as reference and confirmation.

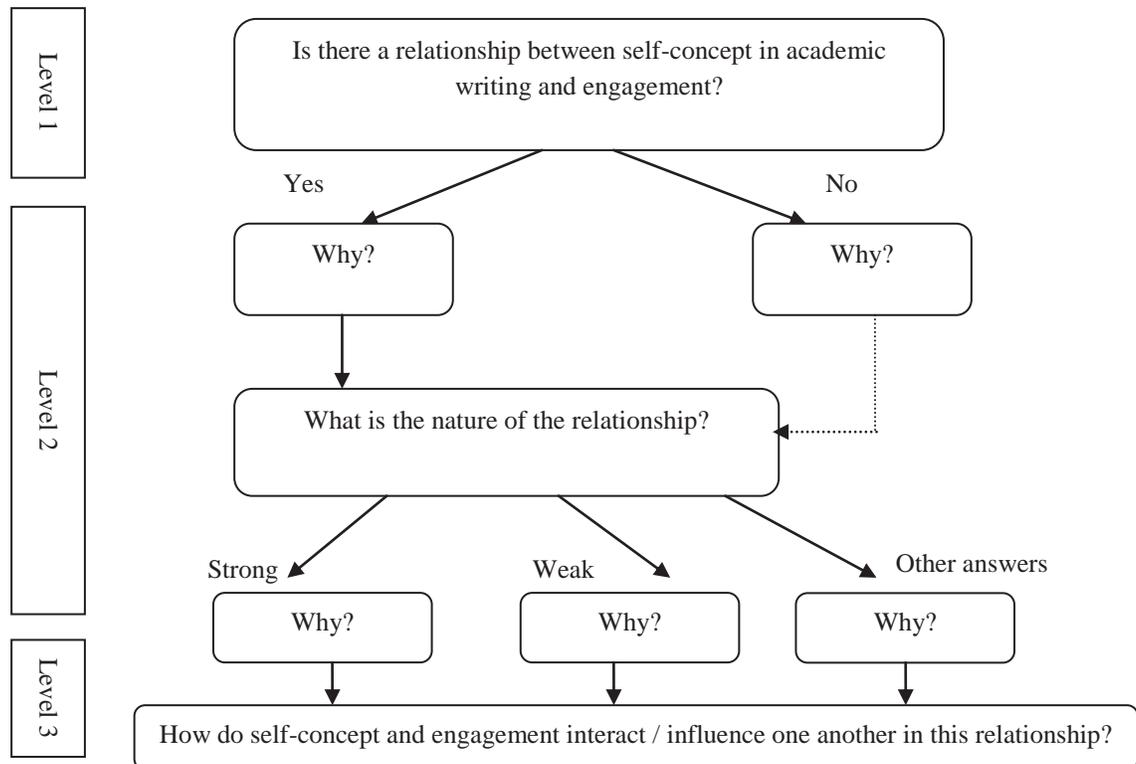
To make the concept of 'engagement' more accessible, visual representations were included. Incorporating visual methods in social and educational research have been revealed to greatly enhance the richness of data (Banks, 2001; Moss, Deppeler, Astley,

& Pattison, 2007; Spencer, 2011). Therefore, several pictures which depicted variations of 'engagement' were shown, and the students were invited to arrange the pictures based on a continuum from 'most engaged' to 'least engaged' (see Appendix I). By doing this, the researcher was able to gauge what students felt about and interpreted as 'engagement' or 'disengagement'. The visuals also justified the need to conduct the interviews, as engagement is not only subjective, but can also be manifested in many forms and actions. Ranking of activities was also included in the interview. Students were asked to rank which activities in the classroom engaged them, from most to least, enabling 'engagement' to be understood in the context of the AW class. To gauge students' self-concept in academic writing, they were required to complete sentences such as:

*I am a \_\_\_\_\_ L1/L2 writer                      I am a \_\_\_\_\_ academic writer in English*

Several adjectives such as *confident, organised, creative and careful* were provided as options, and students were encouraged to provide their own answers. Students were also encouraged to provide multiple responses to the statements (e.g. careful and confident). A final issue that arose during the pilot was trying to get students to explain the association or relationship between their self-concept in academic writing and their engagement in the AW class. Probing proved to be challenging at times, as students found it quite difficult to provide an answer without a concrete reference to a situation or a scenario. Thus, a three-level exploration of the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement was necessary to help explore these constructs with the students (see Figure 4.2).

In Level 1, the aim was to investigate whether students perceived a relationship existed between self-concept and engagement in academic writing. Students were also encouraged to provide reasons as to how they came to their chosen answers. Following on from the response in Level 1, students' perception regarding the nature of the relationship was investigated in Level 2. Students were also encouraged to provide reasons as to why they believed that the relationship is strong or weak (or other answers which they have provided). Finally, in Level 3, how students perceived self-concept and engagement as interacting or influencing one another in the relationship is investigated further. Students are encouraged to provide examples from their learning experience in the AW class to clarify their responses.



*Figure 4.2.* Flow chart for the exploration of the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement in the pilot and study. The dotted lines depict a possible relationship, despite interviewees' negative response.

Furthermore, to investigate the nature of the relationship (e.g. direction and magnitude), visual approaches such as Venn diagrams (see Appendix J) proved to be helpful in gauging students' perception of the relationship between self-concept and engagement. The visual materials not only functioned as prompts to students' own illustrations and representation of the relationship, but also as a means for in-depth discussion.

The pilot was crucial to the study as it helped elucidate potential issues that may have been overlooked by the researcher during the actual interviews. In short, the pilot helped provide validity and reliability for the semi-structured interviews as an instrument (Van Teijlingen, Rennie, Hundley, & Graham, 2001). Thus, the pilot affirmed that the interview would help the researcher gain a better understanding of student behaviour in the classroom. The next section discusses participants and procedures for the actual study.

## **Phase Two Semi-structured interview participants**

Thirteen students expressed interest in participating in the interviews by leaving their email and contact details in the final section of the questionnaire. Although the initial plan was to select the interview participants from the results of the questionnaire according to the different types of self-concept levels reported (e.g. very high, high, medium to low), only eight students were able to participate in the interviews. The other five students had to withdraw from participating due to scheduling conflicts and their own respective study commitments. Consequently, the remaining eight students represented only the medium ( $n=5$ ) and high self-concept ( $n=3$ ) range on the continuum, as indicated by the questionnaire.

## **Semi-structured interview procedure**

The researcher began to contact the possible participants for the interview phase via email in July 2009. The Information Sheet was emailed to the students and a schedule was finalised by the end of July. The interviews were conducted from 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2009 to 13<sup>th</sup> August 2009 in a neutral and non-threatening location such as discussion rooms in the library and tutorial rooms in the centre. The interviews were conducted in English and *Bahasa Melayu*, the native language of the research subjects and the researcher.

Prior to the interviews, the students were once again briefed verbally about the study, in addition to the earlier written information. The students were informed about their rights as participants and once they agreed, were invited to sign the Consent Form (see Appendix L). The participants were also informed that once the transcription had been completed, it would be sent via email or post for them to check and clarify. Once students agreed that the transcription accurately recorded what had been discussed in the interview, they were asked to sign the Authority for the Release of Transcripts form (see Appendix M) and return it to the researcher. The interviews took a maximum of one hour per student and were digitally audio-recorded. Each student was interviewed twice to increase the depth and richness of the data. The gap between the first and second interviews in each case was no more than one week.

Directive prompts allow for probing of events that depict engagement. Invitations to provide personal accounts of participants' experiences were balanced with questions

which altered their viewpoints (e.g. *You mentioned a class that you felt was uninteresting. Let's say that you were the teacher for that class, what would you do differently to make sure the students participate or become more engaged?*). The interview process was flexible (Janesick, 2000) in that more questions were added, refined and readjusted in the subsequent interviews due to emergent findings. The researcher's role shifted from detachment to empathy since the focus was on building trust and rapport. Michael (1994 as cited in Bogdan and Biklen, 2007) offers the notion of *quasi-friend* to encourage participation and rapport with child participants. Thus, during the interviews, the researcher assumed the role of 'another student writer' to help establish rapport and reduce the researcher-participant power issues. Additionally, the two interviews helped to build rapport and trust between the two parties.

### **Semi-structured interview analysis**

Data analysis in qualitative research involves the process of "systematically searching and arranging interview transcripts, field notes and other materials that the researcher accumulates to enable you to come up with findings" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 159). The analysis of data from the semi-structured interviews involved several (not necessarily distinct) steps, namely transcription, coding, analysis and interpretation. The analysis of data from this qualitative phase was supported by the use of NVivo 8 software.

### **Transcription**

The semi-structured interview data was digitally recorded and later transcribed using the denaturalised convention (MacLean, Mechthild, & Alma, 2004). This is a verbatim depiction of speech, perceived to be an antidote to the naturalised transition often used alongside conversation analysis. The emphasis on informational content is particularly relevant to the study, as it is concerned with the substance of the interview, that is "the meanings and perceptions created and shared during a conversation" (Oliver, Serovich, & Mason, 2005, p. 4).

During the study, it became necessary to check the translations of transcriptions to avoid potential inaccuracies and errors. The participants were contacted about this via email to ensure they would give informed consent. Participants' confidentiality was

maintained as the language expert signed a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix N). Field notes were also taken during the semi-structured interviews, and these were typed using a word processor. The transcribed and field notes data were then transferred into the NVivo 8 software for further analyses.

### **Coding**

Upon completing the transcription, the researcher proceeded with coding. The importance of coding has been highlighted by researchers as “the heart and soul of whole-text analysis” (G. Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 274). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) suggest several steps in developing a coding system. These include: (i) searching for regularities and patterns as well as for topics in the data, (ii) writing down words and phrases to represent these topics and patterns, and (iii) developing a list of coding categories. The identified words and patterns become the initial coding categories for the descriptive data.

The next stage in the process is the data reduction stage. This process is “dynamic and fluid” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 101). It required the researcher to read the whole transcription repeatedly for code refinement. Coding categories have to be limited to ensure that there are no overlaps or redundancies, so major and sub-codes were established. Through NVivo 8, the systematic analysis of interview data was carried out by grouping coding strips (coded parts) into nodes in the project database, with each node representing a category. As suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998), and Bogdan and Biklen (2007), the analysis requires several rigorous steps.

For coding, the steps were subjected to several rounds, and *meaning units* were used that “preserve the psychological integrity of the idea being expressed” and “neither fragment the idea into meaningless truncated segments nor confuse it with other ideas that express different themes” (Ratner, 2002, p. 169). The researcher thus coded coherent, related statements as one meaning unit. In cases where participants combined two themes in one sentence, the researcher coded the sentence twice and each theme was placed in two categories. Table 4.1 presents an overview of the steps involved in coding through NVivo 8 software.

Table 4.1

*Overview of Coding Steps using NVivo 8*

Step	Procedure	Product
Step 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relevant parts of each interview were highlighted and are given a code name based on the theme they expressed</li> </ul>	Free nodes (coding strips unconnected to one another)
Step 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Free nodes are compared, revised or deleted</li> <li>Free nodes are clustered based on thematic affinities into a higher code level</li> </ul>	Tree nodes (coding strips that have category / subcategory relationship)
Step 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All free nodes and tree nodes are compared across participants</li> <li>Emergent themes are categorised</li> </ul>	Casebook / Matrix Query

**Analysis and interpretation**

Data interpretation of the qualitative phase was carried out inductively. Literature indicates that this approach emphasises how meaning is to emerge from the data (Barbour, 2008; Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; N. Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). In fact, the strategy of inductive analysis “is to allow the important analysis dimensions to emerge from patterns found in the case under study without presupposing in advance what the dimensions will be” (Patton, 2002, p. 56). With regard to this study, findings emerged from the frequent and significant themes from the raw data, without the restraints of preconceived categories. The rich qualitative data was from the participant’s own words/ language of how they understood their experiences of learning in the AW class. At the same time, the researcher acknowledges her position was subjective, due to her experience as an educator of ESL learners and her background knowledge on the Malaysian educational context. Thus, the analysis would be influenced by the researchers’ experience.

In this phase, the analysis also required the researcher to draw connections between the results and theoretical issues. The different perspectives that students held about their self-concept in academic writing and the meaning of engagement to them, were used to interpret the role of the relationship between these two concepts in their learning experience. In this part, the interpretation of the displayed data and meaning-making was done by the researcher. Verifications and conclusions were based on the data

presented and links were made to relevant literature. The case studies included verbatim quotes and examples.

The analysis and interpretation stage involved finding themes and identifying telling incidents, which would further depict the relationship between learners' self-concept in academic writing and their engagement in the AW class. The goal of the analysis and interpretation at this stage was to understand how the learning experience is shaped through the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement. This was achieved by comparing participants across the different sections of the interviews and identifying the relationships between the different aspects of the coding systems.

'Data linking' (Weitzman, 2003) whereby relevant data segments or themes are connected to each other, was carried out through NVivo 8 using the *casebook* and *matrix* function. This helped facilitate the creation of theme clusters within, and between students. Additionally, the matrix query was able to show frequency of codes through the identified attributes (Silver & Lewins, 2009). The cross-tabulation in matrix query also helped identify similarities, differences and relationships between the participants.

### **Trustworthiness of qualitative findings**

The notion of trustworthiness in qualitative findings can be addressed through: credibility, transferability; dependability and confirmability (Shenton, 2004). Credibility of findings relates to ensuring that the study measures "accurately ... the phenomena under study" (p. 64). The credibility (in preference to internal validity) of findings in this phase was ensured through provisions such as digitally recording students' interviews, getting clarification of participant meanings in the interview, getting participants to review the interview transcripts, 'thick' descriptions of participant accounts in the research findings and having multiple sources of data (through replication of investigation across more than one case).

In terms of transferability (in preference to external validity / generalisability), a similar strategy of providing 'thick descriptions' of the cases in the study was implemented.

This was to ensure that the readers can “have a proper understanding of it, thereby enabling them to compare the instances of the phenomenon described in the research report with those that they have seen emerge in their situations” (Shenton, 2004, p.70).

The strategy used in this study was providing an in-depth methodological description as Hartnett says (2010) dependability “pertains to the stability of finding and confirmability to the internal coherence of data in terms of findings, interpretations, and recommendations” (p. 45). This was to ensure that any replication of the study is possible. Issues of confirmability of findings, (comparable to objectivity) were addressed by clarifying the researchers' position as subjective in the qualitative phase. The detailed methodological description helped readers “determine how far the data and constructs emerging from it may be accepted” (Shenton, 2004, p.72).

#### **4.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

This study adhered to Massey University Human Ethics Committee (MUHEC) guidelines. Ethical approval for each phase, Phase One and Phase Two was received simultaneously (MUHEC 09/04). The overarching ethical principle emphasizes the need to minimise harm to student participants and the institution.

Minimisation of harm to the institution was addressed firstly during the ‘access and acceptance’ (Cohen et al., 2007) stage. This was sought through an informal contact followed by seeking official permission in the target setting before the start of the study. The researcher presented her “credentials as a serious investigator and establish[ed] [her] own ethical position with respect to the proposed research” (p. 55). In this study, informal and formal approval from the Dean of the language centre and the university was gained by explicating the aims and nature of the proposed research, nature and procedures involved in the study. Additionally, the researcher also had to protect the integrity and reputation of the institution and its instructors, as well as protecting the anonymity of the institution. Measures were taken to ensure the ethical requirements of both institutions, Massey University and the institution involved, were met.

In the context of students, the issue of minimisation of harm also required consideration of how the study would be beneficial to the participants. Dornyei (2007) believes that an effort needs to be made to ensure that “the participants benefit from the research in some way” (p. 67). In this study, students' reflections on their learning experiences and the knowledge of the relationship between their self-concept in academic writing and their engagement, were likely to help them better understand their learning and writing processes. The literature suggests that those who are clear about their self-concept, and who are able to describe who they are as learners, have greater control of their learning (H. W. Marsh & Martin, 2011; Mercer, 2011). An understanding of the relationship between learners' self-concept in academic writing (in English) was also expected to facilitate learners' effective transition from secondary school to the tertiary institutions.

The understanding of the expectations and beliefs of learners is equally beneficial to the institution which was expected to benefit from a greater understanding of the expectations and perspectives of its learners, especially those of indigenous or native students. Information from the study may provide opportunity for improvement of current practice in the academic writing course.

Other ethical issues considered in this study were: informed and voluntary consent, anonymity and confidentiality, cultural issues and researcher position. These principles are discussed in the following sections.

### **Informed and voluntary consent**

Informed consent is a vital issue in educational research which deals with human participants. The underlying principle of informed consent is “it is up to research participants to weigh the risks and benefits associated with participating in a research project and up to them to then decide whether to take part” (K. Howe & Moses, 1999, p. 24). The decision to do so must be made only once participants have been informed and understand what their involvement in the research entails (K. Howe & Moses).

To ensure that students were sufficiently informed and had understood what was involved if they participated in the study, an Information Sheet for each phase: pilot questionnaire, questionnaire, pilot interview and interview (see Appendix B, Appendix

C, Appendix G, Appendix K) was provided, which detailed information on the researcher's background, project description and objectives, procedure of participant identification and recruitment, project procedure, data management, and participants' rights. Students were also provided with project contact details (available in the information sheet) if they wished to ask questions regarding the research.

As discussed extensively in Chapter One, the students in the study varied in terms of their English proficiency levels. Therefore, all information sheets, consent forms and questionnaires were translated to Malay language, which is the participants' national language. Additionally, prior to data collection in each phase, the researcher informed participants verbally regarding the objectives of the research and their rights. This provided a platform for students to raise questions concerning the study. For all parts of the study, ethical procedures regarding informed and voluntary consent were followed.

### **Anonymity and confidentiality**

Cohen et al. (2007) define confidentiality thus: "although researchers know who has provided the information or are able to identify participants from the information given, they will in no way make the connection known publicly" (p. 65). This means that what has been revealed by the participants in terms of data, results or records, will not be disclosed, unless permission is granted. Therefore, in this study, confidentiality was maintained by ensuring that the consent forms were kept securely in a separate place from the data and results were written up, excluding any information that might identify the individual.

Wiles et al. (2006) maintain "anonymity is a vehicle by which confidentiality is operationalised" (p. 4). This anonymity ensures participants' privacy with regards to the data provided, so that both name and authorship is unknown. In the following section, the discussion of anonymity and confidentiality is dealt with differently in each phase and includes a discussion on the handling of various types of documentation and data pertaining to the study.

### **Pilot Phase**

In the pilot study, participants' identities were known only to the researcher, as it was only the researcher who reported responses from the group discussion as feedback on the questionnaire. This ensured that no links could be made between the participants and their responses. In refining the questionnaire, it was impossible for the participants to be identified as they were from different institutions in Malaysia. In addition, the participants signed a confidentiality agreement, which makes it clear that students are not to disclose information shared in the focus group that would render an individual identifiable as a participant in the pilot study.

### **Phase One**

The participants in the questionnaire were encouraged to complete it independently outside class time. A box was also provided outside the language centre's reception for students to return the completed questionnaire anonymously. All these procedures ensure their identities remained anonymous. Results from the questionnaires were collated in a manner which ensured data confidentiality. Although students' names were not on the questionnaire, if a student gave consent to be interviewed, they needed to give their contact details so the researcher could arrange for a follow-up meeting. All this information was made known to the students on the information sheet.

### **Phase Two**

For the semi-structured interviews which were conducted face-to-face, the researcher assured participants of confidentiality of their identities as they would be known only to the researcher, as data was coded during the analysis and pseudonyms were used in writing up the final report.

### **Handling of data**

In storing hard and soft data, strict measures were taken to ensure security in accordance with Massey University policy. Data related to the study were accessible only to the researcher and the supervisors. Hard copies and audio tapes were locked away securely in the researcher's office to which no one else has access. Electronic data was stored on the researcher's personal computer, which is password-protected. In accordance with Massey University policy, all data will be stored securely for five years, after which it will be destroyed. Consent forms were locked away in the researcher's home office,

separate from the data. Care was taken to ensure that the researcher alone had access to the consent forms. In accordance with Massey University policy, the consent forms will be stored for five years, after which they will be destroyed.

### **Cultural issues and researcher position**

Weis (1992) argues that research has to empower and make positive changes rather than exploiting and abusing the power-relationship between researcher and participants. This is particularly so when researchers are working with cross-cultural participants. Because of their cultural background, Malaysian learners are often passive in their approach to learning and are not used to being asked to make contributions to their own learning. Consequently, the researcher anticipated that some participants might be a little unsure at first, about what contributions they could make, and how to express their inner thoughts. Nevertheless, the researcher's former experience with Malaysian learners also indicated that they would welcome the opportunity to discuss their ideas and experiences when they felt they were in a comfortable and supportive environment.

Therefore, in this study, several measures were taken to ensure the research environment would be warm and supportive for the participants. For example, it was thought that the topic of self-concept and engagement could be very sensitive to the students. Thus, the researcher positioned herself in the interview as 'another student writer' who wanted to understand their learning experience in the Academic Writing class. This positioning was done through informal dialogues (throughout the interview) outlining the researcher's experience and challenges dealing with academic writing and also writing in English for her PhD study.

These informal dialogues highlighted some commonalities, built camaraderie with the students, reduced the possible power-relationship issues, and put the participants at ease. As there were two interviews with each student, the initial meeting enabled the researcher to get to know each interviewee and establish some rapport before the second meeting, which was more in-depth and further addressed the research questions. In addition, the study focused on the students' self-concept, in which they themselves were the subject-matter experts. This addressed the issue of power-relationship between interviewer and interviewee.

To help develop a non-threatening environment, communication was not restricted to verbal discussions. Students were invited to draw illustrations to represent their perspective on the relationship between self-concept and engagement in the AW class. This provided an alternative for students who may have had challenges in expressing their thoughts regarding the relationship. Moreover, since the researcher shares a similar culture, language and background (and thus was very much aware of cultural and social issues related to Malaysian learners) it took away some of the pressure by allowing them to communicate freely.

#### **4.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter has discussed the way in which the study was implemented. It described procedures used for questionnaires in Phase One and semi-structured interviews in Phase Two (two methods of data-gathering) in light of the research purpose and the research question identified in Chapter Two. Practical issues such as procedures for identifying the research participants, pilot studies, data gathering and data analysis were also described. Finally, the ethical principles (as outlined in the Massey University Code of Ethical Conduct for Research) applied in the study were outlined. The following chapter presents the quantitative findings of the study from Phase One.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **QUANTITATIVE RESULTS**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents the findings from the analysis of data in the quantitative phase of the study. Firstly, the results from the demographic analysis are presented in Section 5.2 followed by findings on the Malaysian learner's self-concept in academic writing in Section 5.3. Findings on the Malaysian learner's engagement in the AW class are presented in Section 5.4. The findings include results from the descriptive analysis, the item analysis and grouped frequency statistics. Subsequently, results from the exploratory factor analysis and correlational analysis are presented in Section 5.5. This is followed by a quantitative discussion in Section 5.6. Finally, the link between the quantitative phase and the qualitative phase of this study is discussed in Section 5.7.

#### **5.2 DEMOGRAPHIC RESULTS**

Respondents to the Phase One questionnaire were all in the AW classes offered by a public university in Malaysia (the context for the research). This class was conducted once a week for two hours. Essay writing was the only writing genre addressed in the programme. The number of undergraduate students enrolled in the paper was 199, with an average of 25 students per class. Questionnaires were distributed to all students taking this AW paper during a two-week period in Semester Two of the 2009 academic year. Of the 199 questionnaires sent out, 170 were returned, resulting in a very positive 85% response rate. Respondents included 135 female students and 35 male students.

Since the AW paper was offered every semester and there were no restrictions as to when students could enrol in this paper, the result was a very diverse sample of respondents. Respondents came from seven faculties, the majority (39%) coming from the Faculty of Resource Science and Technology. The Faculty of Cognitive Science and Human Development represented 17.6% and the Faculty of Social Science represented 15.3 % of the whole sample. The remaining respondents came from the Faculty of

Computer Science and Information Technology (10%), the Faculty of Engineering (7.6%), the Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts (5.3%) and the Faculty of Economy and Business (4.7%).

Respondents ranged from first-year students to final-year students. The majority of the respondents were second-year students (62.4%), followed by third-year students (22.4%), fourth-year students (12.9%) and finally first-year students (2.4%). The ethnic representation of the participants was also diverse. Most student respondents were Chinese (40%) and Malay (37.1%). The remaining respondents were Iban (12.4%) and other minor ethnicities (10.7%).

Respondents were also asked to indicate the main language used for everyday communication. Results for this questionnaire revealed there were two major groups, Malay (49.4%) and Chinese (38.2%). Only a small number of students used English (1.8%) as their main language for everyday communication. Most students opted for their own language as their primary language for communication, rather than English. Accordingly, the students' English proficiency level was varied, ranging from Band 3 to Band 5 (with Band 6 being the highest) of the Malaysian University English Test (MUET). The majority of respondents were in Band 3 (65.3%) during the particular semester in which the researcher undertook the data collection. The remaining students in the sample had higher proficiency levels with more students in Band 4 (25.9%) than in Band 5 (8.8%).

The number of hours the students allocated for studying academic writing per week was also investigated. This was specified as the hours each student assigned for revision or homework outside of the AW class, per week. To analyse whether there were levels of differentiation between undergraduate years, a cross tabulation was carried out. The breakdowns of results are shown in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1

*Breakdown of Cross Tabulation of Hours for Studying Academic Writing (per week) by Respondents' Academic Year*

Academic Year	Hours of study allocated for academic writing			
	None	One to two hours	Three to four hours	More than five hours
<b>First Year (n=4)</b>				
% within Undergraduate Year	75.0	25.0	.0	.0
<b>Second Year (n=106)</b>				
% within Undergraduate Year	32.1	62.3	1.9	3.8
<b>Third Year (n=38)</b>				
% within Undergraduate Year	26.3	65.8	7.9	.0
<b>Fourth Year (n=22)</b>				
% within Undergraduate Year	13.6	54.5	27.3	4.5
<b>Total (n=170)</b>				
% within Undergraduate Year	29.4	61.2	6.5	2.9

Based on the results, it appeared that academic year did not discriminate greatly the number of hours student put into studying academic writing outside class. As learning academic writing may require students to read multiple academic articles, summarising and incorporating these academic sources into their written work (e.g. paraphrasing and synthesising) (see Section 1.2), it was anticipated that the students would spend at least 3-4 hours per week, studying academic writing. The majority of second, third and fourth year students spend one to two hours studying academic writing. This was unexpectedly low as it was anticipated by the researcher that time spent studying academic writing (four hours per week) would mirror the students' academic experience, in that as students progressed in their level of study, the hours spend for studying academic writing would also increase.

To further analyse whether there were levels of differentiations in the amount of time spent on studying for academic writing between the MUET results, a cross tabulation was carried out. The breakdown of results is shown in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2

*Breakdown of Cross Tabulation of Hours for Studying Academic Writing (per week) by Respondents' Malaysian University English Test (MUET) results*

MUET Result	Hours of Study Allocated for Academic Writing			
	None	One to two hours	Three to Four hours	More than five hours
Band 3 ( <i>n</i> =111)				
% within Hours of Study Allocated for Academic Writing	46.0	73.1	81.8	60.0
Band 4 ( <i>n</i> =44)				
% within Hours of Study Allocated for Academic Writing	42.0	18.3	18.2	40.0
Band 5 ( <i>n</i> =15)				
% within Hours of Study Allocated for Academic Writing	12.0	8.7	.0	.0
<b>Total</b> ( <i>n</i> =170)	( <i>n</i> =50)	( <i>n</i> =104)	( <i>n</i> =11)	( <i>n</i> =5)

It was anticipated that students who were in the higher band of MUET (see Section 1.3) would spend fewer hours studying for the paper, compared to students who scored in the lower bands. This was reflected in the results above, in which students in Band 5 spend the least amount of hours studying (none and 1-2 hours) for academic writing. The same can be said for Band 4 students in which the majority (*n*=21) do not spend any time or only one to two (*n*=19) hours to study academic writing outside class. In the same way, it was anticipated that students in lower bands of MUET would spend more time studying for academic writing. However, the majority of Band 3 students (*n*=76) spend one to two hours, or do not study for academic writing outside class (*n*=23). Nonetheless, a small representative of students in Band 3 also contributed to the highest amount of hours spent on studying academic writing (e.g. three to four hours, *n*=9 and more than five hours *n*=3) compared to Bands 4 and 5.

### Summary of Section A results

Section A of the questionnaire indicated there was a positive response rate (85%) and a relatively large sample (*n*=170). The demographic results indicated that the sample is representative of the target population. The demographic results also indicated that there

was diversity amongst the respondents in terms of ethnicity, academic experience and academic English proficiency levels. As respondents tended to use their first language as their primary means of communication, English appears to be the second language for these students. The secondary placement of the English language in the students' lives suggested that learning academic writing in English may be difficult for them. One particularly interesting finding was that the number of hours students allocated for studying academic writing per week was not reflected in their MUET band. This suggested there may be certain student learning beliefs, in relation to academic writing, which warrant further exploration in the subsequent qualitative phase of this study.

### **5.3 MALAYSIAN LEARNERS' SELF-CONCEPT AND ACADEMIC WRITING**

Descriptive analysis of items 9-26 in Section B of the questionnaire aimed to capture students' self-concept in academic writing. The descriptive analysis of their responses to the 18 self-concept items is presented under three subheadings: *self-concept in academic writing*, *self-concept as a writer* and *self-concept in writing in English*. Since items in the questionnaire include positive and negative statements, the responses for negative statements were reverse-coded in the analysis. For example, the lowest value of the 4-point Likert scale in a positive statement is 1 (False). However, in a negative statement, the value will be 4 (e.g. False=4, Mostly False=3, Mostly True=2, True=1). Only statistically significant items under each sub-heading are discussed in the respective sections.

#### **Findings on self-concept in academic writing**

The statements which gauged the respondents' self-concept in academic writing appeared in the majority of items in Section B of the questionnaire. The 11 statements in this section included how students felt about their academic writing abilities, and how they valued academic writing and the tasks required of them in the AW class. Table 5.3 presents the distribution of responses for self-concept in academic writing.

Table 5.3

*Distribution of Responses for Self-Concept in Academic Writing*

Item	Mean	Distribution of responses %			
		F	MF	MT	T
SC18 It is important for me to do well in academic writing	3.56	0.6	1.8	38.2	59.4
SC17 I enjoy studying for academic writing	3.10	5.3	12.4	49.4	32.9
SC16 I learn things quickly in my Academic Writing class	2.81	5.9	22.9	55.9	15.3
SC10 I always look forward to my Academic Writing class	2.71	11.2	22.4	50.6	15.9
SC14 I often do badly in academic writing tests*	2.60	14.7	41.8	32.4	11.2
SC9 Academic writing is one of my best subjects	2.58	14.1	25.9	47.6	12.4
SC11 Tasks in Academic Writing classes are easy for me	2.26	17.6	45.3	30.6	6.5
SC13 I often need help in the Academic Writing class*	2.15	7.1	21.8	50	21.2
SC25 I have always done well in academic writing	2.15	20	50	25.3	4.7
SC22 I am hopeless when it comes to academic writing*	2.08	5.3	23.5	44.7	26.5
SC21 Academic writing is easy for me	2.0	23.5	57.1	15.3	4.1

*Note:* F = False; MF = Mostly False; MT = Mostly True; T = True.

<sup>a</sup> Items are arranged from the highest to lowest mean. <sup>b</sup> \* Refers to negatively worded items

Four items had high means in this sub-category of self-concept, affirming that the respondents generally have a positive disposition regarding the subject of academic writing. The findings show considerable consensus amongst the respondents that it is important for them to do well in academic writing (SC18), as indicated by the 59.4% who responded True and the 38.2% who responded Mostly True to the statement. This corresponded well with items intended to gauge students' interest in the subject of academic writing, namely Items SC17, SC16 and SC10. The majority of the students seemed to enjoy studying for academic writing (Mostly True = 49.4%; True = 32.9%) and look forward (Mostly True = 50.6%; True = 15.9%) to attending the classes.

In order to further gauge the students' self-concept in academic writing, items measuring how well students felt they had fared in the assessments and tasks, in the AW class were also included. This analysis revealed that 62.9% of the students found that the tasks set for them in the AW class were difficult.

Items with the two lowest means in Section B of the questionnaire were represented by Items SC22 and SC21, with a mean value of 2.08 and 2.00 respectively. The majority of the students reported that they were hopeless when it came to academic writing (T = 26.5%; MT = 44.7%). This view was affirmed by Item SC21, where 4.1% students responded True and 15.3% responded Mostly True to the statement that academic writing was easy for them; meaning that the remaining 80% of the students felt that academic writing was a difficult subject. This was an interesting finding since (despite the reported difficulty) 66% of the students still looked forward to going to the AW class. This finding warranted further investigation in Phase Two of this study. In particular, it was seen as important to identify the factors that contribute to the difficulty of academic writing, and also to examine the reasons why students felt it was important to attend the AW class.

### Findings on students' self-concept as writers

In order to capture the Malaysian learners' self-concept in academic writing, it was also necessary to explore their self-concepts as writers in general. Table 5.4 presents the rather sharply juxtaposed findings between the respondents' self-concepts as writers and their perceived ability in academic essay writing.

Table 5.4

#### *Distribution of Responses for Self-Concept as a Writer*

Item	Mean	Distribution of responses %			
		F	MF	MT	T
SC20 I find writing essays challenging*	3.35	42.4	51.2	5.9	0.6
SC19 I find writing essays interesting	2.73	7.6	33.5	37.1	21.8
SC15 I have poor writing skills*	2.30	8.8	31.2	41.2	18.8
SC26 I consider myself a good writer	1.98	25.9	53.5	17.6	2.9

*Note.* F = False; MF = Mostly False; MT = Mostly True; T = True.

<sup>a</sup> Items are arranged from the highest to lowest mean. <sup>b</sup> \* Refers to negatively worded items

More than half of the sample reported that writing essays was interesting for them (True = 21.8%; Mostly True = 37.1%) and they did not find writing essays, in general, to be challenging (False = 42.4%; Mostly False = 51.2). Despite the respondents' reported interest in writing, only 2.9% actually reported they considered themselves to be good

writers and only 18.8% reported that they had good writing skills. This finding warranted further investigation in the subsequent qualitative phase of this study, highlighting that it would be valuable to explore the relationship of these juxtaposed responses.

### Findings on self-concept of writing in English

Items SC24, Item SC12 and Item SC23 were aimed at gauging the respondents' self-concept of writing in English. Table 5.5 shows the distribution of their responses.

Table 5.5

*Distribution of Responses for Self-concept of Writing in English*

Item	Mean	Distribution of responses %			
		F	MF	MT	T
SC24 I make a lot of mistakes when writing in English*	2.86	22.9	47.6	21.8	7.6
SC12 I like writing in English	2.81	7.6	25.3	45.9	21.2
SC23 I feel confident in my ability to write in English	2.55	10.6	38.8	35.3	15.3

*Note.* F = False; MF = Mostly False; MT = Mostly True; T = True

<sup>a</sup>\* refers to items which are worded negatively. <sup>b</sup> Items are arranged from the highest to lowest mean

The majority of the students responded False (22.9%) and Mostly False (47.6%) to the statement *I make a lot of mistakes when writing in English*. This was inconsistent with previous findings, where students reported that they did not consider themselves as good writers. Although the data regarding students' perceptions of themselves as writers, and their responses about making mistakes in writing appear to be conflicting, analyses of qualitative data may suggest possible interpretations of these juxtaposed responses. It is probable that there may be a distinction between a student's self-concept as a writer and self-concept in writing in English. This appears to be supported by responses for Item SC12 in which the majority of the students reported they like writing in English (Mostly True = 45.9%; True = 21.2 %). Despite students' preference for the English language, their general writing self-efficacy responses, however suggested otherwise. The division in responses could be attributed to the respondents' interpretation of their grammatical accuracy in writing and may also have strong links to proficiency issues.

## **Findings on item analysis in Section B**

To further explore and discriminate responses of learners' self-concept in academic writing, item difficulty and item discrimination using point biserial correlation was conducted (see Appendix O for a detailed breakdown of the distribution of responses for item analysis).

### **Challenges to and the value of academic writing**

The item difficulty analysis was implemented for the purpose of discriminating items in the questionnaire that students felt very positively or very negatively about. Favourable, i.e., true or mostly true responses to the items in the questionnaire were interpreted as reflecting positive self-concepts or high engagement. Likewise, unfavourable, i.e. false or mostly false responses to the items in the questionnaire were interpreted as reflecting negative self-concepts or low engagement. Item difficulty can also be represented in the form of a percentage. Table 5.6 presents the results of the analysis. Items with  $p$ -value below 0.50 and some with values that discriminate significantly (e.g.  $p$ -value  $\geq .90$ ) were identified as statistically significant in the study.

The findings showed a clear agreement (98%) amongst the respondents regarding the importance and value of 'doing well' in academic writing (Item SC18,  $p=0.98$ ). Similarly, a high percentage (94%) of the respondents agreed that academic writing was challenging for them (Item SC20,  $p=0.94$ ). A  $p$ -value of 0.51 was identified for Item SC 23, *I feel confident in my ability to write in English*, which implied that the respondents were somewhat equally divided (51%) in their perceived ability to write in English.

Despite the importance of doing well and the value of academic writing, it was interesting to note that five items (SC25, SC13, SC22, SC26 and SC21) had  $p$ -value equal to or less than 0.30. These items can be interpreted as the challenges faced by these participants in the context of academic writing. The challenges seem to stem from their writing skills, the tasks in academic writing class, and their self-efficacy in writing in English. In fact, the two lowest  $p$ -values were recorded for Item SC26 ( $p=0.21$ ) and Item SC21 ( $p=0.19$ ) respectively whereby only 21% of the respondents considered themselves good writers and a mere 19% felt that academic writing was easy.

Table 5.6

*Item Difficulty for Self-concept in Academic Writing Items*

Item	<i>p</i>	SD
SC18 It is important for me to do well in academic writing	.98	.152
SC20 I find writing essays challenging*	.94	.247
SC17 I enjoy studying for academic writing	.82	.382
SC24 I make a lot of mistakes when writing in English*	.71	.457
SC16 I learn things quickly in my Academic Writing class	.71	.454
SC12 I like writing in English	.67	.471
SC10 I always look forward to my Academic Writing class	.66	.473
SC9 Academic Writing is one of my best subjects	.60	.491
SC19 I find writing essays interesting	.59	.494
SC14 I often do badly in academic writing tests*	.56	.497
SC23 I feel confident in my ability to write in English	.51	.501
SC15 I have poor writing skills*	.40	.491
SC11 Tasks in Academic Writing classes are easy for me	.37	.484
SC25 I have always done well in academic writing	.30	.460
SC22 I am hopeless when it comes to academic writing*	.29	.454
SC13 I often need help in the Academic Writing class*	.29	.454
SC26 I consider myself a good writer	.21	.406
SC21 Academic writing is easy for me	.19	.397

Note. SD = Standard deviation. *p*-value range from 0 to 1.

<sup>a</sup> \* Refer to statements that are negatively worded. <sup>b</sup> Statements with *p*-value  $\leq 0.50$  are shaded. <sup>c</sup> When *p*-value is multiplied by 100, it converts to the % of students who responded to the items

The results corroborate the preliminary descriptive analysis. Although the students perceived academic writing favourably, as indicated by the high percentages, the results show they still faced challenges with regard to academic writing, as indicated by the low *p*-value for multiple items in this section of the questionnaire. The challenges seem to revolve around two main issues: the perceived difficulty of academic writing and proficiency-related issues. Responses on Items SC18, SC20, SC23, SC26 and SC21 affirmed this finding.

### **The 'indiscriminate' self-concept**

For further item discrimination, point biserial correlation was included for self-concept in academic writing items. As mentioned in Chapter Four, point biserial correlation is the correlation between the 'favourable/ unfavourable' scores that students receive on a given item and the total scores that students receive when summing up their scores

across the remaining items (Varma, 2006, p. 3). The correlations can range between +1 and -1, and a value above .20 means the item is behaving as expected (Varma, 2006). In this study, students who answered favourably, were interpreted as reflecting positive self-concept and vice versa (see Chapter Four). Positive correlation values are desirable and they indicate that the item is good at differentiating respondents' high or low self-concepts. It was hypothesised that a student who had a positive self-concept would have a high score and students with a negative self-concept would score low. The results are shown in Table 5.7.

Table 5.7

*Point-Biserial Correlation for Self-concept in Academic Writing Items*

Items	Corrected Item- Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
SC9 Academic Writing is one of my best subjects	.460	.772
SC10 I always look forward to my Academic Writing class	.395	.775
SC11 Tasks in Academic Writing classes are easy for me	.303	.779
SC12 I like writing in English	.318	.779
SC13 I often need help in the Academic Writing class	.079	.789
SC14 I often do badly in academic writing tests	.262	.782
SC15 I have poor writing skills	.189	.785
SC16 I learn things quickly in my Academic Writing class	.457	.772
SC17 I enjoy studying for academic writing	.440	.774
SC18 It is important for me to do well in academic writing	.187	.784
SC19 I find writing essays interesting	.360	.777
SC20 I find writing essays challenging	.047	.787
SC21 Academic writing is easy for me	.351	.778
<b>SC22 I am hopeless when it comes to academic writing</b>	<b>-.300</b>	<b>.805</b>
SC23 I feel confident in my ability to write in English	.448	.772
<b>SC24 I make a lot of mistakes when writing in English</b>	<b>-.169</b>	<b>.800</b>
SC25 I have always done well in academic writing	.515	.770
SC26 I consider myself a good writer	.382	.776

Note. Statements with  $r_{pb}$  value < 0.20 are shaded.

<sup>a</sup> Statements in bold refer to items with negative correlation

The corrected item-correlation in Table 5.7 calculates the relationship between the item score and the test score, after removing the responses of the item in question from the total score. It is assumed that the removal of a response for that particular item could have a significant impact on the total score, and would better discriminate between students who had high or low self-concept in academic writing. In this analysis, it was

interesting to note that the majority of the items had low or negative item-correlation. These items suggested students' self-concept in academic writing warranted further exploration in the next interview phase.

The shaded items identified were based on the point biserial correlation value and they included SC15, SC18 and SC13. This finding indicates that these items were not able to discriminate between the two groups of students, those with high self-concept in academic writing, and those with low self-concept in academic writing. In addition, the low value could also mean that the respondents perceived that the items SC15, SC18 and SC13 have a debatable answer. In the case of the negative point biserial correlation coefficient (SC22 and SC24 in bold), this meant that students who had lower self-concept answered 'favourably', as opposed to the students who had higher self-concept (who answered 'unfavourably'). This may be due to the fact that there was no clear context (specific writing task or activity) upon which the students could base their answers, thus affecting the clarity of the items. The fact that the sample was fewer than 200 students could also explain this inconsistency. Therefore what can be derived from this finding is the fact that the aforementioned items may not be able to discriminate the groups of students. In fact, the removal of responses for these particular items indicates acceptable point biserial values (Cronbach's alpha value  $\geq .70$ ).

The findings show that several issues regarding academic writing were faced by both groups of students; those who had high self-concept level and those with low self-concept levels. Issues identified included writing skills, needing help in the AW class, making mistakes and perceiving the task of writing in English as a challenge. It was evident that English proficiency and the subject of academic writing was a recurring challenge for both groups of students (those with a high self-concept level and those with a low self-concept level). This issue thus warranted further examination in Phase Two of the study, since it would illuminate the factors which were challenging for different groups of students when learning academic writing in English.

## Findings from grouped frequency for student profile

To further facilitate answers to the first research question on the Malaysian learners' self-concept in academic writing, a grouped frequency distribution was incorporated to analyse the self-concept scores. The results are presented in Table 5.8.

Table 5.8

*Student Profiling based on Self-Concept in Academic Writing Scores*

Self-concept	Score	f	%
Low	18-26	4	2.4
Average	27-35	70	41.1
High	36-44	92	54.1
Very High	45-53	4	2.4

*Note.* f - frequency; % -percent.

The grouped frequency distribution was also used as a basis for selecting participants for Phase Two. Overall, the students' self-concept scores ranged from low to very high. Only a few students expressed having a low self-concept in academic writing. Similarly, only a few students expressed having very high self-concepts in academic writing. The overall trend seems to indicate that a majority of these students had an average ( $n=70$ ) to high ( $n=92$ ) positive self-concept in academic writing. This could be perceived as students possibly basing their self-evaluations on factors such as normative evaluations by the institution. In fact, it is also possible that these students had very high expectations since they valued academic achievement very highly. For this reason, it was seen as necessary to explore the genesis of these self-evaluations with the majority of these respondents in the second qualitative phase of the study.

## Summary of Phase One results on self-concepts in academic writing

Phase One results raised several critical issues with regard to the first research question, which aimed to identify these Malaysian learners' self-concept in academic writing. The analysis identified an overall positive response to academic writing and the AW class whereby an overwhelming 98% of the students stated that academic writing is very important for their future endeavours. Nonetheless, despite their overall positive responses, the theme that emerged from the analysis was that students' self-concept in

academic writing was influenced by their writing skills, writing abilities, and writing strategies, and therefore (in this phase) these challenges seem to be proficiency-based. Similar findings were found through the two item analyses; item difficulty and point biserial correlation. The consistency of results (across all the analyses) indicates that most of the students faced very similar issues, with regard to their self-concepts both in writing and in academic writing. English language proficiency seemed to be an issue for students in terms of constructing their sentences and overall writing process. It has been tentatively demonstrated that academic writing demands advanced writing skills and a certain level of English proficiency. This was further supported by the fact that there was a range of self-concept scores (low to very high self-concept).

Additionally, the multifaceted nature of students' self-concept began to emerge. There were variations in responses within the sub-sections of the questionnaire (e.g. responding negatively in self-concept in academic writing, but positively in self-concept when writing in English). This seems to suggest that within a similar academic self-concept domain (e.g. self-concept in academic writing) there are distinctions within students' other self-concepts (e.g. self-concept in English and self-concept as a writer).

#### **5.4 MALAYSIAN LEARNERS' ENGAGEMENT IN AW CLASS**

The descriptive analysis of items 27-44 aimed to capture the students' engagement in the AW class. The descriptive analyses of responses to the 18 engagement items are presented under three subsections (as guided by literature on student engagement reported in Chapter Two): *behavioural engagement* (six statements); *cognitive engagement* (six statements); and *affective engagement* (six statements) in the context of the AW class. Like self-concept, the responses for negative statements in this section were reverse-coded in the analysis. For example, the lowest value of the 4-point Likert scale in a positive statement is 1 (False). However, in a negative statement, the value will be 4 (e.g. False = 4, Mostly False = 3, Mostly True = 2, True = 1).

## Findings on behavioural engagement

Engagement items in the questionnaire included statements which gauged the respondents' behavioural engagement in the AW class. This was inferred through positive conduct, involvement and commitment. The overall mean values of the respondents' behavioural engagement seem to indicate that they have a relatively high behavioural engagement in the AW class. Table 5.9 summarises the distribution of responses for behavioural engagement items.

Table 5.9

### *Distribution of Responses for Behavioural Engagement Items*

Item	Mean	Distribution of responses %			
		F	MF	MT	T
E30 I pay attention in class	3.24	2.4	8.2	52.4	37.1
E29 When writing gets difficult, I stop trying*	3.18	38.8	44.7	12.4	4.1
E28 I do as little as possible; I just want to pass*	3.09	34.1	46.5	14.1	5.3
E27 I work hard in my Academic Writing class	3.01	4.1	15.9	55.3	24.7
E31 I always participate in class discussions	2.88	5.3	25.3	45.9	23.5
E32 I prepare two or more drafts of an assignment before final submission	2.69	11.2	29.4	38.8	20.6

*Note.* F = False; MF = Mostly False; MT = Mostly True; T = True. Items are arranged from the highest to lowest mean.

<sup>a</sup>\* Refers to negatively worded items.

The highest mean value is represented by Item E30, where an overwhelming majority of the students noted that they paid attention in class (MT = 52.4%; T = 37.1%). These encouraging responses for the behavioural engagement subsection were further supported by Item E29, where the majority of the students reported False (38.8%) and Mostly False (44.7%) to the statement *When writing gets difficult, I stop trying*. This may indicate the determined and persistent nature of the respondents.

Very similar responses were reported for Items E28 and E27. The majority of the students disagreed with the statement E28 *I do as little as possible; I just want to pass*. (MF = 46.5%; F = 34.1%). This item (which was intended to gauge the work culture in the AW class) indicated that the majority of the students who responded were of the opinion that merely passing was not sufficient. This is supported by Item E27, which indicated that most students worked hard in the AW class (MT = 55.3%; T = 24.7%). In

addition, the students responded positively to the statement on class participation (Item E31). The majority of the students stated that they *always participate in class discussions*. This implies that commitment and involvement were generally confined within the parameters of the AW class, and resonated with earlier findings where the majority of the students indicated that they spent minimal hours studying academic writing independently.

An interesting finding was identified for item E32 (*I prepare two or more drafts of an assignment before final submission*). This item had the lowest mean (2.69) in the behavioural engagement subsection. Although 20.6% responded True and 38.8% responded Mostly True to the statement, a considerable number of respondents responded False (11.2%) and Mostly False (29.4%). This statistic was alarming, since it demonstrated that the academic writing process for the majority of respondents involved not producing drafts or multiple drafts for writing tasks.

### Findings on affective engagement

Statements in the affective engagement subsection were intended to gauge the students' feelings and connections to the AW class. This involved learners' positive attitude towards learning, sense of relatedness, and belonging in the AW writing class. The distribution of responses for affective engagement is presented in Table 5.10.

Table 5.10

*Distribution of Responses for Affective Engagement Items*

Item	Mean	Distribution of responses %			
		F	MF	MT	T
E36 I think that academic writing is important for my future	3.64	1.2	1.2	30	67.6
E35 The writing class feels like a waste of time*	3.58	62.9	32.9	2.9	1.2
E38 In class, I really care that I do my best work	3.33	0	10	47.1	42.9
E34 I am proud to be in the Academic Writing class	3.16	3.5	13.5	46.5	36.5
E33 I look forward to my Academic Writing class	2.67	10.6	30.6	40	18.8
E37 I often help others in the Academic Writing class	2.37	15.9	37.6	40	6.5

*Note.* F = False; MF = Mostly False; MT = Mostly True; T = True. Items are arranged from the highest to lowest mean.

<sup>a</sup>\* Refers to negatively worded items

Item E36, which aimed to gauge students' identification with the AW paper through the statement *I think that academic writing is important for my future* scored the highest mean value (3.64) in the affective engagement items. An overwhelming majority of the students reported True (67.6%) and Mostly True (30%) to this statement, indicating that they hold academic writing as a priority. The identification with what the paper has to offer, be it academic literacy or L2 proficiency also highlights issues related to the sense of belonging in the AW class and their academic identity.

This sense of relatedness was further supported by Item E35, where the majority of students disagreed with the statement, *The writing class feels like a waste of time* (F=62.9%. MF= 32.9%). This infers that the students have an affinity with the AW class and this could have been attributed to the value of the AW paper. The identification with academic writing was also supported by Item E38 in which the majority of the students reported Mostly True (47.1%) and True (42.9%) to the statement, *In class I really care that I do my best work*. The responses to this item are also indicative of a positive attitude towards learning and the effort and students put in as a result of the identifying with AW paper. That the majority of the students reported Mostly True (46.5%) and True (36.5%) to Item E34, *I am proud to be in the Academic Writing Class* further affirm that students are engaged affectively and wanting to have a positive self-concept in the AW class.

Nonetheless, the overall positive sense of belonging to the AW class responses for Item E33, *I look forward to my AW class*, and Item E 37, *I often help others in the AW class*, were rather divided. It was interesting to note that only 58.8% of the students (Mostly True=40%; True=18.8%) stated that *I look forward to the AW class*. The sources of the students' apprehension were therefore further explored in the subsequent phase, in order to shed more light on the findings in affective engagement. That the majority of the students disagreed (False=15.9%; MF=37.6%) with the statement, *I often help others in the AW class*, can be inferred as low peer relatedness. This could be attributed to the fact that peer group membership in the AW class is unstable as students are from different faculties, academic year and proficiency levels. Thus, it is likely that students' affective engagement is perhaps more directed towards the AW paper or nature of instruction. It is also possible that there is a preference for an independent academic engagement style for L2 learners in this study.

## Findings on cognitive engagement

The final subsection in Section C of the questionnaire aimed to capture the respondents' cognitive engagement. Cognitive engagement refers to the psychological investment and effort directed towards learning and understanding (See Section 2.3 in Chapter Two). The breakdown of responses for cognitive engagement is presented in Table 5.11.

Table 5.11

### *Distribution of Responses for Cognitive Engagement Items*

Item	Mean	Distribution of responses %				
		F	MF	MT	T	
E40	I take care to ensure that my essays are done properly (e.g. formatting, referencing)	3.42	1.2	2.4	50	46.5
E43	I feel that academic writing helps me to do well in my content papers	3.41	1.8	4.1	45.3	48.8
E41	I often look for ways to improve my English writing	3.36	1.2	4.7	50.6	43.5
E39	Writing in English helps me organise my ideas	3.24	2.9	5.3	56.5	35.3
E42	It is easy to organise my thoughts into sentences in English	2.46	12.4	42.4	32.4	12.9
E44	I find it hard to express my ideas effectively in English*	2.31	9.4	28.8	45.3	16.5

*Note.* F = False; MF = Mostly False; MT = Mostly True; T = True. Items are arranged from the highest to lowest mean.

<sup>a</sup> \* Refers to negatively worded items

Overall, there were variations in the cognitive engagement in this section. Item E40, which aimed to identify the respondents' cognitive engagement with regard to tasks in academic writing, revealed that half of the respondents reported Mostly True (50%), while the other half (46.5%) reported True to the statement, *I take care to ensure that my essays are done properly*. A considerable number of students also agreed that the paper had helped them to perform better in content papers and consequently they would look for ways to improve their writing. A similar positive response was reported for Item E43 *I feel that academic writing helps me to do well in my content papers* where 45.3% of the students stated Mostly True and 48.8% stated True. This contrasts with the finding on students not seeing the value of successive drafts.

Items E39, E42 and E44 further explored cognitive engagement, to see whether the learners faced cognitive challenges in writing due to the level of their English language. The results from Item E39 indicated that for a majority of the respondents writing in

English actually facilitated the organisation of ideas for the writing process (T = 35.3%; MT 56.5%). However, the actual task of constructing sentences appeared to be the main obstacle. Therefore, to a certain extent, English proficiency may impede the students' cognitive engagement in academic writing as represented by the lowest two mean values (E42 = 2.46; E44= 2.31) in Section C of the questionnaire.

Overall, the results from the questionnaire on the engagement section seem to portray this group of respondents as being highly engaged in the AW class. Further analysis of the separate dimensions revealed a variation of engagement responses. The majority of the respondents indicated a high overall behavioural engagement in the writing class, and therefore, the students appeared to be persistent and hardworking in their academic studies. Nonetheless, this finding juxtaposed with the findings on their academic writing process such as writing minimal drafts. This behaviour imposed constraint on improvement in the academic writing process, since the students were not going through the recursive writing process which includes receiving feedback on earlier drafts. The majority of the respondents also reported an affinity for the writing class and that they valued the time spent in the class learning academic writing. This was tentatively supported through results in the cognitive engagement section where the students seemed to be mostly engaged in the cognitive dimension of the AW class, and most claimed that academic writing was relevant and valuable for their future. The following section presents findings for the item analyses of Section C.

### **Findings on Item analyses of Section C**

To further understand student engagement, item analysis; *item difficulty* and *item discrimination* was carried out (see Appendix P for a detailed breakdown of the distribution of responses for item analysis). Only statistically significant findings from this analysis are discussed in the sections below.

#### **Barriers to engaging with academic writing**

The table below presents the results of the analysis. It indicates a good range of *p*-value for the items. Since the optimal item difficulty level is 0.50, items with *p*-values below 0.50 have been identified as statistically significant for this study (see Table 5.12).

Table 5.12

*Item Difficulty for Engagement Items*

Item	<i>p</i>	SD
E27 I work hard in my AW class	.80	.401
E28 I do as little as possible; I just want to pass*	.81	.397
E29 When writing gets difficult, I stop trying*	.84	.372
E30 I pay attention in class	.89	.309
E31 I always participate in class discussions	.69	.462
E32 I prepare two or more drafts of an assignment before final submission	.59	.493
E33 I look forward to my AW class	.59	.494
E34 I am proud to be in the AW class	.83	.377
E35 The writing class feels like a waste of time*	.96	.199
E36 I think that AW is important for my future	.98	.152
E37 I often help others in the AW class	.46	.500
E38 In class, I really care that I do my best work	.90	.301
E39 Writing in English helps me organize my ideas	.92	.276
E40 I take care that my essays are done properly	.96	.185
E41 I often look for ways to improve my English writing	.94	.236
E42 It is easy to organize my thoughts into sentences in English	.45	.499
E43 I feel that Academic writing helps me to do well in my content papers	.94	.236
E44 I find it hard to express my ideas effectively in English*	.38	.487

Note. *p*-value range from 0 to 1. SD-Standard deviation.

<sup>a</sup>\* Refer to statements that are negatively worded. <sup>b</sup> Shaded item have *p*-value  $\leq$  .50

The item difficulty analysis was implemented for the purpose of discriminating items in the questionnaire that students felt very positively or very negatively about. Items E37, E42 and E44 had *p*-value lower than 0.50. For example, the results for Item E37 seem to suggest that only 46% of the respondents helped their classmates in the writing class. This indicates a rather independent writing approach may occur in the class.

Only 45% of the students stated that it was easy for them to organize their thoughts into sentences in English for Item E42. Furthermore, 38% of the students felt that it was challenging for them to express their ideas in English in Item E44. This challenge may be attributed to proficiency issues in which respondents are capable of organising their thoughts into sentences, in a general English writing context. However, a context or a situation (e.g. academic writing) that demands these respondents to express their ideas effectively (and perhaps accurately) in English may require an advanced level of English proficiency.

The results in the item difficulty analysis resonated with the earlier findings in the descriptive analyses of cognitive engagement items. This consistency suggested further exploration would be helpful in the qualitative phase to identify why students found it difficult to express themselves in academic English. This will further illuminate the challenges students faced in the AW class.

### **The dynamic engagement continuum**

Similar to self-concept items, further item discrimination using point biserial correlation was included for the engagement section. This was used for the purpose of differentiating the sample and cross-checking the previous findings in the item difficulty. Positive values of the correlation are desirable and they indicate that the item is good at differentiating respondents as highly engaged and disengaged students. Table 5.13 presents the results of the point biserial correlation analysis of the engagement items. The corrected item-correlation in Table 5.13 calculates the relationship between the item score and the test score. It is assumed that the removal of a response for a particular item could have an impact on the total score (i.e. Cronbach Alpha  $\geq .70$  is preferable, or  $r_{pb}$  value of at least 0.20 is recommended).

The low point biserial ( $r_{pb}$ ) value on items identified in the shaded sections (E30, E32, E42 and E44) is indicative of the fact that students who scored high and low in their engagement in the AW class responded similarly. In particular, students who were engaged and disengaged were not discriminated effectively (.100) revealing that both groups paid attention in the AW class.

The fact that there were no specific contexts (specific writing task or activity) upon which the students could base their answers, may have also affected the clarity of the items. Therefore, the aforementioned items may not be able to discriminate between the groups of students well. It is noted that the removal of responses for these items would have a significant impact on the total score (as the value of Cronbach's alpha if item is deleted is  $\geq .70$ ). The results correlated with the findings in the descriptive analysis. These items, which have low point biserial values, warranted further exploration in the qualitative phase as it represent anomalies in items for a high scoring student.

Table 5.13

*Point-biserial Correlation for Engagement Items*

Item	Corrected Item- Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
E27 I work hard in my AW class	.386	.668
E28 I do as little as possible; I just want to pass	.308	.677
E29 When writing gets difficult, I stop trying	.228	.686
E30 I pay attention in class	.100	.696
E31 I always participate in class discussions	.403	.664
E32 I prepare two or more drafts of an assignment before final submission	.197	.693
E33 I look forward to my AW class	.495	.650
E34 I am proud to be in the AW class	.380	.669
E35 The writing class feels like a waste of time	.269	.684
E36 I think that AW is important for my future	.307	.685
E37 I often help others on the AW class	.275	.683
E38 In class, I really care that I do my best work	.310	.678
E39 Writing in English helps me organize my ideas	.509	.663
E40 I take care that my essays are done properly	.339	.681
E41 I often look for ways to improve my English writing	.367	.677
E42 It is easy to organize my thoughts into sentences in English	.187	.695
E43 I feel that Academic writing helps me to do well in my content papers	.056	.697
E44 I find it hard to express my ideas effectively in English	.169	.697

Note. Shaded statements have  $r_{pb}$  value < 0.20

### Findings from grouped frequency for student profile

In order to obtain a clearer understanding of the variations in responses for the engagement items, and to analyse the engagement scores, a grouped frequency distribution was incorporated in the analysis of Phase One data. This was used as a basis for selecting participants for Phase Two. The results from the grouped frequency analysis are presented in Table 5.14.

Table 5.14

*Student Profiling based on Engagement Scores*

Engagement	Score	f	%
Very Low	18-26	1	0.5
Low	27-35	3	1.7
Average	36-44	36	21
High	45-53	100	59
Very High	54-61	30	17.7

*Note.* f – frequency; % -percent.

The respondents fell into five groups for engagement with scores ranging from very low to very high. The majority of the students had high scores for engagement (59%) and approximately 18% of the students had very high levels of engagement. On the other hand, 21% of the students had average scores of engagement and 2.2% of the overall sample made up the very low, to low, levels of engagement. The analysis revealed that the range for engagement was more diverse than that for self-concept. The high number of students who were engaged can be seen as a positive sign as this potentially provides an opportunity for them to further enhance their positive self-concept.

### **Summary of Phase One results on Engagement**

The quantitative analysis identified that a majority of learners appear to be highly engaged students in the AW class, since an overwhelming majority of the respondents agreed that it was important for them to do well in the paper. Although this seemed to reflect the consensus, further analysis of the separate domains indicated that students responded differently in the engagement domains (e.g. high behavioural engagement and low cognitive engagement), which therefore highlights possible contextual influences and affirms the dynamic nature of student engagement.

One theme that emerged from the analysis was that these students faced several challenges (mainly cognitive-based), which impeded their overall engagement in the AW class. Further item analysis (point biserial correlation and item difficulty) affirmed this finding and correlated with the preliminary descriptive analyses' findings. The relationship between self-concept and engagement is addressed in the following section.

## 5.5 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MALAYSIAN LEARNERS' SELF-CONCEPT IN ACADEMIC WRITING AND THEIR ENGAGEMENT IN THE AW CLASS

In order to establish the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and student engagement, Pearson product moment correlation analysis was conducted. This was undertaken in order to determine the magnitude and direction of the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement. The result indicated a moderate ( $r=.504^{**}$ ;  $p<.01$ ) positive relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement that was significant at the .01 level (2-tailed). These results suggested that the students' self-concept in academic writing and the students' engagement might increase, in the same direction and in the same manner. Hence, when a student has a low self-concept in academic writing, their engagement in the writing class could also be low. Since correlational analysis is unable to explicate the strength of the relationship, or to make predictions about the variables (or causality), a coefficient of determination was calculated to show how closely one variable was related to the other.

### **The magnitude and variation of self-concept in academic writing and engagement variables**

The calculated coefficient of determination identified the magnitude of the relation between the two variables (see Table 5.15). Since  $r= .504^{**}$ ,  $r^2= 0.254$  suggested that 25% of the variation in engagement could be explained by self-concept in academic writing.

Table 5.15

*Coefficient of Determination ( $r^2$ )*

Model 1	$r$	$r^2$	Adjusted r Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.504 <sup>**</sup>	.254	.250	4.23971

*Note.*  $r$  = Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient.  $r^2$  = Coefficient of Determination.

<sup>a</sup> <sup>\*\*</sup> Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The significant coefficient of determination gives reason for a qualitative examination of the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement. This was undertaken in the second phase of this study.

### **Exploratory factor analysis for factor structure of self-concept in academic writing responses**

In order to further explore the relationship between engagement and self-concept, exploratory factor analysis was conducted. This data reduction aimed to eliminate non-significant items in self-concept and engagement so that only items which contribute significantly to the factors which emerged in the survey contributed to the correlational analysis. In addition, factor analysis demonstrated the construct validity of the questionnaire. All sub-components of self-concept and dimensions of engagement in academic writing have been shown to be approximately normally distributed (see Appendix Q for a detailed breakdown of exploratory factor analysis results).

A principal axis factoring with varimax rotation on the 18 items was also performed. Following factor analysis on five factors with three factors solution, in addition to an inspection of the scree plot (refer to Appendix S), three factors were retained. Three clear factors emerged for self-concept which accounted for 45.75% of the variance. Four items (SC12 *I like writing in English*, SC16 *I learn things quickly in my Academic Writing class*, SC18 *It is important for me to do well in academic writing*, and SC24 *I make a lot of mistakes when writing in English*) did not load significantly on the three factors. The factor solution and all the items appear in Table 5.16.

The first factor was labelled 'academic writing efficacy' because it represented the students' confidence (or lack thereof). This explained 22.74 % of the variance. The five items included SC13 *I often need help in the Academic Writing class*, SC14 *I often do badly in academic writing tests* and SC23 *I feel confident in my ability to write in English*. Bong and Skaalvik (2003) have argued that "self-efficacy acts as an active precursor of self-concept development" (p. 30). The findings of this study suggest that a possible reciprocal direction exists between the two constructs; self-concept and self-efficacy in academic writing.

Table 5.16

*Factor Structure of Self-concept Items*

Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
SC14 I often do badly in academic writing tests	.783		
SC15 I have poor writing skills	.759		
SC22 I am hopeless when it comes to academic writing	.674		
SC13 I often need help in the Academic Writing class	.526		
SC23 I feel confident in my ability to write in English	.518		
SC25 I have always done well in academic writing		.804	
SC21 Academic writing is easy for me		.743	
SC11 Tasks in Academic Writing classes are easy for me		.697	
SC26 I consider myself a good writer		.542	
SC17 I enjoy studying for academic writing			.681
SC10 I always look forward to my Academic Writing class			.676
SC20 I find writing essays challenging			.576
SC19 I find writing essays interesting			.512
SC9 Academic writing is one of my best subjects			.504

*Note.* Extraction method: Principal component analysis. Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation converged in 4 iterations.

The second factor consisting of four items was labelled 'language learning self beliefs' because it represented students' perception of their ability, possibly based on their past learning experience. This explained approximately 15% of the variance. Items included: SC11 *Tasks in Academic Writing classes are easy for me*, and SC25 *I have always done well in academic writing*. The results implied that the students' reported beliefs about their success (or failure), originated from their past learning history of English and academic writing in English and have led the respondents to their current self-concept in academic writing. The developmental nature of self-concept and the underlying influence of past learning experience have been discussed extensively (e.g. Guay, et al., 2010; H. W. Marsh & Craven, 1997; Shavelson, et al., 1976). These quantitative findings tentatively demonstrated that the students' self-concept may have stemmed from their previous academic experiences (positive and/or negative).

The third factor consisted of five items. It was labelled 'academic interest' since it depicted the enjoyment and appeal of the AW class. This explained 8.097% of the variance. Items include SC9 *Academic writing is one of my best subjects*, SC10 *I always*

*look forward to my Academic Writing class and SC17 I enjoy studying for academic writing.* This finding is similar to Marsh and colleagues' (2005) study, which identified that "academic self-concept, interest, and achievement are interrelated" (p. 397) in domain-specific self-concepts, such as English. With regard to self-concept in academic writing, academic interest can thus be perceived as an internal frame of reference. This frame of reference, which is highly affective in nature, has also been found to have strong motivational influence for self-concept (Marsh et al.).

### **Exploratory factor analysis for factor structure of engagement in academic writing responses**

A similar analysis was implemented for engagement items in Section C of the questionnaire (See Appendix R for a detailed breakdown of the results). The interpretability of the factors was difficult after three, and the scree plot (see Appendix S) suggested that the absolute size of the slope showed only slight decrease after three factors. Following factor analysis of a five-factor and a three-factor solution, and inspection of the scree plot, three clear factors emerged for engagement which accounted for 39.9% of the variance. Four items (E29 *When writing gets difficult, I stop trying*, E31 *I always participate in class discussions*, E38 *In class, I really care that I do my best work* and E43 *I feel that Academic writing helps me to do well in my content papers*), which did not load significantly on the three factors were excluded. The results of the exploratory factor analysis are presented in Table 5.17.

The first factor consisted of five items which underlined the value of the AW class and what academic writing (as a subject) could offer the students. Items included: E39 *Writing in English helps me organise my ideas*, E28 *I do as little as possible; I just want to pass*, E40 *I take care that my essays are done properly*, E35 *The writing class feels like a waste of time* and E36 *I think AW is important for my future*. This factor was labelled as the 'value of academic writing' and explained 22.63% of the variance.

The second factor was labelled 'independent academic engagement style' (9.50 % of the variance) because it implied a certain distinction between the academic and social style of engagement. Coates (2007), who offered a typological model of student engagement styles (see Appendix T), noted that: "An independent style of engagement is

characterised by a more academically and less socially oriented approach to study” (p. 133). In this style of academic engagement, there is little collaboration with other students in the learning experience. This second factor includes five items: E27 *I work hard in my AW class*, E33 *I look forward to my AW class*, E30 *I pay attention in class*, E34 *I am proud to be in the AW class*, E32 *I prepare two or more drafts of an assignment before final submission* and E41 *I often look for ways to improve my English writing*.

Table 5.17

*Factor Structure of Student Engagement in Academic Writing Items*

Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
E 39 Writing in English helps me organise my ideas	.633		
E 28 I do as little as possible; I just want to pass	.600		
E 40 I take care that my essays are done properly	.568		
E 35 The writing class feels like a waste of time	.541		
E 36 I think that AW is important for my future	.539		
E 27 I work hard in my AW class		.665	
E 33 I look forward to my AW class		.637	
E 30 I pay attention in class		.559	
E 34 I am proud to be in the AW class		.556	
E 32 I prepare two or more drafts of an assignment before final submission		.523	
E 41 I often look for ways to improve my English writing		.508	
E 44 I find it hard to express my ideas effectively in English			.693
E 37 I often help others on the AW class			.563
E 42 It is easy to organise my thoughts into sentences in English			.504

*Note.* Extraction method: Principal component analysis. Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation converged in 8 iterations.

The third factor was labelled ‘academic writing challenges’ (7.77% of the variance), since it dealt with course-related challenges in meeting the demands of academic writing-related tasks. It consisted of three items: E44 *I find it hard to express my ideas effectively in English*, E37 *I often help others in the AW class*, and E42 *It is easy to organise my thoughts into sentences in English*. These items can be perceived as characteristics that may impede student engagement in the AW class. The crux of the academic challenges seems to be English proficiency. Note that Wu and Hammond (2011) maintain that proficiency in the English language “is central to academic success and social integration” (p. 423). This would explain why the students in this study faced not only cognitive challenges, but also issues with social participation in the AW class

The exploratory factor analysis revealed several additional 'influences', which may contribute to both self-concept and student engagement, in the context of academic writing. In doing so, it has provided some deeper insights into the possible influences of the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and student engagement.

### Correlational analysis between extracted factors

In order to further establish the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and student engagement factors, Pearson product moment correlation analysis was conducted using the extracted factors emerging from the exploratory factor analysis. The results are presented in Table 5.18.

Table 5.18

*Correlation between Extracted Factors of Self-Concept and Engagement*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Perceived academic writing efficacy	-					
2 Language learning self beliefs	.383**	-				
3 Academic interest	-.034	.245**	-			
4 Value of academic writing	.074	.178*	.421**	-		
5 Independent academic engagement style	-.056	.128	.549**	.450**	-	
6 Academic writing challenges	.314**	.485**	.119	.125	.112	-

*Note.* Factors 1, 2 and 3 refer to self-concept in academic writing. Factors 4, 5 and 6 refer to student engagement factors.

<sup>a</sup> \*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). <sup>b</sup> \* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Overall, the largest number of significant correlations identified was between the factors of engagement and self-concept. The highest correlation was found between *academic interest* and *independent academic engagement style* ( $r=.549^{**}$ ). The second highest correlation occurred between *language learning self beliefs* and *academic writing challenges* ( $r=.485^{**}$ ). Finally, *academic interest* has a moderate positive correlation with the *value of academic writing* ( $r=.421^{**}$ ).

The correlations between factors of self-concept in academic writing ranged from moderate to non-significant. To illustrate, *perceived academic writing efficacy* has a

moderate positive correlation to *language learning self beliefs* ( $r=.383^{**}$ ) and a non-significant correlation with *academic interest* ( $r= -.034$ ). *Language learning self beliefs* had a weak but significant correlation with *academic interest* ( $r=.245^{**}$ ).

Similarly, the intra-correlations of engagement factors ranged from weak to moderate. For example, *academic writing challenges* correlated non-significantly with both *value of academic writing* ( $r=.125$ ) and *independent academic engagement style* ( $r=.112$ ). The highest correlation was between *value of academic writing* and *independent academic engagement style*, in which there was a moderate positive correlation ( $r=.450^{**}$ ).

Based on the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) results, it was interesting that intra-correlations of engagement factors were only moderate and insignificant. There are some potential explanations for this particular finding. The nature of responses in the Likert scales (e.g. False, Mostly False, Mostly True and True) may also provide some explanation to the results for engagement factors. Since the factors contain behavioural, affective and cognitive items, it is likely that students responded either positively or negatively to the different engagement dimensions in the factor (as discussed in Section 2.3).

Analyses examining the correlations between cognitive, affective and behavioural engagement in the different factors revealed that items were not significantly correlated, suggesting a non-linear relationship. For example, the relationship between a behavioural (E30 *I pay attention in class*) item from Factor 2 and a cognitive item (E42 *It is easy to organize my thoughts into English*) from Factor 3 had a non-significant correlation ( $r= -.105$ ). This lack of correlation would be expected since E42 which falls under Factor 3 (*academic writing challenges*), is independent from internal factors such as their academic engagement styles or how students value of academic writing ( $r=.071$ ). Similarly, the relationship between a cognitive item (E44 *I find it hard to express my ideas effectively in English*) from Factor 3 and two affective items from Factor 1 (E35 *The writing class feels like a waste of time*, and E36 *I think that AW is important for my future*) had non-significant correlations ( $r=-.074$ . and  $r=-.012$ ). Thus, it is highly likely that the relationship between engagement factors may not be linear and the factors may interact in a more complex and dynamic way.

Further analyses examining engagement items in its respective dimensions revealed a stronger relationship and further affirmed the likelihood above. To illustrate, there was a strong moderate relationship ( $r=.499^{**}$ ) between E40 (*I take care that my essays are done properly*) and E41 (*I often look for ways to improve my writing*) within the cognitive engagement dimension. Within the dimensions of affective engagement, there was also a strong moderate relationship ( $r=.432^{**}$ ) between E33 (*I look forward to my AW class*) and E34 (*I am proud to be in the AW class*).

### **Summary of Quantitative Results**

In response to Research Question Two, the quantitative analysis found that a positive relationship existed between self-concept in academic writing and the students' engagement in the AW class. Additionally, the results offered strong empirical support of the proposition that the relationship between Malaysian learners' self-concept factors in academic writing and engagement is associated distinctly with specific constructs of engagement, such as the value of academic writing, independent academic engagement, and the challenges of academic writing. Although the factors that have emerged are in line with the literature, the level of correlation ( $r= .504^{**}$ ) implies that other variables may be influencing the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and student engagement (beyond those revealed answers to the questionnaire).

The findings of the quantitative results affirmed that little can be assumed with regard to the nature of the relationship between self-concept and engagement. The spread of scores for statements on self-concept in academic writing which do not seem to impact on the students' engagement responses, suggested there would be value in qualitative exploration, since the influences on such a distribution of responses was beyond the parameters of this phase. In addition, the variation of student engagement also implied that the self-report could have been made through more than just internal frames of reference. The themes that emerged from the quantitative analysis which merited further qualitative investigation are summarised in Figure 5.1.

Emerging themes from the quantitative analysis	
Section 5.2 Demographic results	<i>Respondents' diversity</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic experience</li> <li>• Academic English proficiency</li> </ul>
	<i>Studying habit for academic writing</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimal hours</li> </ul>
Section 5.3 Self-concept in academic writing	<i>Challenges in academic writing</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing skills</li> <li>• Proficiency issues</li> </ul>
	<i>Variation of self-concept in academic writing</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Majority average-high self-concept in academic writing</li> </ul>
	<i>The value of academic writing</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Important for future</li> <li>• Difficulties / Challenges</li> </ul>
Section 5.4 Student engagement in academic writing	<i>Behavioural engagement</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highly engaged student</li> <li>• Persistent and determined</li> <li>• Minimal drafts produced as part of academic writing process</li> </ul>
	<i>Affective engagement</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Value the academic writing class</li> <li>• Learning tends to be individual-orientated</li> </ul>
	<i>Cognitive engagement</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highly engaged</li> <li>• Perceive significant relevance of academic writing for their future</li> <li>• Proficiency poses a challenge for cognitive engagement</li> </ul>
Section 5.5 Relationship between Self-concept in academic writing (ScAw) and engagement (EAw)	<i>Correlational analysis of relationship between ScAw and EAw</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderate positive relationship (<math>r = .504^{**}</math>; <math>p &lt; .01</math>)</li> <li>• 25% variance is explainable by self-concept in academic writing</li> <li>• 75% are 'unknown factor(s)' to be explored in Phase Two</li> </ul>
	<i>Exploratory Factor Analysis</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extracted factors for self-concept in academic writing (perceived academic writing efficacy, language learning self beliefs and academic interest)</li> <li>• Extracted factors for student engagement in academic writing (value of academic writing, independent academic engagement style, academic writing challenges)</li> <li>• Highest positive correlation was between academic interest and independent academic engagement style (<math>r = .549^{**}</math>)</li> <li>• Overall, <math>r</math>-value is moderately significant</li> </ul>

Figure 5.1. Overview of the emerging themes based on the quantitative analysis.

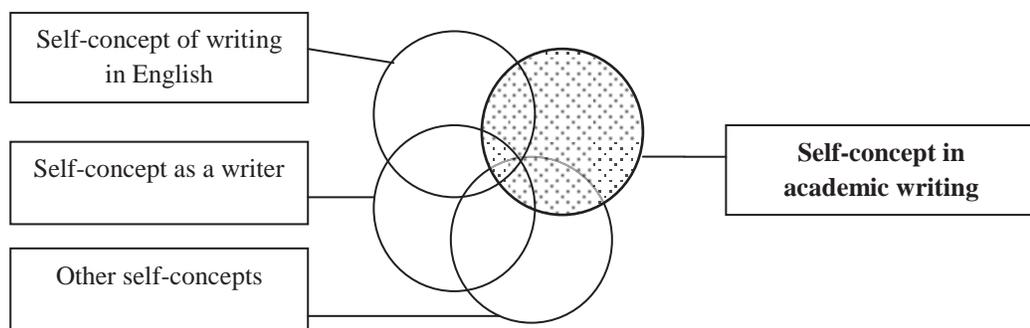
## 5.6 DISCUSSION OF QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

With the purpose of this study in mind, the key findings in the quantitative phase, that suggests directions for further qualitative investigation in Phase Two of this study, will be discussed.

### The dynamic nature of self-concept

The quantitative results revealed that there were different self-concepts involved in self-concept in academic writing. These included self-concept in English, self-concept as a writer and self-concept as a writer of English. Especially interesting in the results was the fact that the individual responses for each of these self-concepts were very distinct from each other. What this suggests is the saliency of certain self-concepts with regard to self-concept in academic writing. This also raises the issue of whether there are other self-concepts that may have shaped learners' self-concepts in academic writing which were not explored in the questionnaire.

Additionally, due to the diversity in the demography, there was learner variation in how the multiple self-concepts interact and interconnect with regards to self-concept in academic writing. In particular, learners' self-concept in English does not always reflect their self-concepts as a writers or self-concept in academic writing. Therefore, the proposed structure of self-concept in academic writing in this study is represented as overlapping with other self-concepts (see Figure 5.2).



*Figure 5.2.* A potential structure of self-concept in academic writing for Malaysian learners.

Further, it is likely that there are other self-concepts which may have some bearing on self-concept in academic writing. Any hierarchical representation is avoided as self-concept in academic writing as it is unclear whether certain self-concepts are more central or peripheral in relation to self-concept in academic writing.

### **Frames of reference for self-concept in academic writing**

The quantitative results also indicated variations in respondents' self-concept scores the majority of which were average and low in academic writing. Further item analysis indicated that self-concept in academic writing was closely linked to English proficiency issues and also the challenges of academic writing itself. The findings from Phase One may be indicative social comparisons made with students who had higher English proficiency and more academic experience in the writing class (See Section 5.2 for respondents' demographic distribution). Thus, it may be reasonable to expect that an unfavourable comparison caused the majority of average to low self-concepts. This is pertinent when the frames of reference are highly experienced, highly engaged and proficient group of students. In fact a study by Kuo (2006) indicated that in EFL or ESL contexts learners also use native-speakers (of the target language) as frames of reference in assessing their own abilities.

The findings from the first phase of the study supports the notion that self-categorisation happens at both the personal and social level (see Chapter Two, Section 2.2). The plausibility of individuality and belonging concurrently existing may be authenticated if the respondents form their personal self based on social comparisons. This is supported by previous research (Bornholt, 2000; Deaux, 1992; Onorato & Turner, 2004). In this phase of the study, there is no way of ascertaining the basis on which learners established their self-concepts in academic writing. This will be further explored in the qualitative phase of the investigation. The need for the frames of reference to be identified is further highlighted by the fact that the majority of respondents in the quantitative phase reported many 'difficulties' and 'challenges' that they faced in the AW class. Thus, it will be interesting to see in the qualitative phase whether respondents' chosen self-concepts were based on *'the looking-glass self'* (C. H. Cooley, 1964,1902) whereby "individuals form their self-concepts based on how they believe others perceive them in a particular social context" (Mercer, 2011, p. 76).

### **The silver lining of the transition stage**

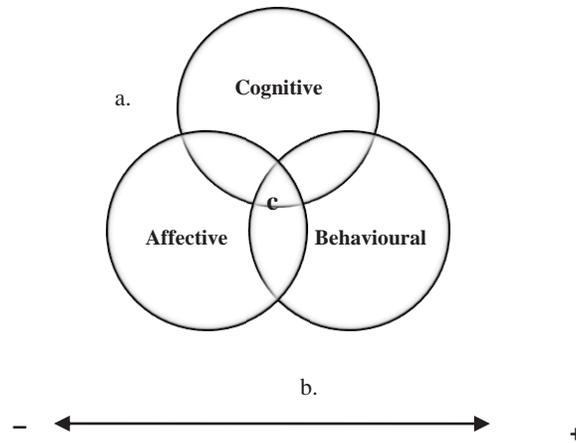
That the students in this study were relatively new to the subject of academic writing regardless of their academic year and mostly were in the beginning stages of their academic life, implies there may be future opportunities for instructional intervention. Since the students had recently moved from secondary schools into tertiary institutions, the new setting, new academic expectation and new learning demands could all play a role in learners' re-evaluation of their self-concepts. The new environment may also afford numerous opportunities for positive enhancement of self-concept in academic writing. This is supported by previous research (see Section 2.2) that acknowledges the reciprocal effect of self-concept and academic performance. Learners' relatively new self-concept in academic writing may eventually develop to become more central as the learners receive increased exposure to academic writing. This aligns with previous research (e.g. Harter, 1999; H. W. Marsh & O'Mara, 2008; Mercer, 2011; Pinxten, et al., 2010), which has suggested that self-concept becomes more established with time.

Markus and Wurf (1987) have argued that "less elaborated conceptions may still wield behavioural influence" (p. 302). It is also possible that the students' relatively new self-concept in academic writing may gradually become more positive as it increases its saliency in the university. The susceptibility to change in terms of self-concept development could mean curricular improvement would be effective since the adaptive characteristics of self-concept in academic writing could offer the premise for instructional intervention. Thus, in the context of this study, it became interesting to investigate to what degree an individual's self-concept in academic writing might develop and be open to changes, and what processes would be involved in the formulation of the self-concept in that context. Additionally, it is also important to explore what contextual changes can enhance self-concept in academic writing.

### **Variation of student engagement in the AW class**

Although the composite scores indicate that the majority of the students are highly engaged in the course of their studies in academic writing, further analysis revealed that there were variations in the subsections of the engagement dimensions. This was also evidenced by the results in which correlations of engagement factors were only moderate and non-significant. Indeed, there were several instances where students

responded both positively on items related to behavioural engagement and negatively on items related to the cognitive engagement dimension. This findings is in line with Trowler's (2010) meta-analysis of student engagement whereby "each dimension can have both a 'positive' and a 'negative' pole, each of which represents a form of engagement, separated by a gulf of non-engagement" (p. 5). Thus, based on the quantitative results, student engagement in the AW class is represented below (see Figure 5.3).



*Figure 5.3.* Student engagement in the AW class consists of (a) behavioural, affective and cognitive dimensions (b) Each dimension exists in a continuum with a positive and negative pole (c) Each engagement dimension is capable of influencing and being influenced by other dimensions.

Respondents' preference for an individual-based approach in AW (see independent academic engagement style from the EFA analysis and only 46.5% opted for the collaborative orientation to learning in the AW class) provides further support to the distinctive nature of the dimensions, as positive behavioural engagement does not necessarily translate to, or correspond with affective engagement. Thus, it is possible that individual dimensions of engagement may interact dynamically on a continuum in the AW class.

One possible explanation for the spectrum of responses within an engagement dimension could be respondents' language learning beliefs. Educational psychologists Bandura (1986) and Rokeach (1968) pointed out that learners' beliefs influence their experiences and actions in their learning. Thus, if beliefs predispose action, instances in

which students indicate what seems to be lack of effort or cognitive disengagement (e.g. minimal drafts and minimal hours of studying) can be better understood. For example, if a learner's particular belief is that language is an innate ability, this could explain why they invest minimally. On the other hand, if students believe that proficiency is not fixed but rather acquired through effort and hard work, they may expend additional effort.

Differences between responses could also be due to the context. Academic Writing was a paper developed for language and academic competency, and is not discipline-inclined. Jary and Lebeau (2009) established that student engagement may vary based on discipline. Thus, in the context of this study, it seemed useful to find out whether the responses elicited on their engagement in AW class were shaped in any way by the nature of the academic writing curriculum and objectives of the course, or the respondents' major in their respective faculties.

### **Factors influencing student engagement**

The findings from Phase One data seem to indicate that the students were highly motivated, determined and persistent despite the challenges that academic writing presented. This raises the question of why students felt that way regarding academic writing. As factors influencing student engagement may vary from one student to another, more information on the learning environment of the AW class may help to further understand the students' responses. Only by doing so can the possible frames of reference (such as teachers and feedback) that have been established as shaping student engagement (D. McInerney, 2010) be identified in the context of individual Malaysian learners.

There are an increasing number of engagement studies which maintain that non-academic aspects may influence student engagement in its academic context. One such study indicates a *dynamic web of influence* (Pascarella, 1991) may be important in shaping respondents' engagement in the writing class. Fan and Williams (2010) also identified parental involvement as having a strong motivational impact on children's educational outcomes. In the context of this study, as the quantitative analysis revealed, only 25% variance could be attributed to self-concept. Therefore it was definitely worth

exploring whether there were other significant factors augmenting the learners' engagement in the writing class.

### **Independent academic engagement style in the writing class**

Although the overall results from Phase One implied students are highly engaged, the minimal hours put in for studying academic writing by the majority of the respondents did seem to contradict this. In a similar way, the responses on academic writing processes showed that the majority of students produced minimal numbers of drafts prior to submission. This is less-than-ideal as a composing approach for second language learners (Zamel & Spacek, 2006) and implies that although the overall score of student engagement may indicate respondents' positive engagement behaviourally, their cognitive engagement may be otherwise. The engagement, which may be unique to the AW class, could be explicated through Coates' (2007) typology of student engagement styles. The typology has two axes (social and academic) with engagement styles falling on a continuum from collaborative to independent, and from passive to intense. According to Phase One in this study, the majority of the students seem to have a preference for more independent and academic-oriented engagement.

Additionally, the nature of engagement identified in the AW class highlighted how identity relates to student engagement. The positive response for behavioural engagement items may imply a strong identification with the learner identity or learner role as a university student. This affiliation dictates that there are certain actions and behaviours that learners conform to as part of their identity as a tertiary community member. By way of contrast, when the situation involves academic writing tasks which have a predominantly cognitive orientation, this may not translate into a collaborative approach, but be perceived as a task requiring individual cognitive engagement.

The respondents' writing approach and preferences for individual learning in the context of academic writing needs to be further understood. Although numerous studies (e.g. Elton, 2010; Storch, 2005; Wentzel & Watkins, 2002) have noted that the collaborative approach could considerably enhance aspects of writing, such as grammatical accuracy and lexical complexities, the fact that learners' engagement is restricted to the individual domain, highlights issues related to the sense of belonging in

the AW class and their academic identity. In the second half of the study, qualitative exploration was used to deepen the understanding of the dynamic nature of student engagement in the writing class and its salient influences.

### **The value of academic writing to students**

In the analyses of self-concepts in academic writing and engagement, academic writing was highlighted as being important in students' academic studies. It is likely that the students' positive responses to studying academic writing students were attributed to the fact that they were merely responding according to what they believed might be expected of them. Nonetheless, the majority of the respondents shared similar ideas. Therefore, it will be necessary to examine the genesis of their responses to further understand the value that academic writing holds for the respondents.

The questionnaire results suggest that the importance of academic writing appeared to help the respondents transcend the difficulties they encountered, as they perceived academic writing to be relevant to their futures. This suggested there was a need to understand the role academic writing played in these learners' future orientation, and to elucidate why respondents persevered despite the challenges and difficulties presented by academic writing. Similarly, Hoyle and Sherril (2006), and Lee et al. (2010) identified students' future orientations (future self) as a stimulus to learners' motivation and behaviour. Respondents' ability to envisage their future self may also be the catalyst for placing such value on academic writing. Furthermore, Pierce (1995) suggested that investment (for the future) explained why second language learners persevere when faced with adversity. For these reasons, it was believed to be necessary to explore the respondents' trajectory of self (immediate or future) to clarify respondents' emphasis on the subject of academic writing.

Although learners faced several challenges in learning academic writing in L2, this did not deter them from engaging behaviourally in the AW class. However, the difficulty of expressing their ideas in English and organising their thoughts into sentences resonates with previous research (Berman & Cheng, 2010; Biber & Gray, 2010), that indicates English proficiency may impede their cognitive engagement in academic writing. Results from the questionnaire also indicated that respondents' insufficient general

command of the English language was likely to interfere with the academic writing process. As academic writing may be a novelty to the majority of the respondents, it can represent tacit knowledge (Elton, 2010). In fact, academic writing may appear secondary compared to students' already established self concepts as a writer in general and as a writer in English, which could potentially lead to conflict due to mismatch with students' central self-concepts. This may further add to the learning demands of what is already a foreign subject for these learners. Thus, the semi-structured interviews in Phase Two further explored the nature of students' writing self-concept and also language and proficiency-related difficulties presented by academic writing.

### **Positive relationship between self-concept in AW and engagement**

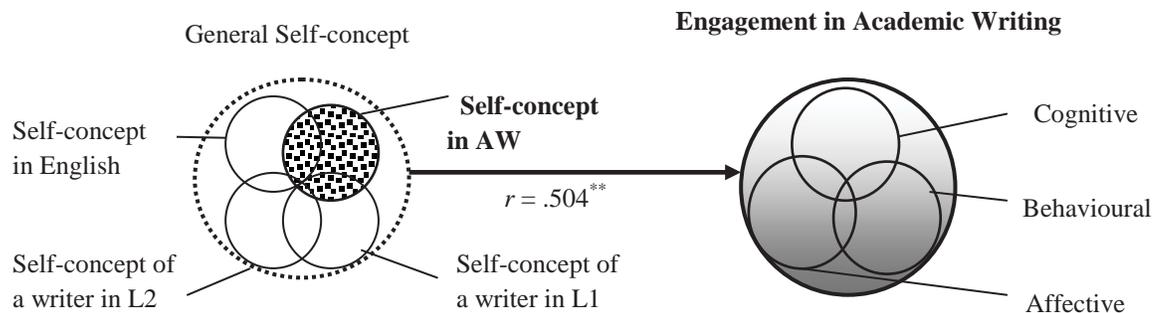
The data analysis from Phase One revealed a link between learners' self-concept in academic writing and engagement. The two constructs of engagement and self-concept in academic writing appear to be positively interrelated, as found in previous studies (Molloy, Gest, & Rulison, 2011; Wigfield & Eccles, 2002). Molloy and colleagues (2011) elucidated the nature of the relationship as follows: "academic self-concept predicts expectation for success and the value placed on academic achievement, which in turn affect levels of engagement" (p. 14). In the context of this study, while Phase One indicated a positive relationship, Phase Two allowed for further investigation of the dynamic nature of the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement.

The quantitative results indicated that self-concept accounted for 25% of the variance in the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement. One possible reason for this result may be that the remaining 75% consists of other factors beyond the parameters of the questionnaire. External frames of reference have previously been indicated, such as institutional expectations (Erkman, et al., 2010; Hu & Kuh, 2002; Powell, 2009); and the artefacts provided by the instructors, as well as relationship with instructors (Day, et al., 2006; Komarraju, et al., 2010; Mornane, 2009; Stewart, 2008). A study by Molloy and colleagues (2011) identified peers as having a prominent role in shaping learners' self-concept and effort in school. As self-concept and student engagement are context-dependent and socially mediated, it may be possible that these factors have considerable bearing on the relationship. Moreover, due

to the diverse demographics in the AW class, other salient external factors could have a unique impact on individuals.

As self-concept may be transitory in nature, more in-depth exploration is necessary to elucidate the development of students' current self-concept. This re-evaluation and redefining process is crucial in contributing to the study's understanding of the relationship between the two constructs of self-concept and engagement in the writing class. Other researchers (e.g. Hattie, 2003; Onorato & Turner, 2004) have argued that self-concepts are dynamic although certain aspects are resistant to change (Mercer, 2011). The first phase results of the present study also suggest that self-concept formation and how it potentially influences the relationship between self-concept and actual behaviour would benefit from further qualitative investigation. Only by carrying out this investigation can the intricacies of the relationship between the two constructs be uncovered.

Figure 5.4 illustrates the way in which quantitative results revealed that the two constructs of self-concept in academic writing and engagement are positively interrelated. Since the correlation has been identified as only moderate, further exploration is necessary to better understand the workings of this relationship. The quantitative findings have, however, produced clear thematic guides for further investigation in the subsequent qualitative phase, highlighting the potential importance of contextual influences and other individual variability that might provide corroboration of the findings on self-concept in academic writing.



*Figure 5.4.* Visual model of the positive relationship between self-concept in academic writing and student engagement based on Phase One.

The results have highlighted self-concept as an important point of reference. The patterns and interconnections between the multiple self-concepts have provided glimpses into the potential 'influences', both internal and external, responsible for explicating the workings of the relationship as the questionnaire results highlighted individual variability. It is this individual variability and uniqueness that could uncover the dynamic workings of the relationship between learners' self-concept in academic writing and their engagement in the AW class. What is needed is a more holistic understanding of who these learners are, as the complexity of individual variants and the causality of context are beyond quantitative parameters. Therefore, further qualitative investigation seems likely to be fruitful.

Having discussed the quantitative findings, the link between the quantitative and qualitative phases is discussed in the following section.

## **5.7 LINKING THE QUANTITATIVE AND THE QUALITATIVE PHASES**

The first phase of this study has provided useful findings for research question one. This question, which aimed at capturing Malaysian learners' self-concept in the context of their AW class, not only revealed significant trends, but also highlighted important internal frames of reference in the formulation of this self-construct. In doing so, it also established that the structure of self-concept appears to be complex and dynamic, and not necessarily hierarchical as suggested by the dominant literature on self-concept. Results for the research question which aimed at gauging the relationship between the construct of self-concept in academic writing and student engagement, affirmed that there was a positive but moderate relationship. The initial phase of the study also indicated that there may be more variables (internal, external or both) involved in shaping this relationship.

Although Phase One has captured some insights into what self-concept in academic writing is, and what it is not (its structure, the patterns and trends in self-concept in academic writing and its respective internal influences) it also alluded to the need for

more investigation prior to establishing the relationship between these two constructs. This is a key aim of Phase Two of the study. It was decided that the notion of individual variability, as well as contextual influences in determining the nature of the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement could be investigated more effectively in a qualitative frame. This would allow the role and function of the two constructs to be explicated in the relationship, and a more holistic picture of the relationship between Malaysian learners' self-concept in academic writing and their engagement in the AW class to be illuminated (see Figure 5.5).

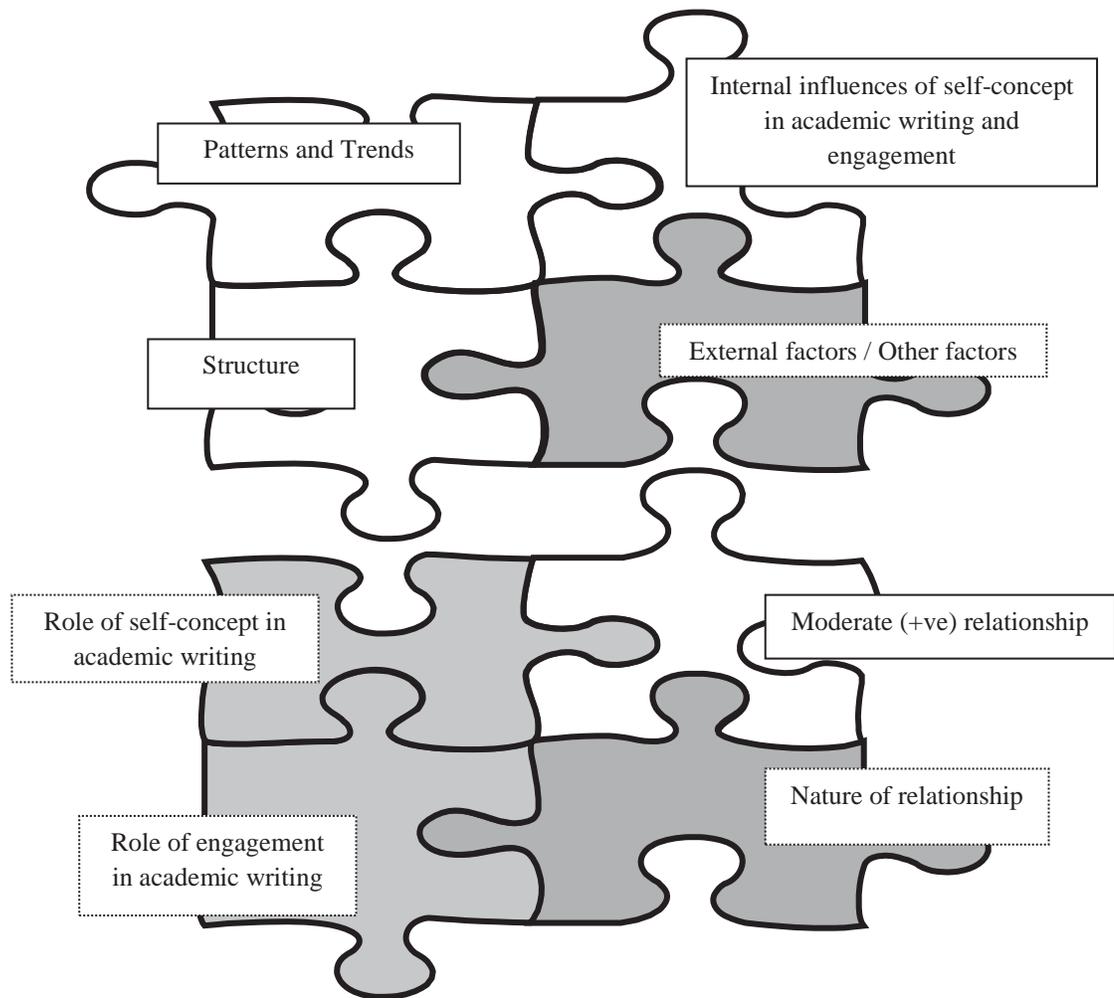


Figure 5.5. Piecing it all together. Shaded areas represent areas which have yet to be explored in the study.

### Development of interview protocol

The goal of the qualitative phase was to elaborate on and explain the results in Phase One, further exploring areas potentially related to the formulation of students' self-concept in academic writing, engagement in the writing class, and the workings of the

relationship of the two constructs. Thus, the design of the interview protocol was focused on obtaining a more holistic picture of how learners came to have particular self-concepts in academic writing, the salient internal and external influences and the interaction between self-concept and engagement. Special attention was paid to the participants' unique sociocultural context and its connection to their engagement in the AW class. Thus, the formulation of the open-ended semi-structured interview questions and their respective probes (see Interview Guide in Appendix H) was based on the following themes: (i) *the academic writing process*, (ii) *variations of self-concept in academic writing*, (iii) *challenges of academic writing*, (iv) *the value and relevance of academic writing*, (v) *variation of engagement and disengagement*, and (vi) *relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement* (see Figure 5.6).

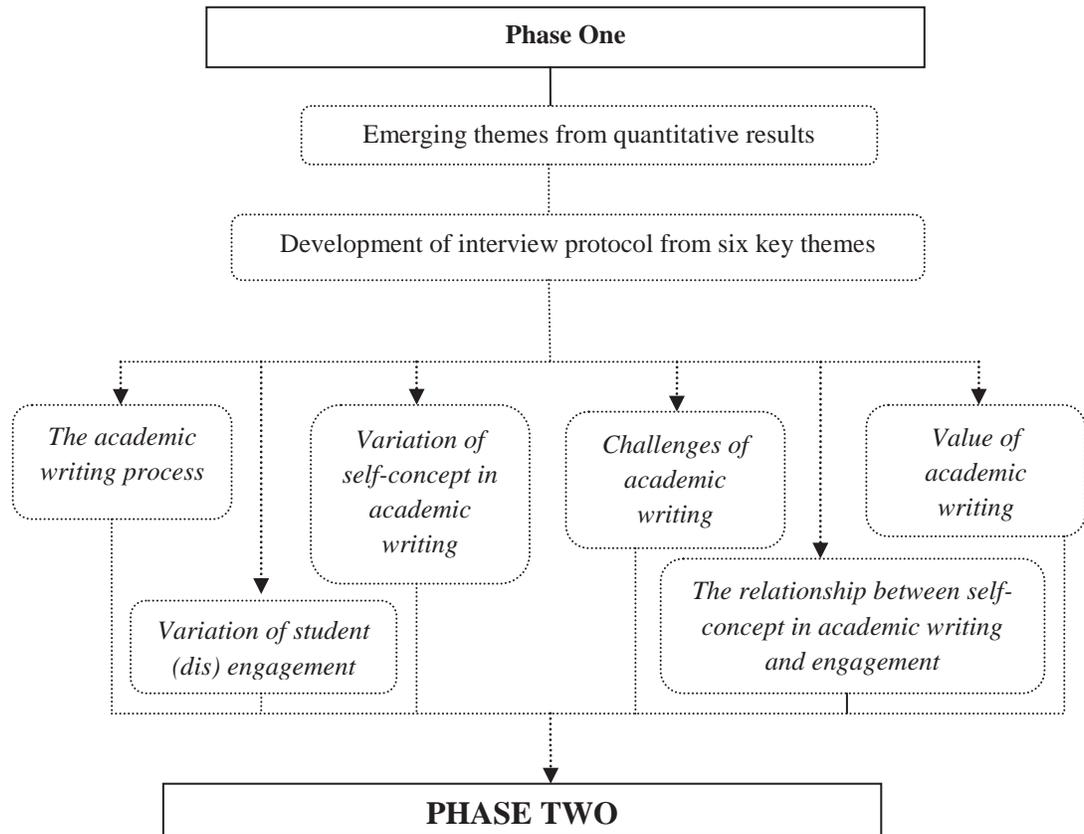


Figure 5.6. Linking Phase One and Phase Two. The dotted lines represent the integration of quantitative and qualitative phases.

## **5.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

In this chapter, the findings from the quantitative data collected from the closed-ended questionnaire were presented under the following sections: (a) self-concept in academic writing and (b) student engagement in academic writing. Each section included graphic representation, tables and figures and summaries of results of the various statistical analyses. Several major findings emerged with regards to self-concept in academic writing, student engagement in academic writing and the nature of the relationship between self-concept and engagement. In particular, it was revealed challenges to students' self-concept in academic writing stemmed from their level of English proficiency. The quantitative analysis for the engagement section revealed that the majority of the students were highly engaged and that students responded differently in the engagement domains. It was also ascertained that there was moderate positive correlation between self-concept in academic writing and engagement. Finally, this chapter explained how questionnaire results informed and guided the data collection in the second phase of this study. The next chapter will present the findings from the qualitative phase of the study.

## CHAPTER SIX

### QUALITATIVE RESULTS

#### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter Six presents the results from the qualitative phase of the study. Central to this chapter are eight case studies, based on the two semi-structured interviews with each participant. The eight case studies will be presented in Section 6.2 to Section 6.9. The student cases are referred to as Imran, Ahmad, Mustafa, Siew Lee, Maya, Joanne, Eliza and Nurul respectively (not their real names). The order of cases presented is based on the interview sessions. Table 6.1 summarises where the students' self-concept and engagement in academic writing fitted according to the quantitative phase. These range from Siew Lee and Nurul (average self-concept and engagement) to Imran, Mustafa and Maya (high self-concept and engagement) with Ahmad, Joanne and Eliza who had mixed results (average self-concept and high engagement in between).

Table 6.1

*A summary of Students' Self-concept and Engagement in Academic Writing Results according to the Quantitative Phase*

<i>Students</i>	<i>Self-concept</i>	<i>Engagement</i>
Imran	High	Very High
Ahmad	Average	High
Mustafa	High	High
Siew Lee	Average	Average
Maya	High	High
Joanne	Average	High
Eliza	Average	High
Nurul	Average	Average

In line with the research objective of exploring the relationship between Malaysian learners' self-concept and engagement in the AW class, each case is presented under the three main headings: (i) self-concept in academic writing, (ii) engagement in academic writing, and (iii) relationship between self-concept in academic writing and student

engagement. As each case was interviewed twice, interview excerpts from the first interviews were coded as (Interview 1) and excerpts from the subsequent interview were coded as (Interview 2). Each case ends with a summary of emerging themes, unique to the individual. The chapter concludes with a summary of key findings from the qualitative phase of the study.

## **6.2 IMRAN: THE PERMEATING INFLUENCE OF L2 INTEREST**

Imran was a second-year student in the Faculty of Resource Science and Technology. He is Malay and is originally from West Malaysia. Imran experienced academic success early in his life and was selected to study in a fully residential school in another state in his early secondary schooling years. Although this meant that he had to move away from his family, he reminisced that he thoroughly enjoyed the experience. Imran consistently did well in his national exams and was selected to do his matriculation studies in another state before studying at a university. In the questionnaire, Imran reported having high self-concept in academic writing and very high engagement in the AW class. However, his Malaysian University English Test (MUET) score was low (Band 3, Band 6 being the highest). Despite the challenges reported by Imran in the AW class, his L2 interest appears to permeate and contribute to his positive self-concept and engagement in academic writing.

### **Self-concept in academic writing**

Imran's self-concept in academic writing was influenced by his interest in a second language (L2), the influence of his other self-concepts, and his language learning self beliefs.

### **Interest in L2**

In the interview data, Imran displayed strong evidence of positive disposition towards English and by extension, anything associated with the English language. Imran explained how this positive disposition and the passion for learning came about:

*I love writing in English. I feel some sort of satisfaction when writing in English. I like English songs and I like to watch English movies. So from there I was motivated to*

*write in English. I personally think that it is easier to write in English [than Malay] when expressing my ideas. (Interview 1)*

This quote reveals how his passion for the language started in a non-academic context (e.g. socialising, listening to English songs and watching English movies). Interestingly, his positive self-concept in English also permeated into the academic aspects of his life. Consistent with his preference for the English language, Imran requested that the interview be conducted fully in English.

Imran reported that it was his interest in English which propelled the intensity of his self-regulatory actions. To further improve his writing, Imran revealed, *“I try to think in English. Yes, it is hard but I am trying to practise to think in English because I want to express what I have been thinking accurately”* (Interview 1). In Imran's case, his interest seems to have been sustained as it was self-generated and correlated with the learning demands of his immediate context (academic institution). This external influence pushed him beyond ordinary expectations, illustrated in his attempts at thinking in English.

Imran's ease in adapting to change was also aided by being part of an education system which uses English as a medium of instruction. To illustrate this, the excerpt below revealed Imran's preference of using English over Malay language in his academic studies.

*Actually in my academic studies ... we learnt everything in English ... so since then I felt very comfortable writing in English. Actually, two to three weeks after we started writing in our new semester, my lecturer told us to submit an assignment in Malay language. I thought it was very hard ... all of us [course mates] found it hard. (Interview 1)*

The use of L2 as a medium of instruction in Imran's academic studies may have strengthened his interest in L2 and influenced his self-concept in academic writing, positively.

### **The influence of other self-concepts**

Imran's self-concept in academic writing was influenced by his self-concept as a writer in L2. To illustrate, when asked to describe his self-concept as a writer in English, Imran explained: *"I am an average writer in English. Although I like writing in English, I need to practise more because every time I write in English there will be a [grammar] mistake. So yes, I need to practise more"* (Interview 1). His admission to having weaknesses did not seem to be a deterrent, but rather seemed to drive him to minimise the discrepancy between his current self and his future self by his awareness and willingness to practise. Although he referred to his self-concept in *general* English as average, he chose to describe himself as good, rather than average or weak in *academic* English: *"I am a good writer of academic English. I seldom make mistakes when I write the assignments or tasks and I feel comfortable with it"* (Interview 1). This suggests his self-concept in English and in academic writing were not interrelated.

### **Language learning self beliefs**

Imran's high level of self-concept in academic writing can perhaps be explained through his language learning self beliefs (LLSB) in academic writing. Several times during the interview he mentioned his optimism regarding the development of his self-concept in academic writing, despite challenges that he still faced with English grammar and vocabulary. Imran's optimism implies that his current self-concept may further develop through the accumulation of knowledge and skills gained from appropriate exposure to AW. He explained, *"In my opinion it [AW] is difficult to start, but after we write a little bit more and learn more about it, it is actually quite easy"* (LLSB 1 in Interview 1). He also expected to improve his self-concept in academic writing:

*I think I would change [from average to good] because after taking the academic writing course, it gives me more confidence to read and write in English because I have the skills to extract the information from the text and how to write in a proper way.*  
(LLSB 2 in Interview 1)

Progress and self-improvement in Imran's case also seemed to be indicative of his objective to have mastery of the discipline knowledge. He further added that this would increase his self-efficacy in English, particularly in reading and writing skills. Imran's

language learning self beliefs appear to influence his self-concept in academic writing and were manifested in his persistence and commitment.

*[for a difficult writing task] I would actually read the title on the assignment or question and try to understand it ... write a draft ... mind map about it and roughly brainstorm what I have to do for this ... Next, I spend my time to just collect the material ... relevant to the topic ... then ... I try to pick up the relevant ones from the material that I get and read it through and try to understand what is being said.*

(Interview 1)

## **Engagement in the AW class**

Imran's engagement in the AW class was also influenced by internal and external factors. In the questionnaire, Imran reported his engagement level to be very high. This resonated with his responses in the interview, whereby the value of academic writing and future goals emerged as major factors shaping his engagement in the writing class.

### **Value of academic writing**

During the two interviews, Imran repeatedly stressed the significance of the AW paper to him. Although he acknowledged that interest does play a role, the value and relevance of academic writing for his academic studies seemed to take precedence. He explained, "*We learnt about the proper way to write information in English, how to express it so that the reader can understand and make full use of the written work. We learnt how to do citation and referencing*" (Interview 1). He also stated that, "*I feel that it is easier for me to extract the information ... compared to before I took the paper, because now I know how to differentiate between main points and elaboration points ... just how to read*" (Interview 1).

The interview excerpts above highlight the underlying value of academic writing to Imran. Its transferability to other skills and contexts (e.g. reading) made Imran value academic writing as a commodity for his academic studies. The perceived value and importance of academic writing is thus, directly linked to his attention and concentration in class, and his self-efficacy also increased due to his acquisition of relevant knowledge and skills. In this manner, Imran's engagement seems to be driven largely by the significance he attaches to academic writing and is aided by his self-

efficacy. The reciprocal benefits are observable in the way his strategic management of learning involves deep learning strategies (cognitive engagement).

### **The appeal of *future self***

Imran's goal of becoming an academic also seemed to have a strong influence on his engagement. Throughout the interviews, Imran repeatedly expressed his love of learning and that his goal was to further his studies. He wished to be an academic and remain in the world of academia. The appeal of this future self appeared to have influenced his engagement and persistence in the AW class. This goal also seemed to enhance his self-concept in academic writing and his actions in the AW class. To illustrate, Imran took the paper in his second year, as opposed to the popular trend of taking the AW paper in the final year to aid students in the writing of their final year projects. He explained:

*For me it's important to take it earlier because I want to practise it before the write up of my final year project and it's also good for other assignments. To know how to write in a proper and formal [academic] way. (Interview 1)*

Academic writing not only provided Imran with the tools to achieve his goal, but also supported his cognitive engagement in the paper.

*After attending the paper, I feel that it is easier for me to extract information from books, papers or journals. So that's how it is related to my study. That's why I took the AW paper. I chose a paper that benefits me and I can gain something from it. (Interview 2)*

The transferability of the skills learnt from academic writing sustained Imran's engagement in the writing class. Additionally, it was evident that his engagement in the AW classroom was formed by interaction between cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions: “[*In an enjoyable class*] ... *my focus is more and I take a lot of notes ... pay attention to it. I participate more ... ask questions ... express my opinion and I will try to participate*” (Interview 2). In this quote, there seems to be a motivational quality to his self-concept in academic writing which leads him to generate an array of strategies for engaging effectively in the writing class.

## The relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement

Imran's engagement in the AW class appeared to be a direct manifestation of his self-concept in academic writing. This seemed to connect, mediate and sustain his actions and motivation in the writing class. His self-concept in academic writing was identified by the value he placed on academic writing and how he judged it to be crucial for his academic studies. Imran explained, *"I think there is a relationship because what we hope from this course and what we get from the course reflects engagement in that particular class"* (Interview 2). This was evidenced by interview data which indicated Imran's increased participation and effort in the AW class. Accordingly, Imran reported a strong relationship existed between his self-concept in academic writing and his engagement (see Figure 6.1).

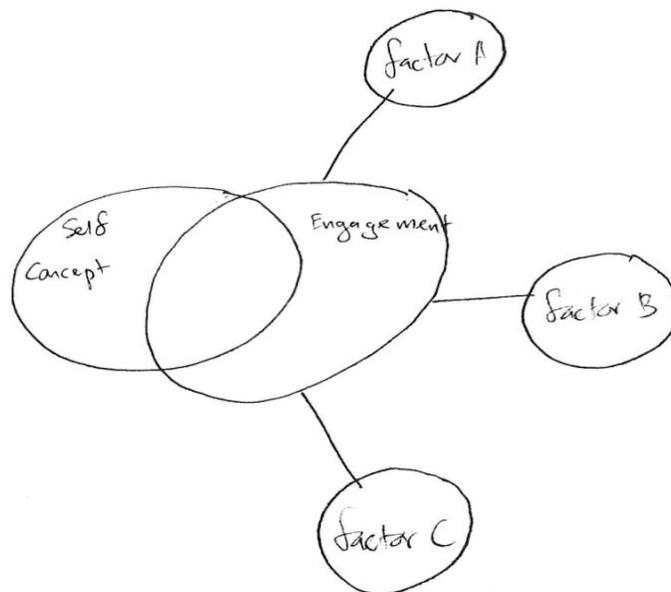


Figure 6.1. Imran's conceptualisation of the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement in the AW class.

Imran explained his visual representation of the self-concept in academic writing and engagement relationship:

*I think there is a strong relationship between self-concept and engagement because if our SC is more to learn about AW, we will try to participate more and try to grab as*

*much information from that course ... compared to someone who doesn't care and just takes a course for fun. (Interview 2)*

Imran's words suggest that when high value and emphasis are placed on self-concept in academic writing, they are manifested in actions. Conversely, the absence of value for academic writing would be reflected by different student actions and decisions in the writing class. It is likely that the relationship that Imran described appears to be a product of his conscious decision to be engaged in the writing class. When he is engaged, he adopts proactive strategies and behaviours. Therefore, the intensity of the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement seems to be contingent on the value he attaches to learning academic writing in L2 within the tertiary setting. This is further supported by Imran's comment which suggests that, the two constructs are capable of influencing each other: *"I think self-concept and engagement influence each other ... and engagement affects our self-concept in that class"* (Interview 2). It is also interesting to note that there were many factors influencing Imran's engagement. Figure 6.1 shows factors A, B and C which he explained represent, *"Friends ... the subject ... our personal factors"* (Interview 2). This may indicate dynamic links to his sense of self and identity, at both a personal and a social level.

Imran believed that academic writing was important and relevant for his future. Accordingly, he invested effort and engaged in relevant strategies, such as doing extensive reading and taking the relevant language courses that could improve his performance. These outcomes may, to a certain extent, have been influenced by other factors (e.g. Imran indicated Factors A, B and C in Figure 6.1), but Imran's goal seems to be central in sustaining his academic optimism and engagement in class. He reported that he persisted in his learning due to his self-concept in academic writing, and consequently this sustained his engagement in educationally purposeful activities in the AW class.

In Imran's case, three themes emerge as central to shaping his self-concept in academic writing. These predominantly internal influences include his interest in L2, his other self-concepts (in other areas apart from AW) and his language learning self beliefs. In regard to his engagement, the value of academic writing and the appeal of his future self

(academic goals) appear to be major influences on his engagement in the AW class. His reported strong relationship between self-concept and his engagement affirms the link between the motivational properties of his positive self-concept and his apparently high academic engagement in the AW class.

### **6.3 AHMAD: THE ONLY FIRST-YEAR STUDENT IN CLASS**

When Ahmad was interviewed, he was the only first-year student in the AW class. Unlike the other interviewees, he did not have to take preparatory English courses prior to taking academic writing as he had obtained Band 4 (Band 6 being the highest) in MUET, indicating he was already a competent user of academic English. Ahmad is Malay and uses mainly Malay language in everyday communication, but he listed English and a local dialect (*Bahasa Sarawak*) as his secondary languages in the questionnaire. At the time of the study, he was majoring in Biotechnology in the Faculty of Resource Science and Technology. During the course of the interview, Ahmad requested to use English and spoke with quiet confidence. In the questionnaire, Ahmad ranked himself as average in the section on self-concept in academic writing and high in the engagement section.

Ahmad's journey to higher learning and being the type of student he was at that time had been influenced by several pivotal and critical incidents in his life. When asked about his early student life in secondary school, Ahmad recollected that he was a different person then: *"In school, I was not very active. I was quite passive. I didn't participate in a lot of activities. If there were activities in school, I would not get involved"* (Interview 1). During his two years in the science stream (Form 4 and Form 5), Ahmad however, gradually became more studious. In particular, the expectations on students in that stream seemed to be an influencing factor in the development of his positive sense of self. He explained:

*When I moved to Form 4 and Form 5, and when you are in the science stream, people say that you have to be good students. You have to be smart and you have to improve yourself in many subjects ... and you have to be better and compete with other people.*  
(Interview 1)

Although he did not clarify who the “*other people*” were, the contextual influence of social comparison seemed to have impacted on Ahmad positively. By comparing his academic achievement with the achievement of his peers in the science stream classes, Ahmad appears to have formulated a new academic self-concept. It is also likely that the prestige that comes with being in the science stream has also facilitated the change in his academic self-concept.

Ahmad's account of his transformation presents further evidence of the fluidity between the personal self and the social self. The transformation that Ahmad reported to have undergone may have been a result of his attempt to belong and to share the stereotypical similarities of this group (e.g. the social identity of science stream students as intelligent and hard working). Since being in a science stream class may not mean instant identification of group membership, the notion of “*compete*” could be interpreted as Ahmad's attempt to gain academic acceptance. On the other hand, this could also indicate that the science stream context may have triggered the change in his self-concept. In this regard, messages conveyed through verbal persuasion and/or social expectations in the science-stream environment may have cultivated the shift in Ahmad's self-concept, culminating in his drive to learn and being the only first year student in the AW class.

### **Self-concept in academic writing**

The formulation of Ahmad's self-concept in academic writing appeared to be shaped by critical incidents from past learning experiences, instructor influence and his content knowledge.

### **Critical incidents from past learning experience**

In the first interview, Ahmad explicitly stated that he had overcome being the passive student he was in secondary school at the university level. When asked about the impetus for this change, Ahmad referred to a talk given during a career seminar in his matriculation year (pre-university). In that seminar, one of the lecturers highlighted the need for graduates to have good communication skills. Ahmad explained:

*He [the motivational speaker] said:*

*In university you will not find similar things in matriculation level or in school. If you don't prepare yourself for skills, when you come to the job market, you will not be employed by any company, especially in communication. That was the moment I thought to myself ... I must change. There is another thing you have to have. Even if you get four flat [4.0 Cumulative Grade Point Average], if you do not have what the employer wants from you - you will not be an employable person. (Interview 1)*

The realisation of what was needed to enter the job market was a critical incident which changed Ahmad's perception of academic achievement and this appeared to have reaffirmed his conviction of the need to change and improve. The examples in this section show how Ahmad's retrospective accounts of critical events that happened in the past had greatly shaped his current academic self-concept. Based on this realisation, Ahmad recognised that he needed to take action and work towards acquiring the skills that would make him attractive to potential employers. He explained, "*So I try my best to activate myself ... not just become a passive student and stay in my room and study. You have to be more active*" (Interview 1). His resolution for self-improvement and his need to reduce the discrepancy between his present self and his ideal future self was thus manifested in his actions, not only behaviourally but also affectively and cognitively. In this manner, Ahmad's clarity of his self-concept positively facilitated his learning approach. Ahmad's case also highlighted how one's personal self-concept can be amenable to change, when triggered by the right catalyst.

### **Instructor influence**

To further understand how Ahmad's self-concept in English came about, it is useful to understand his past learning experience of English. His self-concept in English seemed to be very dependent on the instructor. Early in his studies at secondary level, he felt that his English teacher was not committed to teaching. He further explained that, because of her lack of focus, there was not much emphasis on writing. This dependence is also seen in the excerpt below, whereby Ahmad's interest and passion for learning English was reignited in his matriculation years.

*I think it was when I was more enthusiastic in English in the matriculation level. That is the moment when the lecturers spoke a lot with us. They did a lot of activities with us*

*where we were encouraged to speak. I felt that it was a good activity. It is an opportunity to improve my speaking [not only writing]. (Interview 1)*

The impact of Ahmad's teacher as an agent of influence is apparent as he internalised the input, guidance and support (or lack thereof) from his English teachers, in shaping his self-concept in academic writing. As a result, his perception of competence and his overall disposition toward English changed too.

### **Content knowledge**

A prominent internal factor of Ahmad's self-concept in academic writing was his belief that content knowledge was a key influence on his self-concept in academic writing.

*I am a good, motivated and practical academic writer in English. I am a good academic writer in English because academic writing, like I said earlier on, it is something you master in. For example, if you are a Biotechnology student, of course you have a lot of information about the Biotechnology field. You may write something good in your essay in academic writing. (Interview 1)*

Ahmad's self-evaluation highlighted his perspective that being successful in academic writing was contingent on his knowledge in his discipline area which provided rich information for his writing. Thus, he linked self-concept in academic writing using self-concept to another domain (his academic major) as an influence.

Ahmad presented another dimension to his self-concept in academic writing by implying that self-concept in academic writing was related to general self-worth and self-efficacy. He optimistically explained that he was trying his best to improve and was incorporating a range of strategies that would facilitate this. He elaborated on this optimism:

*It [academic writing] was my first time learning something new and it's also the first time I learnt something formally. So I feel that it is a good thing. For someone who doesn't know anything, they will become more confident and more optimistic about their future because they are now provided with basic knowledge. (Interview 2)*

## **Engagement in the AW class**

Ahmad's engagement in the AW class was primarily influenced by his goal of self-improvement.

### **Goal of self-improvement**

In Ahmad's case, the underlying motivation for his engagement was his systematic orientation toward the attainment of personal goals. The instrumentality of the AW class linked to his goal of self-improvement and employability. Specific goals helped him proactively formulate deliberate strategies. To illustrate, the two excerpts below depict his strategies for addressing his weakness of communicating in English.

*That is why I initiated myself to take this paper, go to this class so that I will gain knowledge about writing academically. So when it comes to the final year, you will already get used to the technique and terminologies. (Strategy 1, Interview 2)*

*Ahmad: I know that communication [in English] is my weakness, so I try my best to meet more people.*

*Interviewer: Is this why you are doing this interview?*

*Ahmad: Yes. I am taking risks. (Strategy 2, Interview 1)*

Ahmad's goal of self-improvement was further supplemented by the cognitive engagement strategies which he employed to guide and enhance his learning and self-concept in the AW classroom.

*InsyAllah [God willing]. I will try my best to improve. And I'm trying. I read a lot of academic writing, books and journals, eBook or anything that is related to my academic field. I think it will boost and improve my confidence level. (Interview 1)*

## **The relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement**

When Ahmad was asked about the relationship between his self-concept in academic writing and his engagement in the class, he stated that the relationship was strong. His conceptualisation is shown below when talking about discussion and question and answer sessions in the AW class.

*Actually all these things [the AW activities] are helping you in your writing and in your writing ability because when you do all this you will actually have the motivation and*

*strength about yourself. And then your engagement, when you are active in class or having some sort of response in class, it makes you learn something new. So, when you have all this at least you can become advanced and improve. (Interview 2)*

Ahmad's data seemed to reveal that engagement strengthens the self-concept through feedback and forms of appraisal. In this sense, the genesis of a positive self-concept in academic writing and sustained engagement is linked with the inherent properties of academic writing and the learning activity itself. This perhaps explained how Ahmad was able to make decisions (e.g. taking the AW in his first academic year) which committed him to a particular behaviour. In Ahmad's case, he appears to choose strategies that he perceived would bring him success. The illustration in Figure 6.2 is Ahmad's representation of the relationship.

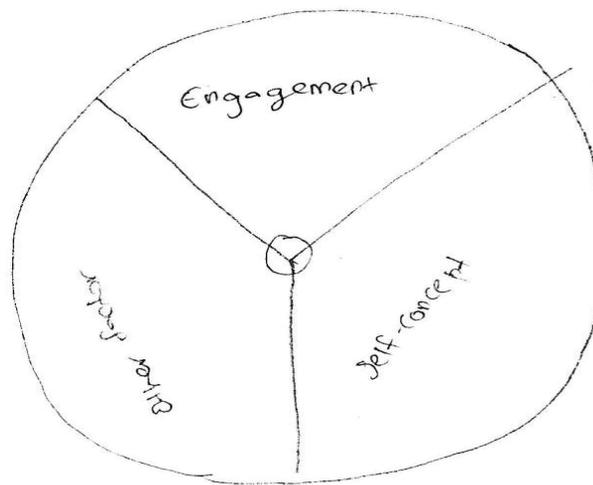


Figure 6.2. Ahmad's conceptualisation of the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement in the Academic Writing class.

Ahmad explained his visual representation of the relationship:

*If you look at this, it looks like a pie chart and there are three portions here, SC, engagement and other factors. I think actually the relationship between these three is all very strong, although other factors can be further divided. Engagement itself has a kind of good relationship with SC and SC will be implicated by other factors as well. So, when these three elements are being combined and being engaged all together it will become one thing and will make ourselves become a good person in the academic*

*writing. So that is you in the middle, you yourself will be a better reader, better writer and better presenter in the academic world. (Interview 2)*

Ahmad's view suggests that in order to be successful in academic writing, self-concept, engagement and other factors are necessary. In Ahmad's case, the emphasis on "you" and the idea of having to activate yourself was repeated numerous times in the interview, indicating agency as a pivotal component in self-concept in academic writing and engagement.

*It depends on you. If your goal is to become a good writer, you have to know which one is the bigger portion. For me, engagement is the bigger portion because you may have a lot of opinions or thoughts but if you don't have any experience and you don't have the engagement from the lecturer, you will not be motivated. Although I am busy, it does not mean that I leave [neglect] my academic responsibilities. It's my priority. I think it all depends on you actually. (Interview 2)*

Ahmad's self-concept in academic writing can thus be perceived as a medium which initiates, guides and sustains his agency in engagement, specifically his effort and behaviour in the AW classroom.

In Ahmad's case, three themes emerged as central in shaping his self-concept in academic writing. These influences are a combination of both internal and external influences, namely critical incidents from the past, instructor influence and content knowledge. With regard to his engagement, Ahmad's personal goal of self-improvement appears to be the key influence on his actions in the AW class.

#### **6.4 MUSTAFA: HOLDING ON TO MY L1**

Mustafa was a 21 year old Biotechnology student. Mustafa scored Band 3 in his MUET exams indicating that he was not a proficient user of academic English. He therefore took English for Preparatory Purposes<sup>2</sup> (EPP) for two semesters prior to taking the AW paper in his second year. In the questionnaire, Mustafa ranked his self-concept in

---

<sup>2</sup> English for Preparatory Purposes (EPP) is a compulsory paper for students who did not get Band 4 or above when they entered the university.

academic writing and engagement highly. However, in the interviews, he evaluated his self-concept in academic writing as “*average*”. Throughout the two interviews, Mustafa code-switched between Malay and English.

Mustafa hails from West Malaysia and is the third of seven siblings. His two older brothers are educated; one is working as a teacher and the other is currently studying at a different university. Having several younger siblings still in school, Mustafa explained that he helped them with homework when he could; especially if it was a Science or Mathematics subject in English. He clarified that it was his responsibility as an older brother to make sure that they did well in their studies since his parents were unable to do so. He explained, “*My parents are not educated*” (Interview 1).

Due to his parents' circumstances, education seemed to be regarded very highly in this family. Mustafa stated that at the age of 12 he was sent to tuition classes so that he could do well in his Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah (Malay for Primary School Evaluation Test). This investment paid off, as Mustafa did well in the exams, and was selected to go to a boarding school at the young age of 13. This residential school was religiously-oriented, and learning Arabic was compulsory. Mustafa consistently did well in his studies and, soon after the Penilaian Menengah Rendah (Malay for Lower Secondary Assessment), he was accepted by another residential school to continue his upper secondary studies and continued his academic success in the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (Malay for the Malaysian Certificate of Education).

Mustafa also showed great interest in the constant changes of Malaysia's educational policies. This was evident in the interview data in which Mustafa was depicted as having strong national sentiments. In this regard, it is likely that Mustafa's conflicting self-concepts explained his need to hold on to his L1.

### **Self-concept in academic writing**

Mustafa's case is very interesting in that his self-concept in academic writing was shaped by the learning culture of his past learning institution, conflicting policies and protection of his core self.

### **Learning culture of past institution**

In tracing his prior learning experiences, it soon became evident that Mustafa had undergone a gradual development of self-concept in English. In fact, Mustafa was one of two students in the study with feelings of ambivalence toward the English language. He acknowledged the importance of the English language but said this does not transcend outside his student life. Mustafa explained, “*English is not a big deal for me. I just learn it as my friends learn. I don't speak English everyday*” (Interview 1).

Mustafa recollected that it was at his last secondary school that his view, and thus his self-concept in English, gradually changed from initial desire to separate his self-concept from identification with English. The change was perhaps driven by his awareness of the utility of the English language. He attributed the change to the teaching and learning culture in the residential school. This environment and the teachers he had there facilitated his learning of English and contributed to his language learning. Using his own words, Mustafa described that the upper secondary school was “*more advanced*” (than his previous school) and the teacher they had in that school was of a higher calibre, *Guru Cemerlang*<sup>3</sup>. He also admitted that although he was initially sceptical, the prolonged exposure to English in this new context eventually encouraged him to participate in these classes.

### **Conflicting policies**

Many times in the interview, Mustafa expressed negative emotions regarding the English language. This sentiment appeared to stem from his strong sense of Malay identity which could be explained by his advocacy of the Malay language as a medium of instruction in educational institutions. Despite Mustafa's sentiments about the English language, he went along with the changes to the medium of instruction in the Malaysian education system. Nonetheless, Mustafa acknowledged that English as a medium of instruction for Science and Mathematics may not benefit everyone. Mustafa explained this by drawing from his experience of helping his younger sister with her mathematics homework:

---

<sup>3</sup> *Guru Cemerlang* (Excellent Teacher) is an award given to teachers by the Ministry of Education who are regarded as experts in their field of teaching and subject matter e.g. English and Physics.

*She is in Standard 5. Sometimes I help her with her homework. She finds it difficult to understand. For primary students, they don't have the foundation or understanding of the basic principles. In my case, we have learnt the principles [of Mathematics] and basics in Malay. So when everything was changed [to English] in Form 4, we just have to change the terms only. But for the primary students, they have to start from zero.*  
(Interview 1)

Mustafa also indicated that the objective of implementing English in the rural areas as a medium of instruction would be null and void due to the socio-economic gap. He recollected a story told by his brother, who is a mathematics teacher in a rural school, *"He [Mustafa's brother] said ... in one test, the whole class didn't answer any question. So the whole class got zero marks because they didn't understand the questions"* (Interview 1). What can be identified from this is that Mustafa's strong national identity and affinity for the national language, perhaps created a source of tension in his self-concept in academic writing. When asked about his thoughts regarding the change of medium of instruction (to Malay language) for Science and Mathematics, Mustafa responded *"I think it [the change] is good"* (Interview 2). He emphasised how it would benefit rural students (who are predominantly Malay): *"Because they [rural students] couldn't understand [Science and Mathematics being taught in English]"* (Interview 1).

Nonetheless, his own difficulties can be detected in the following excerpt,

*But now everything is back to BM [his content papers in university are now being taught in Malay language] so it's hard for us ... because we have been taught Science and Maths in English since Form 4 ... the resources for Biotech are in English and it's hard to translate [into Malay language].* (Interview 1)

In this latter excerpt, Mustafa reveals the difficulty of constant changes to the language for teaching Science and Mathematics.

### **Protecting the core self**

Despite external evidence that suggested ability in academic writing was important, Mustafa seemed more resistant to change than Ahmad or Imran, and he remained steadfast in his self-evaluation of his writing as *"average"*. This is an interesting finding, as it suggests that when a self-concept has been formed early, it may be more

less susceptible to change. He explained, *"I think I am still average because of the citation. I still have to follow and open the reference or the AW guide book to write citation, to do paraphrasing"* (Interview 1). In the same way, claiming that he is average could possibly stem from Mustafa endeavouring to maintain the stability of his core self (in regard to his self-concept in L1 and national identity). In fact, when he was asked whether he would describe himself differently in the future, Mustafa initially maintained, *"Still, I would say I am average. I know myself. Even if the lecturer gives me an A, because sometimes I do great work, I will still feel average"* (Interview 1).

Apparently, there was a juxtaposition between the instructor's and Mustafa's self-evaluation. Although he did not elaborate on this, Mustafa's fixed self-concept in academic writing suggests his preference for stability over change (despite external evidence that suggests otherwise). In fact, when asked whether he foresees change from being "average", Mustafa was quite reluctant to elaborate, but eventually clarified, *"Maybe not. Maybe if I become a lecturer and I have been writing longer, maybe I will be good or excellent ... maybe ..."* (Interview 1). This hesitancy seems to suggest Mustafa's attempt to maintain a coherent identity, but also that his self-concept is informed by comparison with others whose English is better than his.

### **Engagement in the AW class**

Despite his low self-concept in academic writing, Mustafa rated his engagement in the AW class as very high. His engagement seemed to be influenced by his immediate and future goals and recognition and acknowledgement of him in the AW classroom.

### **Immediate and future goals as catalyst**

Mustafa listed two main goals that he currently has in mind: to be a lecturer and to be a scientist. Mustafa seemed to believe that academic writing did not play the same role in these goals. When asked whether he felt that academic writing was important for his future, Mustafa initially explained, *"No, I don't think academic writing is very important for my future" [as a Scientist]* (Interview 1). However, later on he stated, *"I want to be a lecturer and I want to do my Masters. So yes, academic writing is directly involved"* (Interview 1). Although not all his goals might necessarily have an immediate connection with academic writing, Mustafa was very aware that both goals could only

be achieved through outstanding academic success. This was due to the fact that the university utilises a cumulative grade point average in which the accumulation of all grade points are divided into every credit taken. He explained: "*I have to work hard this semester and next semester to increase my C.G.P.A [cumulative grade point average] ... and for my future career*" (Interview 1).

### **Recognition and acknowledgement**

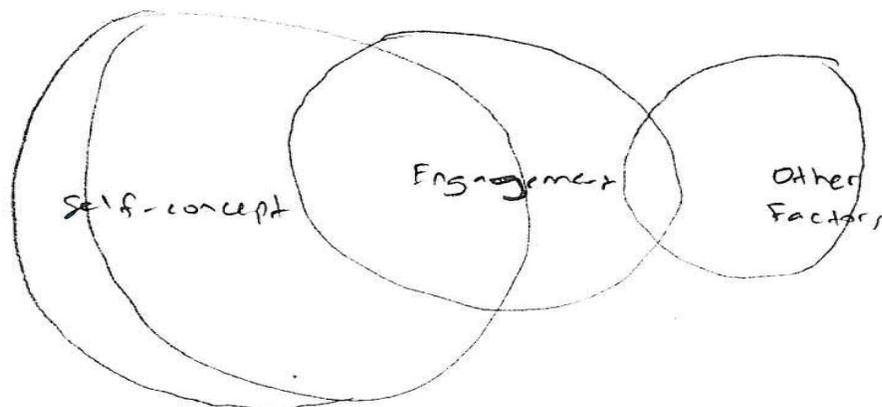
Mustafa appreciated that his efforts to become involved in the lesson were recognised by the instructor. He reported that his assessments had consistently received positive feedback and high marks from the instructors, and this in turn made him "*more confident about my writing*" (Interview 2). This confidence seems to be linked to his engagement in the class, as he was actively involved in answering questions, giving opinions and becoming involved in discussions and presentations in class. He explained, "*I can remember in one class, I was the only one who answered her [the instructor] and then she asked others why they were not as involved [as me] in the class*" (Interview 2). Despite getting recognition for contributions in the class, however, Mustafa did not want to be a 'popular' student. He emphasised, "*I don't need to be popular. There is no benefit. Maybe you will make a lot of friends, but nothing more. Learning is more important*" (Interview 2).

The quote above reveals not only Mustafa's high emphasis on learning, but also his satisfaction about being acknowledged by lecturers for participating in educationally purposeful activities. While, for specific tasks, he exhibited an individual orientation for engagement, at other times he had a more social orientation. In a language class where learners are continuously trying to improve their skills, such as speaking and writing, Mustafa would take risks and put in the effort for more public participation. When asked whether he felt anxious about talking in front of others, Mustafa admitted that the fear would always be there, but, "*It prepares me. If I keep presenting and with a lot of practice, the confidence will come and I won't be as nervous the next time*" (Interview 2). This quote appears to contradict Mustafa's earlier report on how he would remain average (despite getting good grades). This inconsistency suggests that Mustafa's self-concept in academic writing is susceptible to change when there are factors that he regards as salient (e.g. improvement of skills). It is also likely that his earlier report that he has an average self-concept in academic writing may have been transitory in nature.

## **The relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement**

Mustafa believed that a strong relationship existed between self-concept in academic writing and engagement. He clarified that his perception of the relationship between self-concept and engagement in academic writing is dependent on factors such as self-efficacy and proficiency in English. Having the confidence, skills and resources permitted him to engage and participate in activities successfully in the AW class. He related this to his own experience: *“People who already have the confidence to speak and to write well, always participate in class. During my prerequisite English class, those who are in Band 3, 2 and 1 in MUET don't seem to participate in class”* (Interview 2).

It can be inferred that less proficient students are at a disadvantage as participation in the AW class is based on English language abilities. This was further highlighted by the significance of self-efficacy in Mustafa's learning experiences. In addition to self-efficacy, Mustafa's gradual awareness of the utility of English sustained him throughout his academic experience, resulting in positive academic success. Mustafa's explanation indicates he perceived that there was a symbiotic relationship between self-concept and engagement in any activities in the writing classroom. See Figure 6.3 for Mustafa's representation of the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement.



*Figure 6.3.* Mustafa's conceptualisation of the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement in the Academic Writing class.

Mustafa explained:

*It's a strong relationship. The second circle is not smaller. It is the same as self-concept. Engagement is influenced by self-concept and other factors. I think self-concept plays a big role in engagement in the class ... especially in academic writing but some other factors are also influencing it. (Interview 2)*

Although this was not apparent in the diagram, Mustafa indicated the two constructs of self-concept and engagement as having equal weight (e.g. *“The second circle is not smaller. It is the same as self-concept”*) and, perhaps, equal roles in the relationship. When asked about what ‘other factors’ consisted of, Mustafa explained that it was, *“Self-confidence ... it's mostly confidence”* (Interview 2). However, he clarified that in the context of the AW class, self-concept played a bigger role and he used the notion of confidence as a basis for his engagement. Other factors (e.g. learning culture of past institutions, conflicting policies and protecting the stability of the core self) influencing self-concept discussed previously could also be subsumed in the circle. Although the intensity of his engagement appeared to be challenged by internal conflicts, Mustafa was able to engage cognitively, behaviourally and affectively in activities that would mediate the process of attaining his goals due to positive (past and present) learning experiences.

In summary, for Mustafa, three themes emerged as central in shaping his self-concept in academic writing. The significant internal factor was protecting his core self, while external influences included the learning culture from his past learning institutions and changes resulting in conflicting policies about the role of English language in education. With regard to engagement, Mustafa's immediate and future goals and recognition in the AW class influenced his actions and behaviour. The relationship between his self-concept and engagement was represented as strong, and there is some indication that it was influenced by dynamic internal and external factors.

## **6.5 SIEW LEE: FLUCTUATION OF ACADEMIC IDENTITIES**

Siew Lee is a Chinese student from State X, Malaysia. When interviewed, she was in her final year of her studies in the Faculty of Science, Resource and Technology and

was majoring in Zoology. Siew Lee scored a Band 3 in her MUET exams and as a result, was required to take a compulsory English Preparatory Paper (EPP) for two semesters before she could take other language papers offered at the language centre. Based on her questionnaire responses, Siew Lee ranked herself as average in both self-concept in academic writing in English and engagement. This resonated with her responses during both interviews. Nonetheless, Siew Lee chose to use English throughout the two interviews.

When asked how she came to be at this point in her life, Siew Lee reported that she went to a Chinese primary school where Mandarin was used as a medium of instruction and English was the only subject taught in English. After six years in this Chinese school, Siew Lee went on to a national school for her secondary studies, in which the medium of instruction was Malay language. Due to this change, she was placed in a 'Transitional' class (*Kelas Peralihan*)<sup>4</sup> in the national school, to help prepare her to use the Malay language in her studies. Siew Lee recalled that transitioning and adapting to different types of school were both challenging for her.

*Actually it was not easy to adjust. When it comes to secondary school [Form 1-5] we were using Bahasa Malaysia [Malay Language] and then when we came to Form 6 everything was in English. So it was quite hard for us. All the changes were very hard.*

(Interview 1)

The changes and inconsistencies of medium of instruction between past and present learning institutions appear to have influenced Siew Lee's self-concept and engagement in academic writing. This was evidenced in Siew Lee's interview data of her fluctuating academic identities.

### **Self-concept in academic writing**

Siew Lee's self-concept in academic writing appears to be shaped by the changes to language of instruction, English language challenges and the influence of her instructors.

---

<sup>4</sup> Transitional classes are aimed at preparing students from vernacular medium schools, for secondary studies in a national school, where the Malay language is used as a medium of instruction.

### **Changes to language for instruction**

In trying to understand the formulation of Siew Lee's self-concept, it was crucial to understand her past learning experiences. Her education in a Chinese primary school was her first encounter with the English language and this had greatly shaped her initial self-concept in English. Siew Lee believed that the impact of her early educational schooling was considerable, and the lack of opportunity for conversing in English had influenced her range of language skills.

*In primary, I went to a Chinese school. So that is why my English is not that good. We often communicate with each other [friends] and teachers in Mandarin. So we seldom speak in English. This affects the reading, writing and speaking. (Interview 1)*

Siew Lee's educational history, encompassing exposure to both Mandarin (six years for her primary studies) and Malay (six years for her secondary studies) as a medium of instruction, implies she may have had to reconstruct and reformulate her overall and specific student identity and subsequently, her L2 writer identity. Such a major change may have affected her self-concept and this could be the main reason she chose adjectives, such as "*simple, slow and disorganised*" (Interview 1) to describe her self-concept in English.

### **English language challenges**

It also became evident during the interviews that the changes to language for instruction and the subsequent L1-L2-L3 shift had a decided impact on Siew Lee's self-efficacy in English: "*I used to participate in storytelling competitions [in English]. Now I really want to go back, but now I can't anymore ... at that time I was really confident*" (Interview 1). The fact that her ability to converse in English appeared to have personal meaning explains the impact on her self-concept and, self-efficacy in English on her overall ability to write in English. It is highly likely that the move between different institutions, and by extension, the L1-L2-L3 transfer led to English language challenges in the AW class, for Siew Lee.

In Siew Lee's case, the L1-L2-L3 shift also appeared to influence her self-concept in academic writing. She often mentioned that her ideas were in Mandarin and then she would translate or find the equivalent in English, as part of her writing process. This

was difficult and was made more time-consuming by her limited vocabulary. The challenges she faced in writing were not limited only to vocabulary and translation issues, but also extended into the overall text organisation. Siew Lee thought that using uncomplicated vocabulary might have helped her to construct sentences, but in a longer piece of writing, this still posed a problem. She explained, "*Sometimes in essays or proposals, when we write ... we just write what we are thinking. But after you read it, the first sentence is not related to the second one, and it is all jumbled up*" (Interview 1).

Siew Lee's proficiency issues, coupled with her lack of experience with the AW subject, not only impacted cognitively on her self-concept, but also affectively and behaviourally. Siew Lee described herself as "*poor and anxious*" in academic writing. She explained, "*I seldom do this type of writing*" (Interview 1). This suggests that academic writing was almost a foreign subject to Siew Lee. She also stated later on that the rules and conventions overwhelmed her: "*It's the rules ... actually everything about the rules. It is quite difficult to follow sometimes*" (Interview 1). It seems likely that, in previous institutions, the type of writing Siew Lee was exposed to may not have been as advanced or sophisticated as that required at university level. She explained, "*Since my English is not so good, when it comes to really formal writing you really need a good vocabulary and you have to be precise ... when you want to argue, or express your ideas ... that becomes the problem*" (Interview 1).

When asked what she typically does when given writing tasks, Siew Lee reported that her emotions during the writing task would typically be anxiety-oriented. She stated, "*I [tend to] feel stressed*" (Interview 1). Nonetheless, despite her struggles, Siew Lee acknowledged the importance of the AW paper as she stated that, prior to attending the class, she had no knowledge of what constituted good academic writing. She explained the benefits of the AW paper: "*AW is a good course because we know what to write in the body part of our research proposal. The paper taught us how to cite and quote*" (Interview 1), and "*It is quite related to my final year project (FYP) and it is quite important*" (Interview 2).

It was evident that Siew Lee acknowledged the instrumentality of the subject. She perceived academic writing as facilitating her learning since it was applicable to other aspects of her studies at tertiary level. Thus, the value of the AW class seemed to

relegate her difficulties to a secondary position. For this reason, Siew Lee's self-concept in academic writing appears to be rather malleable as it was amenable to both internal and external influences.

### **Instructor as an external influence**

A positive external influence on Siew Lee's self-concept, which emerged in the interview, was the instructor. In Siew Lee's case, the subject academic writing was made more accessible by the instructor. As a result, the subject of AW became enjoyable and fun for Siew Lee. Scaffolding by the instructor helped Siew Lee understand the type of rhetoric that was required for the tasks. Additionally, this approach also gradually helped her to become autonomous in producing similar tasks to those used for the assessments.

*The lecturer is quite good. She explains to us a lot and gives us work and assignments for us to do to improve our English. Our assignments were useful. First she will teach us about the essay and then she will give something similar for the assessment. So that was really helpful. (Interview 1)*

In Siew Lee's case, this external influence provided not only support, but also the resources Siew Lee needed in order to do well in the AW class. This support was necessary for her, as she had mentioned in her first interview that the novelty of academic writing combined with her proficiency issues meant that she would need more support than other students who were more proficient in English than she was.

### **Engagement in the AW class**

Siew Lee described herself as “average” in terms of the intensity of her participation in the AW classroom. She attributed this to several internal and external factors, which worked dynamically together.

### **The dynamic internal and external influences**

Siew Lee mentioned that she did actively seek help when she had limited resources and means of accomplishing tasks in the writing class. She explained that she would ask clarification from a lecturer, seek advice from senior students and discuss issues with her friends:

*[When faced with a complicated writing task] I think I will go and see my supervisor and seek advice. Sometimes my supervisor would give me books, papers or journals to read. He will explain clearly what you need to do if you have problems in your proposal.*  
(Interview 1)

Her effort to actively seek appropriate resources and her willingness to take risks is evident in her active behavioural engagement, such as seeking extra material from the library, despite being unfamiliar with the system. This is seen in her response when asked about her first-time experience:

*Interviewer: How was that experience? [Getting information for a writing task at the library]*

*Siew Lee: It's quite hard, because sometimes you cannot find the material.*

*Interviewer: How are the librarians?*

*Siew Lee: They are not as helpful as I want them to be. (Interview 1)*

Despite a rather unsuccessful experience, Siew Lee persisted by then seeking help from her classmates and senior students who were more 'experienced' in finding materials in the library. Siew Lee also drew on internal motivation for engagement. When asked whether she thought that she would improve her writing abilities, Siew Lee explained: "*Actually it has to depend on me. If I am really hard working, it will be improved*" (Interview 1). In addition, although Siew Lee admitted to experiencing boredom or laziness in the class, she would remind herself to continue trying. This manifested her agency in maintaining self-regulatory behaviour:

*I would still do it. I will do it. No matter how I feel. Sometimes you need to force yourself to do it, and sometimes friends will give you advice and [their] opinion but we still need to depend on ourselves. (Interview 2)*

### **Goals as mediators**

In the interviews, Siew Lee stated that her short term goal was to graduate, and her long term goal was to do her master's degree. She explained that learning academic writing was a means of achieving both of her goals, since she knew that she needed to obtain good grades in order to graduate and to pursue her master's. At the same time, Siew Lee was also very aware of the fact that she would face obstacles due to her level of proficiency in English. Her inability to express herself effectively in English impacted

on her engagement and at times, Siew Lee was unable to engage in certain activities, such as presentations in the classroom:

*As for me, I don't like to stand out. I don't like presenting but I enjoy watching others do their presentation because you can learn [from] their style, the way they present. I think I can learn from them and then apply it to myself. (Interview 2)*

Although she was not always able to participate, Siew Lee maximised the experience by learning from others. This supports the notion of peripheral participation where, in order to be an 'expert' participant, you have to start as a peripheral participant and gradually increase your participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

### **Peers as a network of support**

As previously mentioned, Siew Lee had a good support system that sustained her engagement in the AW classroom. The role that her peers played was important in maintaining her engagement in her course of studies. To illustrate, when Siew Lee complained to her friends about having to read such long materials, her peers helped remind her of her position and responsibility as a student. *"They would give me advice saying, although you don't like it – you still have to do it. So don't waste your time and start reading!"* (Interview 2).

It became apparent that Siew Lee's support system at university positively influenced her engagement in the AW class. These peers consisted of senior students and classmates who provided her with encouragement and sometimes the 'telling off' that she needed to keep her focused on her studies. As her friends were highly motivated and studious, Siew Lee emulated similar behaviour as this appeared to be expected by the norms of the group (the importance of hard work and doing well in studies). Her self-concept was also influenced through social comparisons with other individuals, as well as feedback and appraisal gained from the interaction.

### **The relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement**

Siew Lee believed *"a strong relationship existed"* (Interview 2) between her self-concept in academic writing and her engagement. When Siew Lee perceived there was a

lot at stake in a situation, she was motivated to engage in the activity. Siew Lee used the presentation as an example: “*Even though I don't like presentations, when it comes to defending my thesis or my research proposal, I have to present it. So I have to force myself to do it*” (Interview 2). The last interview excerpt highlights how the decision making process for Siew Lee was contingent on the value and possible outcomes of committing to the activity. This, in return, reinforced appropriate self-regulatory actions and encouraged Siew Lee to commit to a particular behaviour. Therefore, her engagement seems to be a product of her conscious decision to be engaged in purposeful educational activities. See Figure 6.4 for Siew Lee's conceptualisation of the relationship.

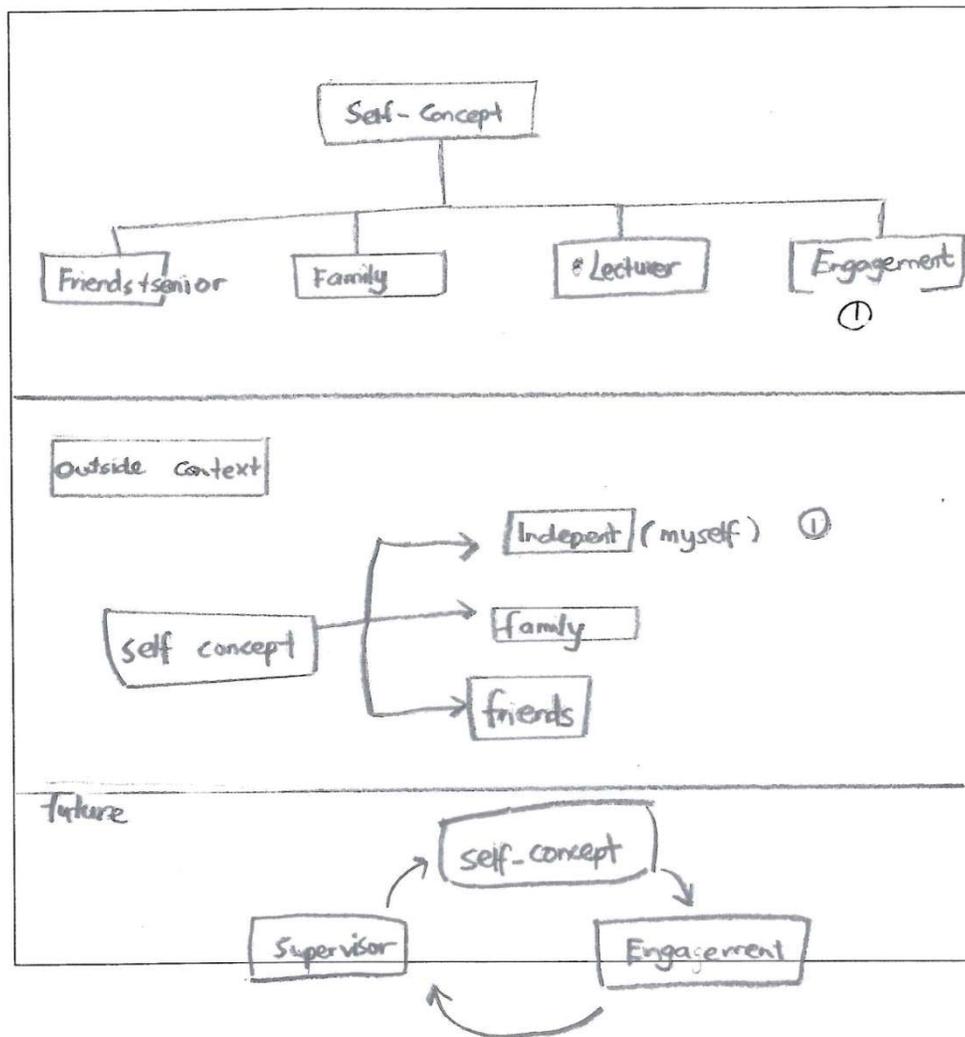


Figure 6.4. Siew Lee's conceptualisation of the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement in the Academic Writing class.

In Siew Lee's illustration, she indicated that the relationship may be different in the context of the AW class, 'outside' the AW class and her future. Nevertheless, it was interesting to note that most of the influencing factors for the two contexts, AW class and outside AW class ('outside context' in the diagram) were similar for Siew Lee. In the AW class, Siew Lee perceived the four elements as consisting of friends, family, lecturer and her engagement, all had strong links with, and helped construct her self-concept. Although friends, family, lecturer and supervisor can be interpreted as external influences for engagement, Siew Lee internalised the influences from these agents (friends and senior students, family, lecturer/supervisor) as part of her self-concept in academic writing. This shows that external agents can influence internal drive. Interestingly, Siew Lee also highlighted the engagement component in her explanation: "*Engagement is more important than the others [influences] because this depends on me ... either to listen to others or not accept. This one [referring to engagement] ... this is me, myself. So I, too, need to advise myself*" (Interview 2).

For Siew Lee, the relationship between her self-concept and her engagement involved both interpersonal and social processes. Individuals, such as peers, family members and supervisors, can be viewed as 'agents of influence' who impose regulatory standards. In Siew Lee's case, she internalised the support, guidance and advice given by these referents. Her case is also an example of students with similar dimensions of achievement (e.g. self-improvement or continuing studies at postgraduate level), attaching different causes and meanings to these, and how they approach tasks, which may also differ.

In summary, three themes emerged as central to shaping Siew Lee's self-concept. These include changes to language of instruction, English language challenges and the instructor's influence. In the context of her engagement, the distinction was not as clear, as both internal and external factors appeared to have a dynamic relationship in terms of their influences. Nonetheless, her goals and her peers both mediated and sustained her engagement in the AW class. The relationship between her self-concept and her engagement was reported by Siew Lee to be strong. This case provided insights into how external factors can lead to internal drives.

## 6.6 MAYA: A CASE OF PERSISTENCE IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY

### **Educational background**

Maya was a second-year student in the Faculty of Cognitive Science and Human Development. She was Malay and hailed from State X in the Malaysian Peninsula. Maya scored Band 3 in her MUET exams. This student spoke Malay at home and scored a high self-concept and high engagement level for academic writing in her questionnaire. Maya explained that she did not come from a well-off family and, thus, had struggled financially in terms of pursuing her education. When asked what language she preferred to converse in for the interview, Maya requested to speak in Malay so that she could express herself better.

Certain critical incidents in Maya's life had clearly shaped her general self-concept and her self-concept in academic writing. Having to move schools numerous times required her to constantly adapt to new environments. These challenges were augmented by a lack of support from her family. Furthermore, the relentless criticisms from her brother and the death of her sister just before the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (Malaysian Certificate of Education) examination affected her subsequent studies. Nonetheless, she was resilient, as she persevered and achieved good results in her *Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia (STPM)*, Malay for Malaysian Higher School Certificate. She was accepted to study at a public university and had never looked back. Maya noted that it was a conscious decision on her part to move as far away from her previous learning situation as possible. She maintained, "*If I had the means to go overseas, I would*" (Interview 1).

Maya also expressed many times that obtaining a degree would be a means of securing her future and providing her with independence. She also believed that education would further improve her family's financial situation. Growing up in a disadvantaged socio-economic background, the lack of support and the lack of resources available to her shaped her learning outcomes in her early years of education. In this regard, Maya's case symbolises persistence and determination in the face of adversity.

## **Self-concept in academic writing**

As with other cases, Maya's self-concept in academic writing was influenced by both internal and external factors. These factors include her past learning experiences, significant others as agents of influence and the value she placed on academic writing.

### **Issues from past learning experience**

Overall, Maya reported the most profound issues with low English proficiency of all the interviewees. She explained: *"Honestly, it is very hard to follow the rules, because I am weak in English. I am not fluent and I don't have much knowledge about English"* (Interview 1). Issues from Maya's past learning experiences such as proficiency and lack of writing skills, influenced her self-concept in academic writing at the time of this study. As she traced her academic journey from primary to secondary school, Maya acknowledged her inadequacy. She felt that her limited proficiency in English only allowed her to construct simple sentence, for writing tasks. As a result, she resorted to construct what she called *"safe and simple"* sentences in her writing. To further exemplify, in assessments, due to time constraints, Maya would incorporate a coping strategy, *"I will write as big as I can because I don't know how to make sentences. So my strategy would be to write as big as I can to fill in the pages"* (Interview 1).

Maya's early experience of learning and writing in English was one of the most negative of all the interviewees. In addition to her low English proficiency, Maya explained that a lack of teacher support in her other subjects very much limited her success and consequently diminished her confidence in her overall learning experience. She recollected: *"There was a teacher in Form 6. He was my history teacher. He criticised me in front of the class and made fun of my answer. I thought it [her answer] was OK for someone like me"* (Interview 1). She also recalled:

*For me in Form 1 and Form 2, I don't think I ever did well in English. It's not easy for me to understand. I still think my grammar was terrible. There was one teacher when I was in Form 3, he was very strict. He always forces us to memorise 10 words. Actually I don't really like it but because he would scold those who didn't do it.* (Interview 1)

These external factors seemed to have impacted negatively on her self-concept and thereby affected her writing abilities. To illustrate, Maya explained: *"What I learnt in secondary [school] it's too basic ... maybe I have learnt only 20%. So what I studied in*

*secondary didn't really help me in university"* (Interview 1). The amalgamation of her weak proficiency, the current contextual demands and her false sense of efficacy were manifested in a unique way. For example, Maya admitted to being very confident, but described herself as a poor writer in English. Maya elaborated on this:

*It's like this. I have an idea, but my ideas are in my first language. So when I change to English it is hard and it becomes wrong. I feel confident when I change it, but then it turns out the sentence is wrong and I have changed the meaning.* (Interview 1)

This interview excerpt seems to suggest that Maya's language issues are underpinned by a false sense of self-efficacy, which affect her English writing abilities. In translating from L1 to L2, certain meanings have probably been lost in translation, so she is confident in L1, but the idea that high concept in L1 will transfer to high self-concept in L2 is not useful in this case.

### **Significant others as agents of influence**

A notable external influence on self-concept in Maya's case was her older brother. As an authority figure in the family, Maya's brother was influential in most of the decision-making processes within their family. Maya explained that throughout her school years, her success was often compared to her other siblings and she incurred relentless criticism from her brother. In spite of this, Maya attributed her success in being accepted to study at a university to him, *"I think my brother was a big factor of how I got to university. I feel that maybe it was his way [his constant criticism and ridicule] of helping me"* (Interview 1).

When further probed as to how she managed to persevere, Maya explained that throughout her academic studies, she established clear goals which helped her stay focused and took the necessary path to get to a higher learning institution. The fact that she had to depend on her brother financially for her education propelled her to work harder in her studies. Maya explained: *"I felt challenged. I wanted to prove to him [her brother] that I wasn't what he thought I was, even though it was hard"* (Interview 1).

In Maya's case, it was evident that the formation of her self-concept was influenced by how she believed her brother perceived her and judged her in her academic abilities. Maya's evaluation of herself is expressed through the following quotations: *"I think I*

*am the type of person, when I get scolded, my motivation will increase” (Interview 1), “I think negative punishment works for me” (Interview 1), and “I know I am this type of person. So, I will find a supervisor that will push me or criticise and be angry with me” (Interview 2).*

Maya's statements, in a way, reflect her awareness of the necessary influences and approach, effective for her learning. The data also reflect the complexity of her motivation for learning academic writing in English. Although she had been exposed to adversity and negativity in her academic journey, this had the effect of consolidating her beliefs in the importance of education and her mastery-oriented hardiness.

### **Value of academic writing**

Maya valued education highly and this is evident in her self-concept in academic writing. She explained that, although the paper was no longer compulsory, she took it anyway because it was useful and relevant for her academic studies. Maya's commitment to the paper was so strong that she stressed its importance to junior students:

*I told my four juniors ... I told them to take this, but someone disagreed because it's hard ... they are not interested to take it [the AW paper] because it's hard ... but I personally feel that it is useful for our academic studies. (Interview 2)*

During the course of the two interviews, Maya explained that the reason behind her decision to undertake the AW paper was that it would guide her studies in the university. Maya further stated that the class was beneficial, not only for her final year project, but also to provide a basis that could be applied to her other content papers. Maya explained: *“When I entered the university, I felt that there wasn't any guideline ... only after this class, I discovered that all I have learnt is helpful to me” (Interview 2).*

It may be that Maya's inexperience in the academic environment was just another hurdle she had to overcome. Taking the AW class, and thereby gaining the necessary tools and resources, seems to have empowered Maya, not only in terms of her self-concept in academic writing, but also in her overall studies.

*Maya: I like the class because of the lesson. Because I know in the final year project I have to do something similar ... so I choose AW to help me ... as a guideline in doing my Final year project (FYP).*

*Interviewer: If you knew this would be helpful in other assignments ... and not just the FYP, would you have taken it earlier? Maybe in first year?*

*Maya: Actually yes, because initially I didn't know what AW was ... it is all about what I need have do in university ... everything was taught in this class ... I mean, how to write report, APA referencing style, how to write a good article, how to create the language. (Interview 2)*

### **Engagement in the AW class**

Maya's engagement in the AW class, specifically her behaviour and actions, were predominantly shaped by her goals; both long and short term. Her engagement in the classroom was also influenced by an interplay of cognitive and affective dimensions.

### **Goals as mediators**

A recurring theme of the second interview was Maya's high engagement which could be attributed largely to her desire to improve her English and learn to write academically. This mastery orientation arguably shaped her actions and was manifested in the time, energy and effort she put into her learning and into the academic writing-related tasks she undertook. Maya explained, "*My short term goal is to graduate. Although I know I will not get First Class Honours, I will be matured*" (Interview 1). Maya's statement seemed to indicate her goal of completing her studies was integrated into her self-worth, and subsequently, her overall self-concept. Realizing that she would not achieve the highest award, Maya acknowledged (due to her circumstances), it would suffice to graduate. This mastery-oriented response resonates with the reported persistence she invested in her studies.

For her long-term goals, Maya expressed that she wished for self-improvement in terms of proficiency. This vision of improved proficiency was closely linked to her notion of the future self and the work she wished to secure after graduating. This was manifested in the emphasis she placed on the learning activity (effort, time and energy) despite the challenges presented by academic writing in English: "*I want to try and master English*

*because I know my English is very simple. I would like to learn more. Plus, the job market requires graduates who can speak and write well in English” (Interview 1).*

The interviews revealed Maya's investment in improving and mastering English. This ties in with her attempt to acquire the resources, tools and strategies necessary for her future career, which would predictably be associated with prestige languages, such as English. Successful acquisition of this linguistic capital, in turn, would secure Maya's immediate and future goals. Despite her poor grades in the academic writing assessment, Maya persevered and enrolled in another language class to further improve herself: *“I got a D and I was very disappointed. So I am taking another English class to repair my grades” (Interview 1).*

### **Interplay of cognitive and affective dimensions**

Maya was one of just two students interviewed who explicitly disclosed instances of being disengaged in the class. In her case, this involved interplay between her emotions and cognitive abilities. Maya admitted to having a low engagement level, especially if she perceived the situation as not being relevant to her goals. For example, in one lesson which she perceived as simple and irrelevant to the study of academic writing, she questioned the importance and the value of the activity.

*In this class, I feel that it is very boring, because I don't think we need to learn about issues and different perspectives. I would question it ... do we need to know about this in so much detail? Do we really have to learn like this? (Interview 2)*

In contrast, when Maya perceived a task as being useful and relevant, this would result in a positive engagement: *“I will ask questions. I will really participate (Interview 2)* and *“If she [teacher] asks questions, I will try to answer. I will feel excited to learn” (Interview 2).* In Maya's case, her inability to engage cognitively would usually impact on her behavioural engagement in the form of frustration, anxiety and at times, despair. In this regard, her engagement was dependent on her capability and perception of the relevance of the task.

## The relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement

When asked whether she thought there was a relationship between her self-concept in academic writing and engagement, Maya indicated that she believed a strong relationship existed and that it was contingent on the individual. In fact, her interpretation of the relationship seemed to be greatly influenced by her own life history. Having to depend mostly on herself to initiate and sustain her motivation, her high efficacy and positive self-concept highlighted the centrality of the role of self in determining Maya's purpose and direction in her learning experience. See Figure 6.5 for Maya's conceptualisation of the relationship.

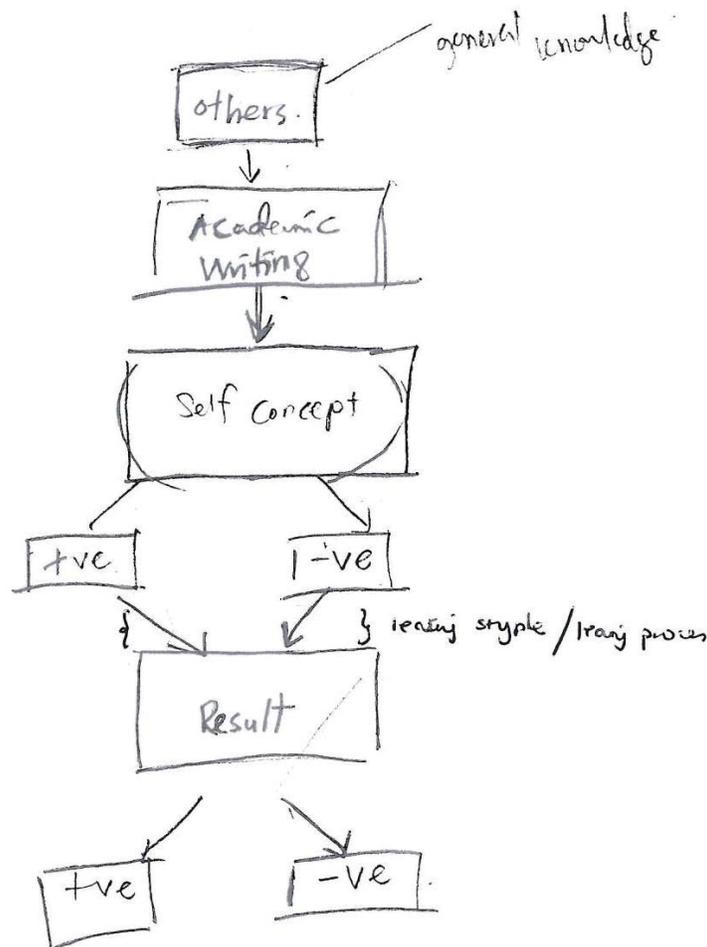


Figure 6.5. Maya's conceptualisation of the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement in the Academic Writing class.

She explained:

*In this diagram, there are other, academic writing, self-concept, positive negative result and positive, negative ... what I learn ... based on that self-concept, if it is positive, the result might be positive or negative. If self-concept is negative, the result can be negative or positive. (Interview 2)*

*In my opinion, it is based on [my] own self. Let's say that I don't have the knowledge in the classroom, how will I survive? So I enter the class to gain knowledge. But I still have to manage my skills to master the class, no matter how boring it is. I mean we can continue complaining and we won't change. It is still up to you to fix the problem. So it still depends on you. (Interview 2)*

In this sense, Maya was actively reconstructing her self-concept as positive and by extension, the behaviour, strategies and actions that reflect her positive self-concept in academic writing. Maya's agency is depicted in the interview excerpt. In addition, it appears that she perceived her self-concept in academic writing to be malleable and capable of change. Maya's illustration helped explain the relationship between her self-concept and her engagement in the class, specifically her behaviour and her actions in the AW classroom. As her educational history was infused with several negative critical incidents, this resulted in a mastery-oriented hardiness aligned to a particular set of learning beliefs.

Three influences emerged as central in shaping Maya's self-concept in academic writing. These influences are a combination of both internal and external influences; namely, issues from past learning experiences, significant others as agents of influence, and the value of academic writing. In addition, interplay of the cognitive and affective dimensions of engagement and the mediating role of her goals seemed to have influenced her engagement in the AW class. The dominant presence of self and agency in the relationship between self-concept and engagement in academic writing provides further insight into how the relationship is highly individualised.

## 6.7 JOANNE: SELF-IMPROVEMENT FOR A BETTER FUTURE

### **Educational background**

Joanne was a 21 year old Chinese student studying in the Faculty of Resource Science and Technology. Based on the questionnaire analysis, Joanne ranked herself as average for her self-concept in academic writing. In contrast, her engagement was reported as high. She used English throughout the interview and was relatively articulate. Joanna also reported that she was in Band 3 based on her MUET exams indicating that she was a modest user of academic English. Originally from State X, Joanne spent her primary and secondary school in a Chinese School. She stated that, due to the nature of the school, English was not given emphasis. In fact, English in that school was taught using Mandarin. Joanne explained, *“I didn't really concentrate much in school. I wasn't serious during study in primary and secondary. That's why, nowadays, my English is very poor, but I will try to improve my English at university level”* (Interview 1).

When interviewed, this student was in her final year of her major, Zoology. Although Joanne admitted that the course was not her first choice, she expressed gratitude (or relief) at having the opportunity to study at a university: *“This [Zoology] was not my choice, but luckily, I got the chance to study at a university. In the first year, I did not find the course interesting ... I now appreciate it more”* (Interview 1). Studying at university was evidently an important aspect of her life, apparent not only in her expectations of the university, but also in her maximisation of self-improvement opportunities. In this regard, Joanne's case symbolised her motivation for a better future through self-improvement.

### **Self-concept in academic writing**

Joanne's formulation of self-concept is shaped differently to that of Siew Lee's, due to her unique academic journey. As Joanne spent more time in a Chinese-medium institution for her primary and secondary schooling, the English academic writing challenge came later in life. It was only when she attended the matriculation centre that Joanne had to learn to adapt to several changes, in terms of the institutional culture, and also the language used as a medium of instruction. Joanne's self-concept in academic

writing was influenced by her L2 self-concepts, her L2 position in past institutions, the inconsistencies in the medium of instruction and teaching learning approach in the AW class.

### **L2 self-concepts as influences**

When Joanne was asked about her self-concept in her first language (Mandarin) she believed herself to be an average writer because, *“It is very hard to study in Chinese compared to Malay. There is a lot of vocabulary, it’s hard to score the Chinese paper compared to the other two subjects [Malay and English]”* (Interview 1). Having had experiences in multiple languages, Joanne seemed very aware of her abilities with regard to the respective languages. This is evidenced in the excerpt where her belief about the difficulty of writing in Mandarin was made on the basis of her better results for assessment in Malay and English. The data above seem to suggest Joanne formulated her self-concept in English by comparing it to other domains, such as Mandarin and Malay language. This suggests multiple factors influencing her self-concept in academic writing.

### **L2 position in past institution**

Joanne described herself as an average writer of English. When asked why, she explained: *“[I am] still improving. For the secondary school I never talk English with my friends ... except in matriculation before university level. In matriculation, there ... sometimes I speak English to each other but not often”* (Interview 1). Joanne attributed her similarly ‘average’ abilities to her Chinese secondary school climate, in which Mandarin was the major means of communication. Due to the dominance of Mandarin as a medium of instruction and as the majority of the students were Chinese and spoke Mandarin, Joanne did not use English to communicate. In addition to the socialising between students, Joanne commented that the teachers, themselves, tended to use Mandarin outside the classroom for communication. Therefore, affiliation with her first language and ethnicity seemed to have demoted the position of English in Joanne’s school. She explained, *“The teacher does not use much English to talk to us. So the students also talk less in English. Since the teacher is Chinese, it is easier for us to communicate in Chinese”* (Interview 1).

Nevertheless, upon entering matriculation (preparatory university courses), Joanne started to use more English to speak to her friends. As the demographic composition of matriculation institutions tends to be more ethnically diverse, this may have provided the motivation for Joanne to use languages other than her mother tongue to communicate. Nonetheless, her increased usage of English in this context may have also stemmed from her own realisation that she needed to improve her English. This may have been influenced by the fact that English was a medium of instruction for all subjects at the matriculation institution.

### **Inconsistency in medium of instruction**

One of the challenges that Joanne experienced during the preparatory level was the inconsistent use of L1 and L2 for teaching purposes. When asked about her opinion regarding the usage of English in matriculation, Joanne admitted that the adjustment and changes were very challenging. In fact, she mentioned it was a stressful and confusing situation. Joanne explained that, at times, instructors used Malay to teach, but provided handouts and notes in English. The lack of consistency in this class, on top of having to adapt to the new medium of instruction, she described as confusing:

*Actually, I don't like the teacher using two languages. If they can just focus on one, it would be better. Students would be more comfortable ... we can focus more ... instead of having to think or translate Malay into English, or vice versa. (Interview 1)*

The statement above highlights how the position of L2 (English) was ambiguous, even for the university instructors. The reservation indicated by the instructors, in terms of the medium of instruction, seemed to be a major source of contention for Joanne, especially in high-stake situations, such as examinations. This perhaps contributed to the proficiency issues that plagued her self-concept in academic writing.

### **Teaching-learning approach in the AW class**

Joanne seemed very optimistic regarding her ability to improve, and by the second interview she had set the target of becoming more fluent in her English and better in her writing after three years in university. This was partly because she found the teaching-learning approach and the related activities in the AW class to be very helpful. Indeed, Joanne chose discussion as one of her favourite activities prior to writing, as it provided her with the language and the vocabulary that would be useful in her task. She

explained, “*We do a lot of discussion because the teacher encourages us to speak more. Sometimes we present the draft of an essay and then present on the slides to improve our grammar*” (Interview 1). The input, feedback and appraisal from the teacher and her peers seemed to have positively altered Joanne’s self-concept in the writing class. She preferred a collaborative and social approach to learning as immediate corrective feedback was provided for her writing from the instructor and her peers. Consequently, her actions in the writing class were further enhanced by the support of the instructors of the paper.

### **Engagement in the AW class**

Joanne’s motivation to engage in the class was underpinned by internal and contextual influences in the writing classroom. In her case, goals, task value, as well as the critical role of the instructor, shaped her engagement in the AW class. All of these influences were evidenced in her behaviour and general outlook in the writing class.

### **Performance and mastery goals as mediators**

Joanne seemed to be very driven to improve herself, not only in terms of performance goals, but also her mastery goals. She stated that her short term goal was to write a good thesis and her long term goal was to become more proficient in English. Taking academic writing was her strategy for achieving these goals. As she explained:

*I took AW and EPP<sup>5</sup> [English for Professional Purposes] because it is useful for my future ... it is also because I enjoy it. All the things, all the lectures in the academic writing paper are useful for my future or for now.* (Interview 2)

As Joanne became more aware that her vocabulary range was not up to the demands of the writing class, she incorporated very specific strategies to help her in the writing tasks. These included spending long hours studying, reading newspapers in English and also listing potential useful vocabulary. It was apparent that her goals were a focus for her actions and behaviour in class. She explained:

*[For a writing task] I will set a timetable ... the date I should finish. Maybe the first week I will find the relevant information, do a lot of research and then, maybe the*

---

<sup>5</sup>English for Professional Purposes is an elective paper (like Academic Writing) that students can take upon completing their English for Preparatory Purposes or have already obtained Band 4 to 6 in their MUET exams when they entered the university.

*second week, I will start writing the points and draft. Third week, I will write the essay and finally submit.* (Interview 1)

The interviews revealed how Joanne's performance and mastery goals mediated her self-regulatory strategies, such as meticulously planning a concrete set of actions. Her self-concept in academic writing was thus, contingent on her cognitive skills and goals interacting with the opportunities and constraints of the AW classroom.

### **Instructor influence**

In the interview, when asked about her conceptualisation of engagement, Joanne listed: good communication between instructor and student, paying attention and asking questions. This proved to be her approach to learning in the class where she regarded the instructor's role of transmitting knowledge very highly. Unlike other students who refrained from seeking help from their instructors, Joanne would not hesitate to do so when faced with doubts about the lesson. She commented, *"The teacher is hard working and motivated. He will guide the students when they are doing their assignments ... step by step. He is very systematic and there is theory and application mixed together"* (Interview 2).

The high regard she placed on the instructor as the distributor of knowledge, and also the attributes of the teacher himself, clearly shaped Joanne's engagement in the writing class. She seemed to emulate his positive approach in this class and reciprocated by putting in the effort and hard work, and thus positively engaged in the lesson.

### **Task value**

Joanne's engagement was also contingent on the specific activities held in the writing class. When asked to rank the activities done in the classroom in terms of engagement, Joanne listed presentation as that in which she was most engaged, and tests or evaluations as those in which she was least engaged. She explained, *"I enjoy presentations the most. Maybe I can train myself to become more systematic. I mean, for the presentation, we have to plan before we present, that is how we can become more structured and systematic"* (Interview 2). Furthermore, Joanne maintained, *"I dislike the test. Studying is not only for test or exams. This [lectures] will push me more ... not the tests"* (Interview 2).

Joanne's words seem to indicate that she would opt for a delay of gratification, and savour the learning experience, rather than seeking the instant gratification of a grade. Even in situations which she perceived as a challenge, such as reading lengthy material, Joanne would persevere, as she acknowledged the value of the tasks and the subject itself, "*I would just try my best ... to reach [the end of] the paragraph until the teacher says stop. I would also read the article again after class to make sure I understand*" (Interview 2). This is indicative of how her behavioural, affective and cognitive engagement was embodied in her resilience and self-determination. When confronted with increasingly more complex tasks and learning demands, Joanne's goals seemed to be unwavering in shaping her engagement in the writing class, and this was also reflected in her self-regulatory behaviour.

### **The relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement**

Joanne believed that there was a strong relationship between her self-concept in academic writing and her engagement in the class. She explained this by referring to a reading comprehension task that she reported as challenging:

*If I put in more effort, maybe I will improve my grammar and my English language. If we are lazy, how can we improve the reading? If your aim is to improve your language, you have to make time to improve your language.* (Interview 2)

This interview excerpt implies that Joanne has a strong belief about the purpose and value of the AW class, which is linked to her belief in her capability of succeeding in academic writing. Therefore, she invested her time, effort and energy accordingly. What is also highlighted here is that the discrepancy between her future self and current self can be perceived to be motivation for minimising the gap. Joanne's specific actions and strategies can thus, be perceived as a response to her focal goal of improving her overall language skills. See Figure 6.6 for Joanne's conceptualisation of the relationship.

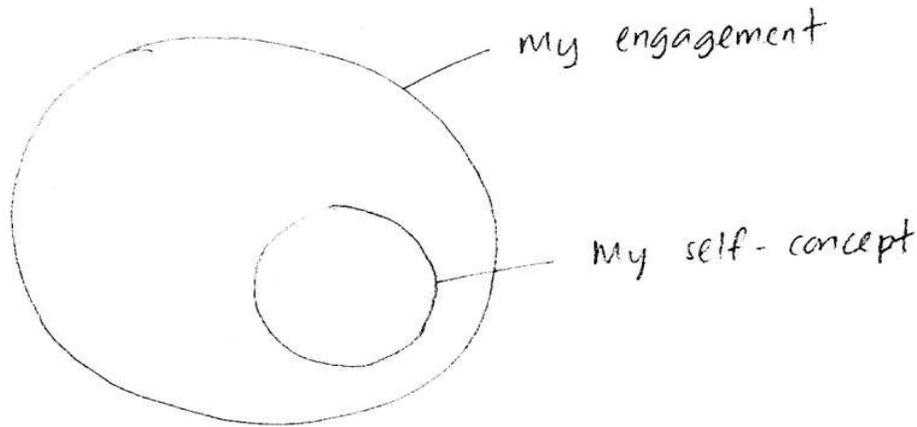


Figure 6.6. Joanne's conceptualisation of the relationship between self-concept in the academic writing and engagement in the Academic Writing class.

Joanne explained:

*I drew engagement covering the self-concept because I think if we have effort and commitment to do something, the engagement will push me to do something ... not my self-concept. Although I have my self-concept, I think I will not do ... engagement pushes me forward. (Interview 2)*

The statement indicates that Joanne perceived engagement to be something that is more dynamic than her self-concept. It almost seemed that the transformation or improvement of her self-concept was dependent on her actions (her effort and her investment). On the other hand, the usually fixed trait of self-concept seems to be only malleable if sufficient effort and energy was invested into changing it. Joanne's engagement, which was motivated by her positive expectations for the future, influenced the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement. This resulted in Joanne's strategic orientation to change (e.g. putting in extra effort improving her vocabulary and implementing a schedule for writing tasks).

In general, four themes emerged as central in shaping Joanne's self-concept in academic writing. These influences are a combination of both internal and external influences; namely, her L2 self-concepts, the L2 position in her past learning institution, the inconsistency of the medium of instruction in educational institutions and the teaching-learning approach in the AW class. On the other hand, her engagement in the AW class

was influenced by performance and mastery goals, task value and instructors. The relationship she depicted between self-concept in academic writing and engagement highlighted how engagement was more susceptible to change compared to her core self-concept in academic writing, which she illustrated as enduring in nature.

## **6.8 ELIZA: MOTIVATING ROLE OF AGENCY**

### **Educational background**

Eliza was a 21 year old Chinese student studying in the Faculty of Resource Science and Technology. When interviewed, she was in the final year of her major, Zoology. Eliza scored a Band 3 in her MUET exams and spoke relatively articulate English throughout the interview. Based on the questionnaire analysis, Eliza ranked herself as average for self-concept in academic writing. On the other hand, Eliza's engagement, was reported as high.

Eliza spent her primary years in a Chinese school and then continued on to her secondary years in a national school, which used Malay as the medium of instruction. In comparison to Joanne, Eliza did not mention or portray any major conflicts or tensions during her academic experience. After completing her *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM)*, Malay for the Malaysian Certificate of Education, Eliza then continued her Form 6 secondary education in the science stream in one of the oldest schools in the state. Despite being designated a national school, it was one of the many that originated as a mission school and enjoyed a very prestigious reputation in the state. Unlike the majority of the students in the study, Eliza did not go through a pre-university programme.

Eliza exuded a mature approach, coupled with a firm sense of self, compared to the other interviewees, as evidenced by the clarity of her goals. She weighed up her options (subjects and grades required for her particular degree) during her secondary schooling and made what she felt was a sensible decision for her future. Eliza also seemed to be the most experienced learner in terms of exposure to academic writing. This may be due to the fact that she had more exposure to English as a subject and to English used as a

medium of instruction for her other subjects (in Lower and Upper Form 6), compared to those who did a one-year matriculation programme. Thus, Eliza's unique academic experience appeared to have provided her with the necessary schema and capital for her university studies. In Eliza's case, her agency supplemented this established schema, in which it sustained her motivation of advancing her academic writing abilities in English.

### **Self-concept in academic writing**

Eliza's self-concept in English was shaped by a combination of the clarity of her self-concept in English, her success in past learning experiences and the challenges she was exposed to in her current learning context.

### **Self-concept in English**

Despite being relatively articulate in English, when asked to choose adjectives to describe her self-concept in English, Eliza chose average. She justified this by highlighting what she perceived as central in determining the level of her proficiency, "*I am not very good in vocabulary, and sometimes I make mistakes in grammar*" (Interview 1).

Eliza stated that her choice of 'average' to describe her self-concept applied in most academic situations which required her to speak and write in English. She also described the high standard she imposed on herself to be good or even excellent. It seems that her underlying assumption of a 'good' evaluation indicates her desire for perfection (no grammatical mistakes and extensive vocabulary), perhaps even native-like fluency and accuracy. Nevertheless, her evaluation of herself as having an average self-concept in English did not stop Eliza from participating in and enjoying the discussions and debates in the AW class. Eliza explained, "*I like debates. During lectures, sometimes we discuss a topic ... for example mercy killing ... and then we are asked about our opinions*" (Interview 1). Eliza's statement seemed to indicate that her enjoyment of the activities in the writing class could be related to her self-concept in English or another factor such as the topic that was used as part of the teaching-learning activities.

### **Success from past learning experience**

Eliza's accounts of learning academic writing in English reflected her success. This may be attributed to the fact that she had engaged in academic writing in her previous learning institution. Her past learning experience possibly provided her with the necessary schema to be successful in her studies. Eliza reported that she had always been very resourceful in completing writing tasks (e.g. making internet searches, using library books) and stated also that she had a good network of support, consisting of her friends and peers, who provided her with advice and encouragement in her studies.

Nevertheless, Eliza was very modest in her self-evaluation. She explained, "*When I took this course, the lecturer showed us a model essay, on how to write the essay. But after completing it, I think it [the essay] is still average*" (Interview 1). This was a recurring theme in the interview, whereby Eliza measured her achievements against standards which can only be described as high (e.g. the model essay supplied by the lecturer) and thus demanded excellence.

### **Current challenges in learning academic writing**

In addition to success, Eliza's self-concept in academic writing was also influenced by challenges she faced in the context of her situation at the time of the interview. When asked to elaborate, Eliza explained that only specific writing tasks were difficult and that her current challenge was "*not having enough points to elaborate*" (Interview 1). Although at times proficiency issues did hinder her writing, Eliza elaborated that the difficulty was due to her lack of information: "*Well, from last semester, mostly we write essays individually. But sometimes I feel that it is difficult and I have no points*" (Interview 2). Therefore, her challenge appears to have been cognitively-oriented and surpassed conventions of academic writing which she perceived could be mastered through practice.

Despite the challenges she faced in the writing class, Eliza exhibited resourceful strategies: "*First, I will jot down the points and then maybe I will also discuss with my friends. If there are any other words that I don't know, I will ask my lecturer*" (Interview 1). It seemed that at this stage, the role of personal agency intervened. Eliza's

sense of personal agency helped facilitate her management of sources, and subsequently, the development of her academic writing abilities in English.

### **Engagement in the AW class**

Eliza's engagement was predominantly driven by internal factors, her goals of improving her L2 proficiency and a career in Zoology. Based on the questionnaire results, Eliza ranked herself as having high engagement in the AW class. This resonated with her responses in the interview, whereby she reported proactive behavioural, affective and cognitive engagement, such as jotting down notes during lectures and participating in discussions.

### **Goal as a mediator**

Eliza was very aware that more academic writing was necessary for her future career. She explained, *"In my field I need to write a lot, so this [AW] will help in the future"* (Interview 1). It is thus, likely that Eliza assumed her own responsibility for studying and thus, sought help from instructors and friends, doing grammar and language exercises as part of a strategic move for self-improvement. Although Eliza did not state it explicitly, her thoughts and actions indicated her aspiration to improve and to write effectively in English. In this sense, her future self seemed to propel Eliza to meet the demands of academic literacy.

When asked to choose which activity she was most engaged in, Eliza chose discussions despite having reported that her proficiency in speaking was merely average. She explained, *"I think during discussion everyone can give their opinions and we can learn about new things. So we can gain knowledge"* (Interview 2). In this manner, the drive for cognitive, behavioural and affective engagement shown by Eliza perhaps reflects the magnitude of her internal influences. In instances where she observed that her goals (and strategies arising from them) were transferrable from the language classes to her core paper, her resilience was further reinforced.

## The relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement

When asked whether she perceived that a relationship between her self-concept in academic writing and her engagement in the classroom existed, Eliza's comments indicate that she believed a strong relationship existed. See Figure 6.7 for Eliza's representation of the relationship.

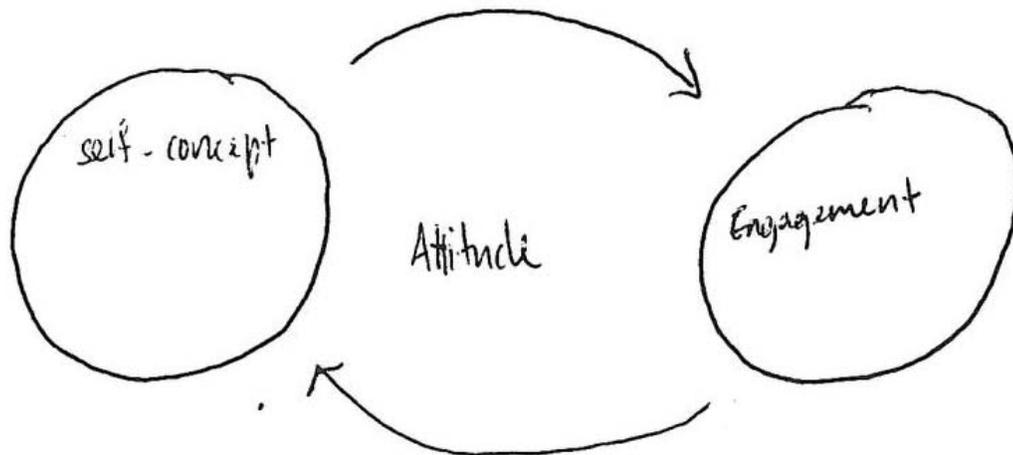


Figure 6.7. Eliza's conceptualisation of the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement in the Academic Writing class.

Eliza explained:

*Because you are the one taking the course, not parents and not the teacher, so, your attitude towards the course you have taken should be straightforward. I think they [self-concept in academic writing and engagement] will influence each other ... so, if during the class you want to get a good result, you have to concentrate and take part in discussion or assessments. (Interview 2)*

Although Eliza emphasised that her self-concept was an attitude, based on her explanation, this could be interpreted as her agency. The central motivational role of agency determined the intensity and quality of the relationship. Eliza's goal for self-improvement through increasing her linguistic abilities also seemed to reflect her motivation for the ideal L2 writer identity. Her unwavering commitment and investment in conforming to the rules of academic writing conventions may be due to the fact that

conformity corresponded with her future goal, as well as the existing community (AW class or institution).

In Eliza's case, three themes emerged as central in shaping her self-concept in academic writing. These influences are: self-concept in L2, success from her past learning experience, and challenges in learning academic writing. In addition, her engagement in the AW class seemed to be predominantly influenced by her goals. The way in which she depicted the relationship between her self-concept in academic writing and engagement highlights how agency played a central motivating role in Eliza's learning experience in the AW class.

## **6.9 NURUL: THE OUTSIDER LOOKING IN**

### **Educational background**

Nurul is a Malay student, originally from State X. When she was interviewed, Nurul was in her final year of study as a Biotechnology student. She reported being in Band 3 for the MUET exams and thus, was required to take English Preparatory Paper for two semesters prior to taking the AW paper. Nurul spoke only in a local dialect (*Bahasa Sarawak*) throughout the interview. There were minor code-switching instances (in English) when Nurul felt confident enough of the meaning, but they were limited to only words or short phrases. In the questionnaire, Nurul reported her self-concept in academic writing to be average, and she also described her engagement in the AW class as average. Her responses in the interview presented a similar view.

When asked about her educational background, Nurul explained that she had been accepted into a fully residential school in State X, after doing well in her primary school exams. In her Form 3 exams she continued to do well (getting an A for English) and was then enrolled into the science stream in her upper secondary school. Although Nurul's parents were very involved in her education and encouraged Nurul and her younger sibling to speak English at home, Nurul refrained from using English and would only respond in Malay. Nurul explained, "*I am just not interested to speak in English*" (Interview 1).

Nurul's quiet demeanour in the first interview could be seen to depict the stereotypical persona of the Asian student. Nevertheless, she was very forthright and candid with her answers throughout the interview. This was particularly obvious when she was asked about her experience of learning English and the tasks done in the AW class "*I can say I have never felt motivated to write*" (Interview 1), and "*As long as it is completed ... done ... I don't really care*" (Interview 1).

Based on the responses given, it would be easy to fall into the trap of writing Nurul off as an unmotivated student who showed strong resistance to instruction. Nonetheless, Nurul's resistance and minimal participation seemed to stem from the challenge of the rapidly increasing tasks and the complex learning demands of academic writing. She explained: "*Language feature [for academic writing] ... it's different ... we have to ensure formality and objectivity. The tenses used ... it's all quite tedious*" (Interview 1). In Nurul's case, her inability to cope with the complex demands of academic writing in L2 exemplifies how as part of the learning process, she became marginalised and became an 'outsider' of the AW class community.

### **Self-concept in academic writing**

Nurul's self-concept in academic writing appears to be an amalgamation of internal and external factors. Her formulated self-concept in academic writing seems to be influenced by critical incidents, the learning culture in past institutions, and protecting the stability of her core self, as well as her perception of academic writing as a foreign subject.

#### **Critical incident**

The issue of Nurul's lack of confidence in English reverberated throughout both interviews. This was a particularly interesting finding, as Nurul had gained consistently good results in her past examinations. In fact, she recollected an event in her secondary school during one of the assemblies:

*The principal said, 'you are the chosen ones [selected to study in a fully residential school]'. That made me feel very small among the other cleverer students ... especially when you hear other students speaking fluently. So I didn't want to talk ... because I felt*

*my English was so low ... I refrained from talking and that caused my confidence to worsen.* (Interview 1)

It became evident that an individual's interpretation of an experience is very subjective. Unlike Ahmad, Nurul's academic self-concept was affected negatively by social comparisons. To illustrate, by making a social comparison with other students who were more proficient in this academically selective school, Nurul's self-efficacy in the language appeared to have suffered a significant blow. The detrimental impact on her self-efficacy in English was further augmented in her university years. Nurul explained, "*When I see instructors, I don't feel confident when speaking, because I will wonder whether she or he will understand me. Because of the low confidence, I will avoid seeing the instructor*" (Interview 1).

### **Learning culture of past institution**

Nurul's initial interest in English was marred by the focus on exams during her secondary school. Based on Nurul's explanation, the writing curriculum was affected by an exam-oriented culture in that certain things were needed to 'impress' the examiners. Nurul exasperatedly recollected:

*From Form 1 to Form 3, the focus on grammar was gearing us towards PMR. In Form 4 and Form 5, the teacher stated that you need to 'up' your vocabulary. Your grammar has to be accurate, main points have to be elaborated for SPM exams. So I had a lot of problems. I kept repeating the same idea which became redundant ... yes, I struggled.* (Interview 1)

Consequently, this also seemed to demote the position of English in Nurul's perspective, as merely a means to an end, as evident in her response: "*Why do I need to learn English? I don't see the point. As long as I pass my exams, that is enough*" (Interview 1).

Nurul's struggle in learning English could also be attributed to the fact that she felt she did not get the attention that she needed in her past learning experience. Although this issue was beyond Nurul's control, it clearly had a negative impact on her. A typical classroom in her secondary school consisted of 40 students. She explained: "*Some students are close to teachers. No matter how busy the teacher is, because they are*

*close to the teacher, they will get the attention. But for me, I was not very close to the English teacher”* (Interview 1). The competition for attention seemed to be challenging for Nurul, who was already plagued by low self-efficacy. The inaccessibility of her teacher may imply that she felt excluded, and consequently failed to benefit from the teacher-student interaction.

### **Protecting the core self**

In the interview, Nurul reported her self-concept in academic writing to be average. When further probed about why she described herself as an “average” academic writer, Nurul explained:

*If I choose poor that means that I am very weak. Constructing a sentence for me would be very hard ... so average ... but not good. I am in the middle. I can create simple sentences. The bombastic vocabulary [her words]... I don't think I can. So I am average.* (Interview 1)

The statement revealed how Nurul's self-concept influenced her sense of commitment. By holding fast and protecting her core sense of self as an average writer of English, Nurul could make decisions that were consistent with her goals, her standard of what is acceptable writing and also her self-concept in English. For instance, she said: *“When I do my assignment, when I read what I have written ... I think the lecturer will be able to understand what I am saying. So it's not that bad, in my opinion”* (Interview 1).

### **Academic writing as a foreign subject**

As Nurul had struggled with English in school, she felt out of her depth when she first took the AW paper. She explained:

*There was a very big difference [between writing in school and writing in university]. In school we are told to write essays about something. But in university, the first thing I had to do was write a report. I didn't even know what a report was. It has its own format, its own language. The language or the terms ... they don't really care so much about the grammar, but when I read it back ... I felt quite bad ... it's bad.* (Interview 1)

It seemed that the novelty of academic writing was internalised in Nurul's formulation of self-concept in academic writing. During the discussion of why academic writing was challenging, Nurul mentioned the ‘foreignness’ of the subject. This new subject

which encompassed a whole new set of rules and regulations appeared to be overwhelming for her. Nurul commented: *“Why do I have to write based on all the characteristics? Why are there so many? Why does it have to be complicated?”* (Interview 1). The demands of academic writing in English were also reported by Nurul to be beyond her proficiency and writing skills, and thus, had affective consequences. This was manifested in some self-handicapping strategies and lower cognitive reflection, as indicated by her responses, *“Things that are hard take time. So I stick to things that I know”* (Interview 2) and *“I leave things to the very last minute”* (Interview 1).

### **Engagement in the AW class**

Nurul self-evaluated her engagement in the AW class as average. This was similar to what she reported in the questionnaire. Nurul's engagement in the classroom varied across dimensions, whereby she would comply behaviourally in the class, but did not engage cognitively or emotionally. Nurul's engagement in the AW class was predominantly influenced by her conflicting goals.

### **Conflicting goals**

Nurul's engagement is complex, as there seemed to be an internal struggle between her reluctance to learn academic writing and the realisation that she still had to pass the paper in order to graduate. This was reflected during the second interview when she spoke about her goal of graduating and finishing her studies. Nurul expressed that, as she was in her third year, she needed to be more focused and aim to complete her Final Year Project. As this was her most important goal, Nurul put in the effort to be more engaged. In relation to her most recent writing task, she commented, *“I will start, but after one paragraph I will feel fed-up and then stop. And that will happen many times ... so that will upset me. But then I will tell myself ... I need to do this ... so I will force myself until I finish”* (Interview 2). Based on the interview excerpt, Nurul's conflicting goals seemed to imply competing demands, where she has to betray one principle in order to pursue another goal. This conflict appears resolved in her statement: *“Final year I have to be serious now ... I have repented ... for my final year project, I will make sure I do my best”* (Interview 1).

In Nurul's case, it appears that a goal that has high value is the gaining of proficiency in English for assessment purposes. However, she was not motivated to pursue this if she considers the likelihood of attaining it is low. Thus, Nurul perhaps redefined the parameters of the writing task and aimed for a more proximal goal, where she would get immediate gratification (task completion or merely passing). Therefore, it seems that Nurul's English proficiency issues became an impediment which impacted on her efficacy and willingness to engage in learning academic writing. This resulted in her putting in minimal effort with activities and tasks in the writing class. For example, when Nurul perceived a lesson to be irrelevant, not stimulating or just valueless, she would disengage and produce the absolute minimum. She expressed this concept twice in the interviews: *"If I could be invisible I would"* (Interview 1) and *"I will try my best to be hidden. If I can be transparent I would"* (Interview 2).

### **The relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement**

Nurul was the only interviewee who expressed that the relationship between her self-concept in academic writing and her engagement was weak. This may primarily be due to her sentiments regarding the English language and her belief that the writing class does not hold any value in relation to her future goals. She explained: *"Only certain things that I learn I can apply back ... so not everything, and therefore, not a strong relationship. The relationship is weak because the application is minimal"* (Interview 2). Nurul's engagement in the AW class seemed to be dependent on whether she perceived the task or the lesson as having value. If it did, then this warranted her effort and participation. When the task was perceived to have no or minimal value, Nurul would put in minimal engagement but her behaviour would still be acceptable within the classroom norms.

Although Nurul was adamant that the relationship was weak, her explanation of this supposedly 'weak' relationship depicted otherwise.

*When you are confident about something and you want to show your confidence, your self-concept is high. Your engagement also becomes visible. When you are engaged, people compliment you and this will, in return, influence your self-concept. For example, if I have the ability to talk to my lecturer, the lecturer will acknowledge me.*

*As a student I will be identified, and I will get the help that I need and this will also build my confidence. (Interview 2)*

What was interesting in Nurul's response was her perception of engagement as becoming visible or to 'impress', in order to be acknowledged by the instructor (despite her wanting to be invisible so many times). This indicated that being acknowledged and perceived as part of the learning community in the classroom seemed to have a bearing on Nurul's overall sense of self and also her self-concept in the AW class. See Figure 6.8 for Nurul's conceptualisation of the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement.

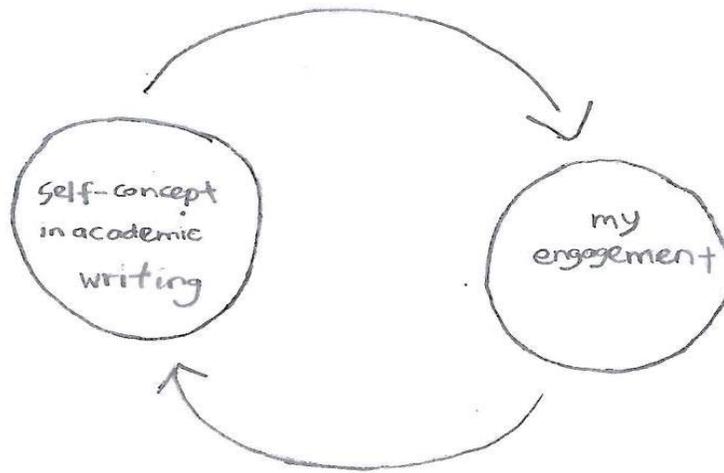


Figure 6.8. Nurul's conceptualisation of the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement in the Academic Writing class.

Nurul explains:

*If it is from here [self-concept in academic writing to engagement] to go to here, the student is ready. I mean this student is confident and can 'expose' herself. But in a situation [engagement to self-concept] when she is forced, then she can start building her confidence. (Interview 2)*

Based on Nurul's elaboration of her illustration, the relationship between self-concept in academic writing seems to be reciprocal in nature. It can originate from either constructs and is contingent on the individual's readiness. This was highlighted in the interview excerpt above, whereby Nurul drew a demarcation between a student who is "ready" (self-concept drives engagement) and a student who is not ready and within a context

that forced participation (engagement influences self-concept). Notwithstanding which construct drives the relationship, the reciprocal nature suggests that the characteristics of one construct can influence the characteristics of the other construct in the cycle (as they revolve in sequence). This aspect is apparent in Nurul's case study in that her negative self-concept influences the characteristics of her engagement in the AW class.

In Nurul's case, a combination of internal and external themes emerged as central in shaping her self-concept in academic writing. These influences were critical incidents from the past, the learning culture of past institutions, protecting the core self, and academic writing as a foreign subject. In addition, her engagement in the AW class appeared to be influenced by her conflicting goals. The depicted relationship was reciprocal.

## **6.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

In this chapter, the individual case study accounts described how the eight interviewees each uniquely conceptualised their self-concept in academic writing, their engagement in the AW class and the relationship between the two constructs in the writing classroom. However, there were also some factors that were common to the cases. The case studies revealed how the socio-historical context of Malaysia influenced the students' self-concept in academic writing and their engagement in the AW class. In particular, students' learning experience in the AW class appears to be greatly shaped by educational issues they all faced (e.g. changes in the policy regarding the medium of instruction and different types of learning institutions). The data revealed not only commonalities, but also varying levels of differentiation as to what each case considered as salient influences. Self-concept and engagement not only overlapped, but also seemed to drive each other, indicating the dynamic nature of both constructs for these students. Tables 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4 present the summary of the emerging themes from the qualitative results.

Table 6.2

*Summary of Emerging Themes from Self-concept in Academic Writing*

<p><i>Internal influences</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interest in L2</li> <li>• The influence of other self-concepts (L1, L2 and L3)</li> <li>• Language learning self beliefs (LLSB)</li> <li>• Critical incidents</li> <li>• Value of academic writing</li> <li>• Past learning experience (success and failure)</li> <li>• Protection of core self</li> </ul>	<p><i>External influences</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Content knowledge</li> <li>• Academic writing as a foreign subject</li> <li>• English language challenges</li> <li>• L2 position in past learning institution</li> <li>• Teaching-Learning approach in the AW class</li> <li>• Learning culture of past institution</li> <li>• Socio-historical factors</li> <li>• Conflicting policies</li> <li>• Significant others as agents of influence (instructors, family members)</li> </ul>
<p><i>Nature of self-concept</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developmental</li> <li>• Susceptible to internal and external influences</li> <li>• Integral to the motivational process</li> </ul>	

Table 6.3

*Summary of Emerging Themes from Student Engagement in the AW Class*

<p><i>Reasons for engagement</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performance and mastery goals as mediators</li> <li>• Immediate and future goals as catalyst</li> <li>• Value of academic writing</li> <li>• Task value</li> <li>• Goals of self-improvement</li> <li>• Self-concept in academic writing</li> </ul>	<p><i>Influences on engagement</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peers as a network of support</li> <li>• Instructor influence (e.g. recognition and acknowledgment)</li> <li>• Institutional support</li> </ul>
---	---

Despite the different drivers in the relationship between self-concept and engagement in the AW class, there was an overwhelming consensus regarding the strong link between students' self-concept in academic writing and their engagement in the AW class. In a variety of ways, the working of the relationship seemed to be reciprocal and involved a

strategic orientation to change. Further discussion of the qualitative themes that emerged is presented in Chapter Seven.

Table 6.4

*Summary of Emerging Themes from the Relationship between Self-concept in Academic Writing and Student Engagement in the AW Class*

<p><i>Nature of the relationship</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Strong</li><li>• Reciprocal</li><li>• Different drivers</li><li>• Links self, context, and engagement</li><li>• Developmental</li></ul>	<p><i>Challenges to the relationship</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• L2 issues ( proficiency)</li><li>• Conflicting identities (L1-L2-L3)</li><li>• Academic writing conventions</li><li>• Foreignness of academic writing</li><li>• Legitimacy issues of participation</li></ul>
--	---

## CHAPTER SEVEN

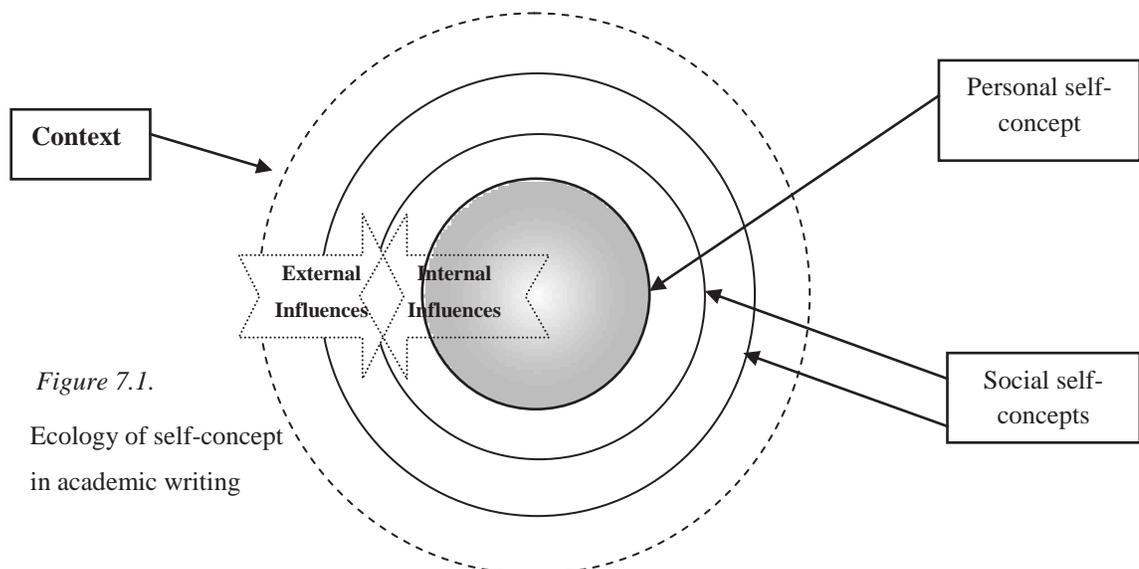
### QUALITATIVE DISCUSSION

#### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

The current chapter presents discussion of the in-depth qualitative findings, with particular emphasis on each of the research questions. Responses to the first and second research questions, which aimed to explore Malaysian learners' self-concept in academic writing and its respective influences, are discussed in Section 7.2. Responses to the third research question which aimed to explore the influences on student engagement in the AW class are discussed in Section 7.3. Responses to the final research question, which focused on exploring the nature of the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and student engagement, are discussed in Sections 7.4 and 7.5. In this chapter, the discussion is supported by interview excerpts which were coded based on the case study participant and the interview session (e.g. [Imran, Interview 1]). The discussion opens by suggesting that there is an ecology of self-concept in academic writing.

#### 7.2 ECOLOGY OF SELF-CONCEPT IN ACADEMIC WRITING

The qualitative data in Chapter Six appears to indicate that multiple influences are impacting on the formulation of Malaysian learners' self-concept in academic writing. These can be represented as internal and external influences within the ecology of the self and which shape self-concept in academic writing. Figure 7.1 illustrates this process.



*Figure 7.1.*  
Ecology of self-concept  
in academic writing

In this ecology, the individual's self is central. It is made up of the personal and social self-concepts. The personal self-concept represents the individuality and uniqueness of each student and self-concept in academic writing (shaded circle) is a component of this personal self-concept. The outer layers consist of the social selves. The social self-concept is influenced by the students' interpersonal and intergroup aspect of their self-concepts. The multiple identities within the self-concept indicate how students can be individuals and social group members at the same time. The notion of a layered self-concept is also supported by Brewer and Pierce (2005), Deaux (1992), Oyserman (2004) and Roccas and Brewer (2002). Nevertheless, this current study adds the notion of context (as illustrated by the dotted lines), as a significant factor capable of influencing the fluidity of social and personal self-concepts. Furthermore, the multiple circles are indicative that there may be an infinite number of selves existing in this individual's ecology.

Influences linked to the internal factors, which appear to be central to learners' self-concept in academic writing will be discussed first, followed by external factors.

### **Internal factors**

Results from the study suggest the internal factors which contribute to the learner's ecology of self-concept in academic writing are an amalgamation of the learner's past, present and anticipated future learning experiences which shape his/her language learning self beliefs, other self-concepts and future self.

### **Language learning self beliefs as instruments of self-concept**

Students' language learning self beliefs (LLSBs) also influenced their self-concepts in academic writing. In particular, students' different past and present learning experiences appear to shape their language learning self beliefs and hence their specific self-concepts in the AW context in various ways.

In the AW class, LLSBs could affect the self-concept negatively, as indicated by students' conflicted identities and the nature of the strategies that they reportedly adopted in the AW class. One example was Nurul's lack of conviction regarding the value of learning academic writing in English (e.g. "*Why do I need to learn English? I*

*don't see the point*" [Nurul, Interview 1]). Nurul's statement reflects the influence of this LLSB: *"I can say I have never felt motivated to write"* (Nurul, Interview 1). In Nurul's case, it appears that this LLSB also permeated her motivation and learning approach and as a result she procrastinated and put in minimal effort in the AW class. These findings, possibly reflect Rajadurai's (2010) study, in which the Malay learners' 'conflicting ideologies' and beliefs about the English language resulted in resistance and struggle as part of their learning experience (e.g. refusal or limited use of English).

The conflict in Nurul's case may be due to the fact that she was unable to identify with the aims represented by the AW class or the objectives of the institution. Consequently, this conflict influenced her actions and further shaped her beliefs in the AW class in a negative manner (e.g. procrastination and trivialising learning AW in L2). Nurul's case thus supports Barceló's (2003) argument, "identity is interrelated with learning and with beliefs, since beliefs helps [sic] individuals to identify with ... and form groups [based on] social systems" (Barcelos, 2003, p. 192). Since Nurul did not express any sense of affiliation with the English language, her LLSBs appeared to exert a strong influence on her learning approach in the AW class. Thus, in the Malaysian tertiary context, it is probable that certain LLSBs may be counter-productive for academic literacy acquisition (in L2) in the AW class, as depicted in Nurul's case.

Nonetheless, there were cases in which students' LLSBs appear to be favourable for academic literacy acquisition and thus influence their self-concepts in academic writing in a positive way. The students also referred to other self-concepts (specifically L1 in Malay or Mandarin) and L2 self-concepts (English) that influenced their self-concepts in academic writing. Eliza, for example, mentioned that her academic writing skills were just average because she still made vocabulary and grammar mistakes in English. Joanne, on the other hand, chose 'average' to describe her self-concept in academic writing after making comparisons with her self-concepts in Mandarin and Malay. She explained: *"It's hard to score [getting a good grade in] the Chinese paper compared to the other two subjects [Malay and English]"* (Joanne, Interview 1). These other self-concepts also contributed to their efficacy in L2 and their L2 writing. This was observable in students' reports of how they are gradually doing well in the AW-related tasks (e.g. Ahmad, Imran, Siew Lee and Joanne), and subsequently becoming more

engaged in the AW class. Thus, the cases above also provide evidence of multiple factors influencing learners' self-concept in academic writing.

The findings on students' LLSBs also demonstrate their inclination towards the English language. The fact that the majority of these students (except Maya – Humanities) were based in the Sciences (e.g. Biotechnology and Zoology) and that they had all learned Science and Mathematics in English in secondary school (2 years) and pre-university levels (1-2 years) may explain the inclination. This is consistent with research by Ismail and colleagues (2010) who found that students' preference for English as a medium of instruction for science and mathematics varied due to: (i) the length of students' exposure to English in secondary school and pre-university, and (ii) the faculties that the students were enrolled in at the university. In this current study, that the majority of the students were in the Sciences, and thus, medium of instruction was English, and that their learning resources (e.g. textbook and research articles) were mainly in English may provide partial explanation for their LLSB in the AW class and nature of their inclination towards English.

### **The influence of other internalised self-concepts**

Other self-concepts in this study that emerged were self-concept in the discipline of study (e.g. academic major of Biotechnology), in particular self-efficacy in that discipline. Ahmad explained how these other self-concepts positively influenced his self-concept in academic writing, *“If you are a Biotechnology student, of course you have a lot of information about the Biotechnology field. You may write something good about your essay in academic writing”* (Ahmad, Interview 1). Thus, broader academic self-efficacy beliefs appear to inform and further influence learners' self-concept in academic writing (in a positive way), such as when learners have mastery knowledge of their respective academic major (e.g. Ahmad). In particular, Ahmad's conviction regarding his ability to succeed in the AW tasks appears to be strengthened by his knowledge of Biotechnology. Ahmad's case provides a strong link to a recent study by Bliuc et al. (2011) who found that “students who have a strong identity within their discipline of study (reflected by stronger identification with the discipline content) are more likely to engage in a deep approach to learning” (pp. 427-428).

The findings in this study extend the current literature on how self-efficacy beliefs can affect academic achievement (Caprara, Vecchione, Alessandri, Gerbino, & Barbaranelli, 2011; Klassen, 2010). For example, this study revealed how self-efficacy beliefs not only influenced learners towards self-regulated learning, but also consistently sustained self-regulated learning strategies (e.g. Ahmad and Imran) for the duration of the AW course. This in turn, informed learners' self-concepts and mediated further action and behaviour in the AW class. When compared to those students who had negative academic writing or other subject content self-efficacy beliefs (e.g. Nurul and Maya), the findings suggest that other self-concepts have a dynamic interaction with self-concept and this therefore suggests that the relationship may indeed be reciprocal.

### **The impact of future self**

The impact of future self on students' self-concepts in academic writing was evident in their reports on the instrumental value of learning academic writing in English. Their assertion that English has an 'academic function' offer further evidence of this. For example, Mustafa and Siew Lee stated that it was important for them to do well in the AW class, as it would contribute to their masters' degrees. Maya and Ahmad, on the other hand, both reported that academic writing would further enhance their performance in other content papers. Although Joanne and Eliza did not specifically state that academic literacy in L2 would be beneficial for a postgraduate degree or job opportunities, both acknowledged that it was useful for their future. Therefore, it is probable that students' self-concept in academic writing will be more favourable if students perceive academic writing as having functionality in regard to their academic studies, increased communicative competence in English and also future careers. In the context of this study, learners' higher instrumental motivation (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1991) tends to supersede students lower integrative motivation. This contradicts Gardner and MacIntyre's (1991) view that integrative motivation is more important in a formal learning environment for second language learners. Gardner has described integrative motivation as students' willingness to identify with aspects of the new language community. This openness tends to stem from the need to interact with the new language community. In the study however, the rewards offered by instrumental motivation in terms of career and also increased academic literacy appears to supersede the motive of identification with the L2 language community.

Based on the interview data, all students, to varying degrees, wanted to minimise the discrepancy between their current self and their future selves, through either short-term or long terms goals. Students who reported a specific and positive future self appeared to be more engaged in their AW class and they indicated more persistence on task. For example, despite the reported difficulties in the AW paper, Maya enrolled in the class *“because I know in the final year project I have to do something similar ... so I choose AW to help me ... as a guideline in doing my final year project”* (Maya, Interview 1). On the other hand, Nurul, who saw no future use for academic writing had low motivation in the AW class. It is probable that the preferred future self reflects the choice of self students wish to represent in the AW class. Therefore, in this study, the future self appears to directly influence motivation and hence, behaviour. In fact, the future self in the AW class seemed to create a nexus between engagement and persistence. This will be discussed in detail in ‘The trajectory of self-concept in academic writing’.

### **External factors**

In the ecology of self-concept in academic writing in Figure 7.1, not only internal, but also external factors played a role in shaping learners' self-concepts in academic writing. The findings in this study, suggest that multiple external factors in the educational context, such as authority figures, the learning culture of past institutions, L2 position in a past learning institution, inconsistencies in the past and present media of instruction, and constant educational flux, have a considerable and lasting influence on the formulation of learners' self-concept. Each of the external influences identified in the study will now be discussed.

#### **Authority figures as internalised agents of influence**

All of the students had authority figures which they interacted with and gained feedback from. These authority figures included parents or significant family members, peers and teachers. Feedback gained from these agents, appeared to influence learners' self-concepts in academic writing differently as seen by distinct ways in which learners internalise the influence.

In Maya's case, a family member appeared to play the role of a critic which directly shaped her self-concept in academic writing. For instance, Maya attributed her success

in being accepted to study at a university to her brother. She explained: “*I wanted to prove to him [her brother] that I wasn't what he thought I was, even though it was hard*” (Maya, Interview 1). In Maya's case, the formation of her self-concept appears to be influenced by how she believed her brother perceived her and judged her in her academic abilities (see Section 6.6). Consequently, Maya internalises her brother's perception of her, as evidenced in the following excerpt: “*I think I am the type of person, when I get scolded [by an authority figure], my motivation will increase*”, and “*I know I am this type of person. So I will find a supervisor that will push me or criticise and be angry with me*” (Maya, Interview 2).

In Mustafa's case, his family's socio-economic status appeared to have a motivational influence on his self-concept in academic writing. His parents' lack of education appears to be internalised, and manifested in his high regard for education. In the interview, Mustafa reported the importance of improving his academic grades: “*to increase my C.G.P.A. [cumulative grade point average] ... and for my future career*” (Mustafa, Interview 1). In this manner, his parents' lack of education has indirectly shaped his self-concept in academic writing, especially how succeeding in the AW class could contribute to his overall academic studies and future goals. It is likely that the encouragement from his parents to advance his education as depicted by their act of sending him to tuition classes at an early age (12 years old) further influenced his self-concept in academic writing.

Further evidence of the effect of authority figures is seen in how teachers were regarded as role models by Joanne and Siew Lee. The quality of interaction with the instructor and by extension, the knowledge and skills gained in the AW class appear to shape Joanne and Siew Lee's self-concept in academic writing. In particular, Joanne mentioned teacher attributes such as “*hard working*” and “*motivated*”, which in turn, appear to shape her self-concept in academic writing. However, in Nurul's case, her inability to interact with the instructor, not only made her feel excluded, but resulted in a somewhat negative self-concept in academic writing.

In this study, the influences of authority figures appear to be internalised to varying degrees. These variations on how authority figures shape the self-concept are not completely consistent with Cooley's (1902; 1964) notion of ‘*The looking-glass self*’, in

which individuals formulate their sense of self based on the perception of others, and the feedback gained through interactions with these agents of influence. Nurul and Mustafa's cases provide an example of this disconnect. Despite having authority figures who promote the importance of English (e.g. Nurul's parents) and gaining excellent results with regard to academic writing abilities (e.g. Mustafa received an A for a writing task in the AW class), these influences appear to have minimal bearing on the students' self-concept in academic writing. For example, Nurul reported that despite ongoing encouragement from her parents, she was "*not interested [in English]*" (Nurul, Interview 1).

Notwithstanding the various ways in which students internalised their self-concepts, all the cases reported that an authority figure within an immediate context (e.g. an instructor) impacted on their self-concept in academic writing. Therefore, it seems that instructors in the AW class may be able to nurture and perhaps gradually enhance a more positive self-concept in their students. Evidence of this appears in Mustafa's case. In the later interviews he reported that the regularity of positive feedback from his instructor in the AW class, and recognition for his participation in the class made him "*more confident about my writing*" (Mustafa, Interview 2). This highlights the need for instructors to design and create learning opportunities in the AW class in a meaningful way. It appears likely that emphasising the relevance and value of learning academic writing in English for academic studies and for future careers could facilitate this.

### **The influence of past institutions**

The students in this study have come from various educational backgrounds and institutions. Consequently, their learning experiences with regard to English and writing in English in particular, may vary depending on the L2 position in the previous school and its learning culture. For example, studying in a fully residential school allowed Mustafa to have a *Guru Cemerlang* (subject matter expert) as his English instructor, and this appeared to have helped him to improve his English. On the other hand, studying in a Chinese vernacular school may have influenced Joanne's 'average' English proficiency level. She explained: "*The teacher does not use much English to talk to us. Since the teacher is Chinese, it is easier for us to communicate in Chinese*" (Joanne,

Interview 1). As a result, there were limited opportunities for Joanne to improve her English proficiency.

Therefore, the nature and type of the students' past learning institution appears to influence their self-concept in academic writing. This was also reflected in McInerney's study (2010) in which the educational conventions and the language conversational form which takes place in a particular type of institution in Hong Kong, greatly shaped the students' present academic self-concepts. Knigge and Hannover (2011) extended McInerney's study, and found that the social status and reputation of the secondary schools that students were streamed into, affected their subsequent collective school-type identities in a significant way (e.g. scholastic motivation and academic self-concept). This raises the issue of whether the type of educational institution at secondary level (see Section 1.2) in Malaysia could actually be detrimental to, or enhance, students' self-concepts.

Students in this study who said academic writing was challenging, also seemed to suggest a mismatch between the skills students brought to university from their secondary school experience. Maya explained: "*What I learnt in secondary it's too basic ... maybe I have learnt only 20%. So what I studied in secondary didn't really help me in university*" (Maya, Interview 1). Although it can be argued that this mismatch could be attributed to the different writing cultures (as in Harklau, 2006) of the two institutions, Maya's views seem to suggest a lack of preparation and awareness from the prior institution, regarding writing requirements for university. Writing in L2 and the lack of emphasis on academic writing in prior institutions may play a critical role in influencing students' self-concepts in academic writing.

### **The lasting influence of national educational policies**

The students experienced several policy changes with regards to the use of English as a medium of instruction during their academic studies. The inconsistencies of the medium of instruction between the past and present learning institution, in particular, appear to have influenced students' self-concept in academic writing. Understandably, the policy changes were met with mixed responses. Some students were able to adapt with ease, while others struggled. This struggle was evident in students' comments such as:

“*Actually it was not easy to adjust*” (Joanne, Interview 1) and “*All the changes [in language of instruction] were very hard*” (Siew Lee, Interview 1). The changes to language of instruction used in the academic setting may cause disruption to learners' present educational self-concept. This disruption has been reported in the literature as challenging (E. Johnson & Nozick, 2011), and it may affect an individual's overall sense of well-being (Usborne & Taylor, 2010). Mustafa's case, which was inclined towards 'self-protection' (Alicke & Sedikides, 2009), from what he considered to be a threat to his core sense of self (e.g. betraying his core Malay identity), provided evidence of this difficulty. In this study, these threats are deflected by actions that may imply resistance to change such as Maya's disengagement in the AW class and Mustafa labeling himself as an “*average writer*” of academic English despite getting an A in his writing task.

There were also students who embraced these changes. Eliza's prior engagement with (basic) academic writing for two years in Lower and Upper Form 6 (as opposed to those who undertook a one year matriculation programme), appeared to have provided her with the necessary writing schema and capital for her university studies. Furthermore, Eliza also had more exposure to English as a medium of instruction for other subjects in secondary school. It is probable that Eliza's acceptance of all the changes in educational policies was manifested in her positive disposition regarding academic writing in English.

It is also probable that the educational policies in which English as a medium of instruction was implemented to cope with globalization (Hashim, 2009; Mohamed, 2008; Yaacob et al., 2011), could explain why Siew Lee and Joanne had to accommodate the changes (which consequently influenced their self-concept in academic writing). Due to the educational policies, self-enhancement in English may be perceived as necessary by Siew Lee and Joanne. Thus “advancing one or more self-domains” (Alicke & Sedikides, 2009, p. 2) also became a necessity. The findings from the current study indicate the way in which educational policies can influence self-concept in academic writing. The impact also appears to vary from one student to another.

### **The influence of the present institutional context**

Students' interactions within their present institution also played an important role in influencing self-concept in academic writing. Students referred to the influence of instructors and the teaching-learning approach in the AW class, thus further highlighting how self-concept was shaped dynamically within context. Joanne, who in Phase One ranked her self-concept in academic writing as average, said that she "*took AW and EPP [English for Professional Purposes] because it is useful for my future ... All the things, all the lectures in the AW paper are useful*" (Joanne, Interview 2). This suggests that context (e.g. university or the AW class context) may promote (and perhaps enforce) certain salient identities. For example, there is the 'good' or 'proactive' student in Ahmad (e.g. "*... not just become a passive student and stay in my room and study. You have to be more active*" [Ahmad, Interview 1]). There is also the 'autonomous' university student in Siew Lee (e.g. "*It [writing improvement] depends on me. If I am really hard working, it will be improved*" [Siew Lee, Interview 1]), and the 'novice' academic writer in Imran (e.g. "*it [AW] is difficult to start, but after we write a little bit more and learn more about it, it is actually quite easy*" [Imran, Interview 1]). These identities are then internalised into students' self-concepts.

The above findings regarding salient identities promoted by the academic context in this study parallel the findings by Stoner and colleagues (2011) who stated that "identities are evoked only when there is a situational pressure to do so (or a possible reward for enacting such identity)" (p. 98). In Joanne's case, the reward may have been her increased knowledge of the language and also the transferability of the skills gained from the AW class to her other content paper. She reported that the discussions in her AW class provided her with the vocabulary that would be useful in her final year project. These 'rewards' appear to shape her self-concept in academic writing. Thus, it appears that students' interaction with the AW subject in a favourable environment could help facilitate a positive self-concept in academic writing. Joanne's case highlighted how the institution plays an integral role in understanding, and consequently meeting students' expectations upon entering the AW class. Additionally, this finding provides evidence of how self-concept in academic writing is influenced by both internal and external factors.

### **The influence of academic writing perceptions**

Students interacting with the subject of academic writing recounted the need for extended cognitive skills; for example, Siew Lee, Maya and Nurul depicted English as a new and 'foreign subject'. That academic writing was taught in English also shaped the learners' self-concept in academic writing. This was particularly evident in Siew Lee's case. She explained: "*My English is not so good ... so when it comes to really formal writing you really need a good vocabulary, and [to be] precise. So that becomes a problem*" (Siew Lee, Interview 1). In short, the external influences on self-concepts in academic writing suggest that factors in the current context may shape self-concept in academic writing in important ways.

The current and frequent interactions that learners have with the subject may also help explain why these factors were listed as influences. The highly academic environment in which the students are embedded may provide further cues to the centrality of academic writing at tertiary level. For example, since all of the students are required to submit an extended piece of academic writing in L2 (Final Year Project) as a requirement for graduation, it is probable that AW may gain importance, increase its perceived value, and consequently shape students' self-concepts in academic writing.

The following section discusses the interrelated influences of internal and external factors.

### **The interrelated influences of internal and external factors**

In this study, the student is central with multiple influences coming from external sources (present institution, past institution, the subject of academic writing and Malaysia's educational policies) and internal sources (future self, language learning beliefs, other self-concepts and authority figures). These influences impact on students' self-concepts in academic writing. The internal and external factors also appear to be interrelated in shaping each other.

Salient internal and external influences appear to be contingent on the social changes that students face as part of the process moving into a new academic setting. As these learners reflected during the study on what was necessary for them to be successful in

their learning experience, they reported that selective changes were made in their self-concept in academic writing. To illustrate, Siew Lee, Maya and Joanne identified themselves with certain groups and a network of students, who share, influence and reinforce individual identities. Therefore, it is probable that when learners are placed into a new setting, they have to reflect on, and re-evaluate their abilities, in order to adapt to internal and situational changes. In this new setting, the learners' self-concept may be questioned or reinforced as "part of the active restructuring of the ecology of the self" (Hormuth, 1990, p. 5). This may result in learners "making selective use of new elements that can enhance the existing concept of the self" (p. 5). As part of this process, both internal and external factors may be interrelated in shaping students' positive self-concept in academic writing.

Individual differences can make it challenging to identify salient influences on self-concept in academic writing. Knowledge of content in L2 may be part of this, as depicted by the case of Ahmad whose self-concept in academic writing seemed to be contingent on, and influenced by his knowledge of Biotechnology, his academic major. This field was perhaps his dominant student identity, and could therefore have been perceived as one of the meaningful selves that he activated in the AW class. The notion that different selves are activated due to contextual input is also supported by McConnell (2011) and Brown and colleagues (2009). It is probable that the ongoing interaction with AW and Ahmad's academic major increased the accessibility and relevance of this particular self. This example highlights how internal and external factors can be interrelated.

Learners also differently integrate internal and external factors into their self-concepts. This was depicted by the contrasting influences of authority figures in Ahmad and Nurul's cases. In Ahmad's case, a talk by a motivational speaker impacted positively and this influenced him to take a more proactive approach to his AW learning. Unlike Ahmad, a motivational speech during a school assembly impacted negatively on Nurul's self-esteem. This naturally raises the question as to why such distinct responses occur. The notion of the *pragmatic self* suggested by Kivets and Tyler (2007) seems to offer a plausible explanation. They argue that the pragmatic self "is guided by the practicality of actions and is focused on opportunities, resources, and other types of means that may be useful at the present moment" (p. 196). In the context of this study,

each student's pragmatic self appeared to be activated through learning demands and the availability of learning opportunities and resources. Ahmad's self-efficacy in L2 and his enhanced ability to participate in the AW class seemed to shape his self-concept in a positive manner. Conversely, limited English proficiency and lack of self-efficacy (in L2), appears to have negatively shaped Nurul's self-concept in academic writing.

Figure 7.2 summarizes the internal and external factors that influence self-concept in academic writing in this study. Self-concept in academic writing is represented by the figure in the center. As the individual is central, this also shows how internal and external influences appear to be interrelated (as indicated by the dotted lines in Figure 7.2) in influencing learners' self-concept in academic writing and do not appear to function in isolation.

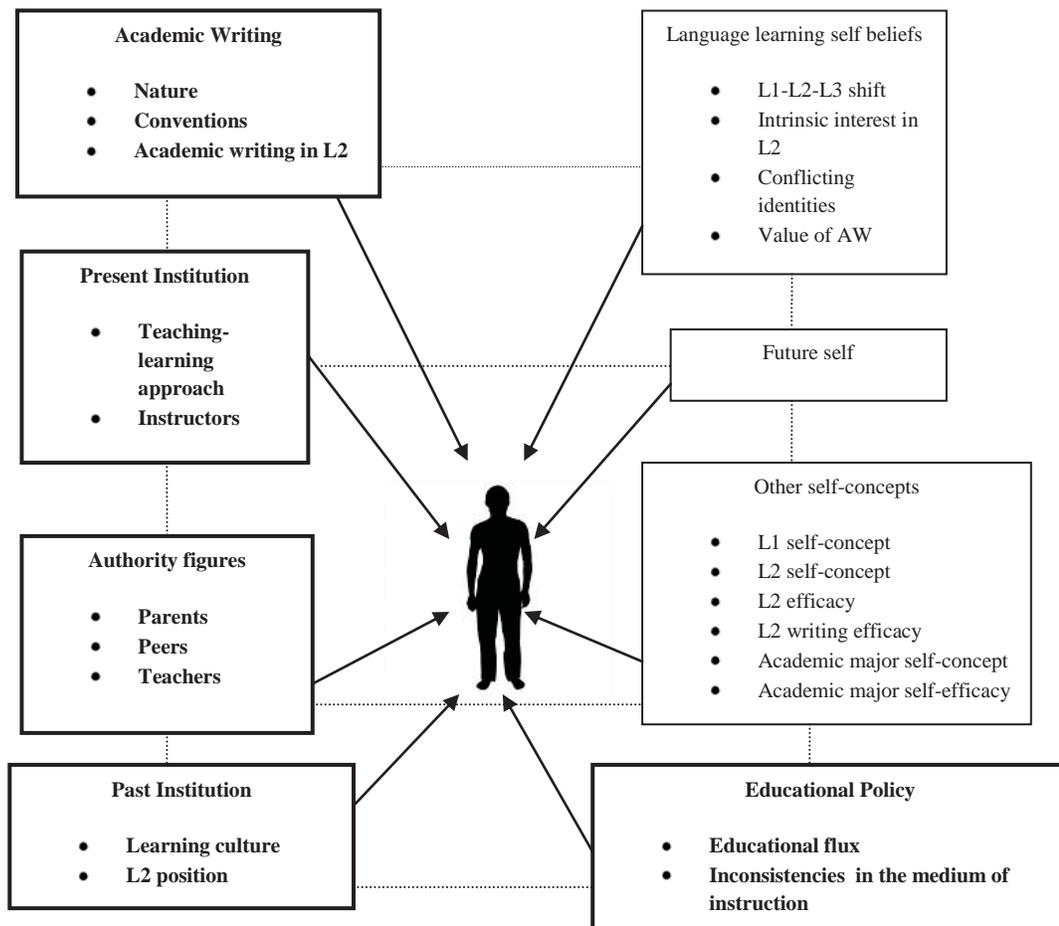


Figure 7.2. Internal and external factors influencing students' self-concept in academic writing. External factors are in boldface.

These findings resonate with those of Mercer (2011), who maintained that internal and external factors of self-concept formulation “could be seen as artificial separation” (p. 97). This current study appears to affirm that self-concept in academic writing is contingent on both internal and external factors and how these interact in the students' ecology of self-concept in academic writing. The case studies also illuminate how despite having similar (external and internal) factors within the ecology of self-concept in academic writing, individual learners may still respond differently.

The discussion now moves on to the nature and role of self-concept in academic writing.

### **The trajectories of self-concept in academic writing – Reconciling stability and change**

In this study, the life stages that students were at, their English language learning stage and the context in which they were embedded imply there are developmental changes in self-concept in academic writing. For example, Chapter Six revealed glimpses of not only who the students were in the past and present, but also their aspirations for the future as manifested in each student's reported future self. When Ahmad stated “*I initiated myself to take the AW class*” (Ahmad, Interview 1) and “*I activated myself*” (Ahmad, Interview 1), it epitomised how an individual can adapt to situational demands (e.g. learning academic writing and having to use English as the medium of instruction). Therefore, it appears that the learners' trajectory of self-concept in academic writing may change in this journey.

Learners' self-concepts in academic writing essentially capture beliefs in their competence about academic writing abilities in L2. It is probable that the accuracy of this knowledge of the self in the context of academic writing would increase as learners gain more academic experience, during which they are made more aware of and realistic about their competence in a particular domain (as suggested by Harter, 1999). To illustrate, there were differences found in some of the students' reported self-concept in academic writing between April (Phase One) and August (Phase Two). Based on the nuances between Phase One and Phase Two responses, it seems that there has been

development in learners' self-concept, as they undergo formal and informal socialisation in the AW class and the academic context as a whole.

The qualitative findings also suggest that the development of self-concept in academic writing varied for each student. Some students held self-concepts in academic writing that appeared central, while others held self-concepts in academic writing that seemed more peripheral in nature (see Section 2.2). In particular, a central self-concept in academic writing appeared to help maintain continuity, whereas peripheral self-concepts in academic writing adapted more easily to changes in the learning context. For students such as Siew Lee, Maya and Joanne, their peripheral self-concept in academic writing appears to be advantageous in adapting to changes. Maya reported that her English proficiency was one of her weaknesses, however, she was able to adapt to the demands posed by her current context. Despite the knowledge that it was difficult to get good grades in AW, Maya explained: *"I choose AW to help me as a guideline in doing my FYP [Final year Project]"* (Maya, Interview 2). In the same manner, Joanne reported that her weak grammar and lack of vocabulary was a challenge in the AW class. However, this did not stop her from trying to improve, as illustrated by her resourcefulness (e.g. seeking help from peers and instructor) and the range of self-regulated learning strategies she used to develop these language aspects. Therefore it seems probable that the fluidity of the peripheral self allowed both Maya and Joanne's self-concept to be more susceptible to change.

Students such as Ahmad and Imran reported an overall positive self-concept in the interviews and questionnaire. This suggested a self-concept in academic writing that was more consistently and closely aligned with their other self-concepts. To illustrate, Imran's strong self-concept in L2 was also evident in his L2 writing, *"I love writing in English ... I like English songs and I like to watch English movies. So from there I was motivated to write in English"* (Imran, Interview 1). In Ahmad's case, a similarly high self-concept in relation to academic writing was evident in his self-efficacy in academic writing, *"I am a good academic writer in English because academic writing, like I said earlier on, it is something you master in"* (Ahmad, Interview 1). The examples of Ahmad and Imran are consistent with the findings of Usborne and Taylor (2010) who maintain that those "who have a clear sense of who they are, have higher self-esteem and greater psychological well-being" (p. 1).

In some cases, students' self-concept in academic writing appears to be quite central. As a result, the interaction of students' self-concept in academic and contextual demands appears to inhibit self-concept in academic writing from being internalised into the personal self. This was evident in Nurul and Mustafa, whose self-concept in academic writing seemed to be central, but had a negative disposition. The enduring nature of these students' negative self-concepts in academic writing (unlike the majority), appears in their reported lack of a strong desire for improvement in their academic writing in English. Nurul questioned the relevance and value of learning academic writing in English, saying: "*I don't see the point. It doesn't really do anything to affect me or benefit me*" (Nurul, Interview 1). Mustafa's self-concept in academic writing was also evident in his conflict and resistance to change, "*I know myself. Even if the lecturer gives me an A because sometimes I do great work, I will still feel average*" (Mustafa, Interview 1). This implies that instructors are not always influential. Other factors, such as self-efficacy in L2 may override high grades in shaping self-concept in academic writing.

The evidence of peripheral and central self-concept also highlights the developmental trajectory of self-concept (as noted in Section 2.2). For example, when Mustafa was asked whether his present self-concept would improve, he explained, "*Maybe if I become a lecturer and I have been writing longer, maybe I will be good or excellent ... maybe*" (Mustafa, Interview 1). Mustafa's response appears to suggest an attempt at maintaining a coherent identity and the stability of his self. His reluctance may also be explained by the fact that when self-concepts as a writer in L2 and self-concept in English have been integrated into the core sense of self, there is a drive for self-preservation (Sedikides, Gaertner, & O'Mara, 2011). This makes new and contrasting self-concepts less easily assimilated (McConnell, 2011). For some students, therefore, the development of positive self-concepts in academic writing may be gradual and slow.

The cross-case analyses in this study appears to indicate that central self-concepts can help an individual maintain continuity (e.g. Ahmad, Eliza and Imran), whilst more peripheral self-concepts in academic writing allow an individual to adapt effectively to the new context (e.g. Siew Lee, Joanne and Maya). It is likely that instances in which self-concept in academic writing appear to be marginalized could mean that the process of adapting could be one of conflict. This is consistent with Turner and Onorato (1999)

who state that “peripheral concepts of the self that are more fluid allow the individual to adapt to various social situations and adopt various roles and group identities” (pp. 15-16). The findings in this study highlight how, for students like Mustafa, reconciling stability and change can be marked by conflicts in which the individual has to find a balance between maintaining his individuality (*I*) and his/her similarity (*we*) with the other students. If a collective AW identity becomes more dominant, the central self may need to be suppressed if it is in conflict with this particular academic setting.

The qualitative findings in this study, affirm the findings of others (e.g. Byrne, 1996; Ferla, Valcke, & Cai, 2009) that self-concepts are developmental in nature. However, in academic writing, some students seem to have conflicted identities as part of their self-concept trajectory. It is probable that Malaysia's socio-historical context contributed to this. There are, however, different pathways in the trajectory of self-concept in academic writing. What the individual case studies have revealed is that the pathways not only depend on students' self-concept in academic writing (peripheral or stable), but also on how they individually interpret and understand the changes in context, and the need to adapt to the new learning demands.

The following section examines how self-concepts in academic writing could be redefined in that context.

### **Redefining ‘me’ in the AW context**

The qualitative data in Chapter Six illuminated the different ways in which self-concept functioned in academic writing. Firstly, the learners' trajectory in academic writing seemed to facilitate the process of redefining the self in the new context (e.g. new institution, new class, new subject, and new academic community). In addition, their self-concepts in academic writing appear to play an important role in (i) motivating and (ii) restructuring the self.

### **Motivating the self**

The motivating role of self-concept in academic writing was linked to individual student's perceptions of the future self. The students also expressed a desire to minimise

the discrepancy between their present self and their future self. The future selves were varied, and these were expressed through students' goals of self-improvement not only in terms of academic writing, but also in relation to their overall education and general development as an individual. For example, Siew Lee and Joanne each simply aspired to be a "*better writer*" but Ahmad, Imran and Mustafa expressed a specific wish to remain in the academic world and pursue postgraduate studies. This finding is encouraging, since studies in the past have reported that the trajectory of academic self-concept tends to decline during adolescence (A. M. Ryan, 2011; Wigfield & Cambria, 2010). However, in the Malaysian tertiary setting, the reverse may be true. The high emphasis put on education (Y. S. Tan, 2010) and scholastic achievement (M. Komarraju, Karau, & Ramayah, 2007) in the Malaysian context, and that these students were embedded in a highly academic setting, may provide reasons for the intensification of these academic self-concepts during the tertiary education period.

Students also reported that their future self, (be it as an academic or pursuing a postgraduate degree, or securing employment) influenced their decisions on when to enter the AW class. For example, Imran, whose goal was to become an academic after completing his postgraduate studies, explained that he took the AW paper early in his degree so that he would know how to write academically. Imran's motivation was affirmed when his envisaged future self was supported by his salient (present) learning objectives. In fact, in the second interview, Imran validated his decision for undertaking the AW paper, "*After attending the paper, I feel that it is easier for me to extract information from books, papers or journals. So that's how it is related to my study*" (Imran, Interview 2). This reflects Osborne and Taylor's (2010) view that self-concept clarity allows students to engage in appropriate processes that enable them to perform competently and achieve their ideal selves. In Imran's case, the transferability of skills from the AW class provided him with the tools to achieve his future self, and his strong vision of a positive future self also appeared to inform his planning to achieve this goal.

The notion of future self that reverberated throughout all the cases in this study was observable in the strategies that the learners deemed appropriate to lead them to their desired goals. For example, Joanne expressed a strategic decision to undertake the AW paper: "*I took AW and EPP [English for Professional Purposes] because it is useful for my future*" (Joanne, Interview 2). Ahmad expressed similar reasons for undertaking the

AW paper where not only would he learn how to write academic essays, “*but also be more confident [in English]*” (Ahmad, Interview 2), with increased knowledge and exposure. It appears that learning academic writing in English was more purposeful when orientated towards future attainments.

It is also likely that the students who reported a high academic self-concept, were more successful because they could translate their motivation into effective regulatory strategies, by engaging in cognitive efforts (e.g. Mustafa, Eliza, Siew Lee, and Joanne), and generating metacognitive strategies (Imran and Ahmad). This finding is in line with Rodriguez (2009), who stated that positive academic self-concept encourages critical thinking and reflective approaches to learning. In the context of the AW class, the findings imply that enhancing students' self-concept in academic writing, through increasing the quality of interaction between student-instructor, and clarifying the link between academic writing and other academic endeavours may help achieve the desired future self. Additionally, in the AW class, the future self, appears to link the self with motivation, behaviour and outcome. This is also noted in other literature on this subject (e.g. Hoyle & Sherrill, 2006; Leondari, 2007; Stevenson & Clegg, 2011). Therefore, it is possible that enhancing students' visions of their future selves may be a way to increase motivation in the AW class.

### **(Re)structuring the self**

The role that self-concept in academic writing played in (re)structuring the self was a further factor that became evident. In particular, the qualitative data revealed how the learning demands within the educational context required the students to restructure their self-concepts in order to succeed in the AW class.

The need to adapt to the new context appears to be met through the restructuring of the self. This was observable through associations that students made between their past, present and future selves, in the context of academic writing. For example, Siew Lee explained that the vernacular institution in which she was previously enrolled had negatively affected her English language. She stated: “*We often communicate with each other [friends] and teachers in Mandarin. So we seldom speak in English to each other*” (Siew Lee, Interview 1). This past self-concept was carried forward into her secondary

school years, where she firstly had to use *Bahasa Melayu* [Malay Language] and then change to English in Form Six. It appears that these changes in context required her to repeatedly restructure her sense of self. Since Siew Lee expressed that the goal of her future self was to pursue a masters' degree, proficiency in the language could help her adapt to the new academic context and other career-related endeavours. Although Siew Lee's past academic experience had deprived her of the opportunity to improve her English-related skills, she appeared to be driven to use the opportunities provided by the AW class for self-enhancement (Alicke & Sedikides, 2009) and this helped in the restructuring of her self-concept in academic writing.

Conversely, Nurul did not exhibit any clear idea of future self (other than completing her studies at university) and she did not possess any relevant and accessible resources (e.g. proficiency, support from friends or instructors). This situation further cemented her rather negative self-concept and inability to restructure her sense of self in this new context. What appears to be an act of self-protection (as noted in Alicke & Sedikides, 2009) is observable through her statements about motivation to write, "*As long as it [writing task] is completed ... I don't really care*" (Nurul, Interview 1). Nurul's behaviour supports Greve and Wentura's (2010) proposition that 'accommodative adaptations' are implemented by the individual, when there are developmental changes that could threaten their sense of self. In Nurul's case, threats could manifest themselves in the form of events in which she has to speak to her instructors in English, or receiving information on rules and convention of academic writing which she reported to be "overwhelming". Nurul's preference for stability over change was illustrated through her acts of rescaling her goals and readjusting how she values academic writing (e.g. "*As long as it's completed*" [Nurul, Interview 1]). It is also probable that trivializing the importance of English (e.g. "*I don't see the point*" [Nurul, Interview 2]). was another way Nurul attempted to maintain stability in her self-concept in academic writing.

It is probable that, since the students are in a new academic context, this requires them to make adjustments to their present selves. This may explain why there were various representations of students' self-concept in academic writing (e.g. poor, average, anxious and good). The new setting appears to have signified a key period in their sense of self in which the university context allowed them to actively define their sense of self

and purpose. The interactions that occur while learning new roles, rules and expectations, as part of acquiring academic literacy may require learners to develop new social roles and revise their current identities. This restructuring was evident in Maya's account: "*When I entered the university, I felt that there wasn't any guideline*" (Maya, Interview 2). It was in the AW class that Maya discovered, "*all I have learnt is helpful to me ... how to write a report, APA referencing, citation and how to use academic language*" (Maya, Interview 2). Thus, parallel to the understanding that self-concept is "susceptible to change due to life transitions" (Demo, 1992, p. 303), students' self-evaluation of "*average*" or "*poor*" in this study could be perceived as a coping strategy that balances their past and their new self-concepts in academic writing, while developing a more central self-concept in this context.

Overall, the present study suggests the role of self-concept in academic writing provides coherence and motivates the self. This provides further evidence that self-concept is a dynamic process (as suggested by Hattie, 1992; Hormuth, 1990; Markus & Kitayama, 2010; Markus & Wurf, 1987). Knowledge of '*Who am I?*' in the AW class in this study appears to reveal multiple (central and peripheral) student identities. Malaysia's socio-historical context can be seen as a major aspect of this phenomenon. The findings further suggest that understanding students' self-concepts in academic writing would help illuminate the reasons underlying varying levels of engagement in the AW class. The following section now turns to examining the construct of student engagement in the AW class.

### **7.3 ECOLOGY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN THE ACADEMIC WRITING CLASS**

Phase One of this study revealed that student engagement in the AW class was a highly dynamic construct, evidenced by the varied engagement dimensions. This possibility was later affirmed through the qualitative findings in Chapter Six, which highlighted how factors within the university context, the AW class context and the broader sociocultural context influenced students' engagement in the AW class. Thus, although the first phase of the study began with a predominantly psychological perspective, findings in both the quantitative and qualitative phases (see Chapters Five and Six)

seemed to reveal student engagement was contingent on context. Therefore, as with self-concept, student engagement in this study is also depicted within an ecological model (see Figure 7.3). This was seen as the best way to depict the holistic insights into why students engage or disengage in a specific educational setting.

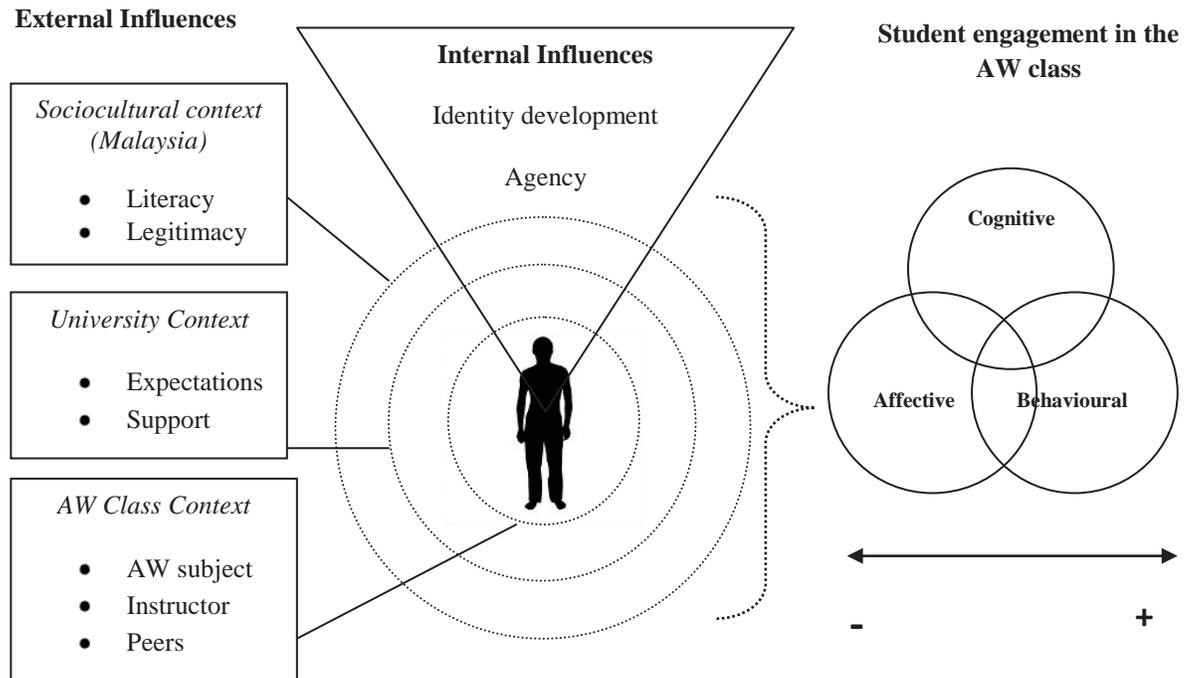


Figure 7.3. Learners' ecology of engagement in the Academic Writing class.

In Figure 7.3, the individual is depicted in the central position with influences from external sources (sociocultural aspects, university and AW class) impacting on the level and nature of his or her engagement. In the first phase of the study, student engagement, similar to self-concept, appeared to be influenced by the interplay of multiple internal and external factors (from context). This interplay was further manifested through students' reports of behavioural, cognitive and affective engagement. In particular, negative and positive poles were identified in the cognitive, affective and behavioural engagement dimensions. A student may engage positively in the behavioural dimension but negatively in the other engagement dimensions, but each dimension is also capable of influencing, and being influenced by other dimensions. These notions are now discussed in more detail.

## **Influences on student engagement**

As illustrated by Figure 7.3, the study identified that there were internal and external factors influencing student engagement in the AW class. These influences are discussed in the following section.

### **Internal factors influencing student engagement**

The qualitative data analysis revealed that two factors were particularly pertinent in influencing student engagement in the AW class: (i) identity development, and (ii) agency. This indicates the close link between the internal influences on student engagement and self-concept in academic writing.

#### ***Identity development***

In this study, students' engagement in the AW class appeared to be influenced by their identity development. The new social contexts represented by the university and the AW class appeared to be sites for identity development and reconstruction for the students (see Section 2.2). Since these students were transitioning into adulthood, the shift to a university context influenced (positively or negatively) their engagement in the AW class. It is known that social changes during the move into a new academic setting have considerable effects on learners' identity position (Hussey & Smith, 2010, p. 420). However, in this study, these changes also impacted on engagement.

The findings on the ecology of self-concept in academic writing (see Section 7.2) revealed that for some students, their academic writing identities were multiple and their socio-historical positions varied. This was evidenced in cases where students were intent on protecting their core sense of self (e.g. Mustafa) and less inclined to make any changes (e.g. Nurul), whilst others willingly adapted to the demands of the new context (e.g. Ahmad, Eliza, Siew Lee and Maya). The multiple identity positions depicted in the findings resonate with the work of Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004), who maintain that identity positions may vary between "(i) imposed identities (which are not negotiable in a particular time and place), (ii) assumed identities (which are accepted and not negotiated), and (iii) negotiable identities" (p. 21) (see also Section 2.4). This was manifested in the varied extent of engagement in the AW class.

Efforts to reconcile multiple identities may also suggest why the students in this study varied in their willingness to engage successfully in the AW class. An example of a student who was able to reconcile his multiple identities and achieve positive engagement was Mustafa (see Section 6.4). Despite Mustafa's unfavourable sentiments about the English language, he acknowledged that it was a commodity that he needed for his future endeavours. This suggests a repositioning of his identity in different contexts. In the academic writing context, the notion of 'identity benefits' coined by Kivetz and Tyler (2007) is particularly useful: "Identity benefits are defined as intrinsic reinforcements that support the expression of one's true self and values" (p. 197). Since academic writing in English would facilitate his future goal of furthering his studies at a masters' level, Mustafa's identity repositioning (perhaps driven by the prospect of identity benefits) influenced his positive engagement in the AW class.

Identity positions could explain why sometimes students disengaged and were marginalised in the AW class. Nurul was unwilling to accommodate any changes represented by the tasks and participation in the AW class. She explained: "*Things that are hard take time. So I stick to things that I know*" (Nurul, Interview 2). Furthermore, the conflict between Nurul's personal self-concept and the imposed identities of novice academic writer or L2 writer highlights the possibility that she does not fully identify with the social categories promoted by the academic context. Her lack of identification and sense of belonging thus informed her disengagement (e.g. decisions, strategies and choices) in the AW class. This may highlight the importance of maximising peer interactions and relationships with faculty. The study revealed that network support in the form of peers (e.g. Siew Lee and Eliza) and instructors (e.g. Joanne) greatly influences student engagement and identity building when faced with challenges in the AW class. It is likely that students may be able to manage multiple conflicting identities (e.g. Mustafa) more effectively when the larger social group of peers promotes similar goals and identities. In the same manner, students may disengage if they do not identify with the more dominant social identities imposed by the academic context and feel that they do not belong.

Maya's case illustrated how dominant social identities imposed by the academic context influenced her engagement in the AW class. In particular, identity positions shaped her new experiences in the AW class and helped her adapt into the university learning

experience. She explained: *“Only after I entered this class, I discovered that all that I have learnt is helpful to me”* (Maya, Interview 2). This excerpt reveals how a change in her identity positions seemed to play a direct role in shaping Maya's engagement in the AW class. At the same time, the excerpt also highlighted the influence of external factors (e.g. AW class) in shaping her engagement. This finding thus provides support to Krause's (2005) study, in which he identified that student engagement not only depends on the opportunities available in context, but also students' identity development. In fact, Krause suggested that student engagement encompasses *“reshaping identity, letting go of long-held beliefs and approaches to learning and social interaction”* (p. 10). Therefore, it is evident that students' transition to higher learning in the Malaysian context needs to be designed in such a way that students are adequately prepared and supported to engage effectively in the new academic setting.

### *Agency*

Students' agency was also closely found to be closely linked with and contributed to student engagement in the AW class. The students' agency seemed to influence their choice and willingness to engage in the AW class. To illustrate, Ahmad's accounts of critical events in his educational background seemed to evoke a strong sense of agency. He explained, *“[As a result of realizing what was needed to enter the job market] I try my best to activate myself ... not just become a passive student and stay in my room and study. You have to be more active”* (Ahmad, Interview 1). In Ahmad's case, his agency appears to facilitate his readiness and willingness to engage in the AW class. This was evident through his act of enrolling in the AW class in his first year. Ahmad explained: *“I initiated myself to take this paper, go to this class so that I will gain knowledge about writing academically. So when it comes to the final year, you [I] will already get used to the technique and terminologies”* (Ahmad, Interview 2).

Similarly, the AW class for Maya provided an opportunity and served as a site for identity reconstruction. In the interviews, Maya acknowledged that her lower level of English proficiency was *“a problem”* and it has also been one of her weakest subjects. However, Maya exercised her human agency to negotiate her entry into the AW class as a way to improve her English and academic writing skills:

*I enter the class to gain knowledge. But I still have to manage my skills to master the class, no matter how boring it is. It is still up to you to fix the problem. So it still depends on you. (Maya, Interview 2)*

It is apparent that the role of human agency shaped both Maya's and Ahmad's engagement in the AW class. More importantly, their awareness of agency may be a catalyst in pursuing resources that could help them articulate their desired learner identities. These findings resonate with studies by Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) and Norton (2010), who highlighted the role of human agency, particularly in illuminating why certain learners resist while others readily change the positioning of their identities in a second language learning context. Norton's participants, Julie and Eva exercised their agency and resisted the English as a second language identity imposed on them. Instead, they actively restructured their identities by seeking social affiliation (e.g. peers in the ESL class) and other resources, which would perhaps reflect a more respectable identity, such as knowledge of their L1, and practices that, may overlap with that of the ESL class.

In this current study, the students exercised their agency in different ways, such as actively participating in the AW class (e.g. Imran), participating minimally in the AW class (e.g. Nurul), and being selective in their engagement (e.g. Mustafa). Therefore, it is possible that in cases where students do not fully engage or maintain a peripheral participation in the AW class, this may indicate they do not view the imposed identity in the AW class to be desirable. It can be argued that the degree to which students exercise their role as "agentive beings" (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004, p. 27), therefore, seems to have an influence on the ability and the readiness of students to engage behaviourally, affectively and cognitively in the AW class, and the extent to which they do so.

The following section discusses external factors from the contexts that influence student engagement.

### **External factors influencing current student engagement**

In this study, the external factors were also found to be related to the AW class context, the institutional context and Malaysia's socio-historical context.

### *Influences from the AW class context*

In the AW class, the students' perceptions of the subject AW in L2, their relationships with the instructors, and the support network of peers, seem to be key external factors influencing their engagement. In this context, the subject of AW was also extrinsic motivation in itself for student engagement and disengagement. The students cited the high value of AW and, by extension, the tasks that were related to AW as being very important in determining their engagement. This was evident in Imran's interview where he reported enriching and empowering educational experiences gained from the AW class, "*I know how to differentiate between main points and elaboration points ... just how to read*" (Imran, Interview 1). Thus, it is likely that the knowledge gained in the AW class has helped influenced this student's cognitive engagement in this setting.

The value and relevance of the AW class also influenced student engagement. As the AW class provided opportunities for students to improve their academic literacy and L2 proficiency, this context afforded an enriching educational experience for students in which the links between the value of academic writing and its relevance to other aspects of academic studies are made explicit. This also implies that student engagement may be increased when the subject AW is recognized by the students as being potentially helpful and transferrable to other contexts, and future endeavors. Again this also emphasizes the need to effectively communicate the value of the AW class to the students.

Conversely, those students who did not see the value and relevance of the AW class (e.g. Nurul) acknowledged that they put in a minimal effort or became disengaged in the class. Students who faced challenges when attempting to cognitively engage with the subject noted that there were too many rules and the subject was rather foreign to them. To illustrate, Nurul commented: "*Why do I have to write based on all the characteristics? Why is there so many? Why does it have to be complicated*" (Nurul, Interview 1). In this case, student engagement appears to be contingent on the perceived difficulty of the subject, which creates a negative external influence. Similarly, Maya stated that "*It was very hard to follow the [AW] rules, because I am weak in English and I don't have much knowledge about English*" (Maya, Interview 1). It is probable that the perceived difficulty of the English language as the medium of instruction lessened Nurul's engagement in the AW class.

The fact that the medium of instruction for academic writing was English also played a role in influencing student engagement in future classes. In particular, students cited proficiency issues and also self-efficacy in L2 as factors that could either augment or impede their engagement. For example, Imran explained that his increased self-efficacy enabled him to engage cognitively in other classes, *“I feel that it is easier for me to extract the information [in other classes taught through English] compared to before I took the [AW] paper”* (Imran, Interview 1). At the extreme end of this continuum, lack of self-efficacy and a lower level of English proficiency were depicted in Nurul's response: *“Constructing a sentence for me would be very hard”* (Nurul, Interview 1). This lack of self-efficacy seemed to affect her ability to engage cognitively and behaviourally in the AW class. For example, Nurul reported: *“I will start, but after one paragraph I will feel fed-up and then stop. And that will happen many times”* (Nurul, Interview 2). This showed a different side to Nurul since she did not engage in self-handicapping behaviour. Instead, she revealed that she wanted to engage in the task but was unable to do so. It is probable that the AW tasks, which she perceived as “hard” could have heightened her anxiety and thus, weakened her self-efficacy. Therefore, it is reasonable to speculate that Nurul's disengagement with academic writing may be related to her self-efficacy in the context of AW in L2 and her apprehensions about writing in L2. This finding supports current literature which affirms the link between self-efficacy and academic achievement, whereby “the confidence in one's capability to regulate learning helps nurture motivation” (Caprara, et al., 2011, p. 91) and thus, is necessary for engagement in future academic challenges.

The relationship with instructors (or lack of this) was another important issue for student engagement in the AW class. Based on the qualitative findings, instructors shaped students' engagement in the AW class. In particular, the quality of interaction with the instructors seemed to help foster positive engagement for Siew Lee, Ahmad, Joanne and Eliza. For example, Joanne explained that her engagement in the AW class was linked closely to her instructors' teaching approach, *“The teacher is hardworking; motivated. He will guide the student how to do the assignment step by step ... Give a lot of advice”* (Joanne, Interview 2). Consequently, Joanne emulated the instructor's systematic approach into her own writing strategies in the AW class (e.g. time management and setting goals for each writing task such as doing research and writing drafts).

Further illustrating how instructors can influence student engagement, Maya highlighted the issue of class size, "*The teacher never has time to check all students' work or pay individual attention*" (Maya, Interview 1). Since Maya felt that she missed out on the personal teacher-student interaction, her experience in the AW class and writing development seemed to be affected. Her frustration was evidenced in the following excerpt: "*It's like ... you just hand in [your] work and the next class you get it returned. That's all. But you don't really get feedback*" (Maya, Interview 1). This study shows how the quality of the relationship with instructors could influence students' engagement in the AW classroom. This finding supports current literature on how student engagement is responsive to the teacher-student relationship (e.g. M. Komarraju, et al., 2010; Reason, Cox, Quaye, & Terenzini, 2010; Skinner, Furer, Marchand, & Kinderman, 2008).

The network of support provided by peers in the context of this study also influenced some students' engagement decisions. Although not all students reported direct involvement of peers in the AW class, those who did explained that peers motivated them to work harder and participate in the AW activities. One case was Siew Lee's, whereby her peers helped remind her of her position and responsibility as a student. She explained: "*They would give me advice saying although you don't like it [academic writing] – you still have to do it*" (Siew Lee, Interview 2). This particular finding highlighted how the affective component of student engagement (e.g. sense of belonging) was particularly pertinent in influencing students' engagement in the AW classroom. Siew Lee, who had formed a network of support, with a group that identified with academic achievement, was able to engage successfully in the AW class. This finding supports a study by Krause and Coates (2008) who maintained that when students feel a sense of belonging especially in the first year, they are able to adjust and engage effectively in the classroom, which "promotes high-quality learning" (p. 493). It may be that, in the AW class, greater attention needs to be paid to foster the sense of affiliation and students' ability to integrate into the new academic setting. This is important because the findings in this study suggest that when students feel a sense of belonging they are more likely to be affectively engaged, and that could also foster behavioural and cognitive engagement in the AW class.

### *Influences from the institutional context*

In the context of the institution, the notions of support and expectations appear to be important for student engagement. This is understandable since the majority of these students were new to the context, and they were mostly first-generation university students or the first member of their families to attend university. Therefore, the support provided by the university, in terms of facilities and resources, was particularly crucial in helping these students to engage academically. Although some students received institutional support in their learning, those who did not receive support related having a more negative experience in the AW class. For example, in attempting to find more material (for her writing task) in the library, Siew Lee explained: *“They [librarians] are not as helpful as I want them to be”* (Siew Lee, Interview 2). This perception may have affected her ability to engage cognitively, in addition to affecting her affective engagement in that particular academic community.

In contrast to Siew Lee, some students (e.g. Nurul and Maya) perceived a lack of clarity in relation to the institution's expectations, which influenced their engagement in academic writing. They reported that they were initially unclear about the AW paper's objectives and how it could actually be beneficial to their academic studies. This lack of clarity in the context of institutional expectations, which created a negative internal influence on Nurul and Maya, was apparent in their frustrations with learning academic writing in English. Institutional expectations and the goals in AW may also not have been communicated effectively by the instructors, as evidenced by students' reports of minimal hours for revision, and the small number of drafts being undertaken for academic writing. However, as pointed out in the discussion on self-concept, this may also have been related to the clarity of the students' personal goals.

All of these issues seem to highlight factors that impeded or facilitated student engagement in the AW class varied across the cases. This finding, along with that of others (e.g. Carini, et al., 2006; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) underscores the fact that student engagement is contingent on multiple external factors, with some of these existing within, and others beyond the academic context. External factors outside the academic context will be discussed next.

### *Influences from Malaysia's socio-historical context*

Notions of academic legitimacy and academic literacy emerged as significant in this study. Student engagement in this study appeared to be shaped by the socio-historical context, which was inherently interwoven with the students' self-concept in a broader sense. As discussed in Chapter One, great emphasis is put on education within the Malaysian context. The demands of globalisation have also resulted in the acquisition of academic English language being seen as a valuable commodity for graduates, and an important investment. In particular, two motivations emerged as driving student engagement in the AW class: motivation for *academic literacy* and motivation for *academic legitimacy*. The way in which these two motivations complement and enhance students' engagement is now discussed.

The position of English in Malaysia is unique due to socio-historical exigencies, and this is manifested in the learners' motivation with regard to academic writing in English. Therefore, the motivation of academic literacy is one of the influences on student engagement in the AW class. Thus, some learners engaged in the AW class with a clear sense of purpose and direction. In fact, the majority of them purposefully elected to study the AW paper, in order to improve their learning outcomes and overall academic achievement. Their investment in the writing tasks and activities in the AW class was motivated by the need to read and write academic texts effectively at university level, not only in the subject of academic writing itself, but also for their own majors and faculties (academic literacy). Upon gaining academic literacy, numerous other opportunities and pathways would be accessible to these learners in terms of furthering their studies at postgraduate level and achieving a promising career in the future. These goals provided powerful motivation for all students who were aware of these links.

The benefits of academic literacy perceived by students, especially Ahmad, Imran, Maya, Siew Lee and Joanne, included increased academic writing knowledge; increased English proficiency; increased knowledge to use for writing research proposals and the final year thesis; and other communicative skills relevant to their future career. Siew Lee reported: "*It [AW] is quite related to my final year project and it is quite important for my future*" (Siew Lee, Interview 2). Therefore, perceptions that academic literacy is essential for a successful learning experience at university level appears to be a key reason for student engagement in the AW class. An emphasis on the acquisition of

practical career-related skills through academic literacy was highlighted by Ahmad, who had been positively engaged in the AW class and other curricular activities at the university. Ahmad explained:

*My goal is to become an employable person. So when you are being recruited by some company ... it doesn't mean that I don't need other skills. I would still need to write something for people to read and for my supervisor to read. So it [writing skills] has a lot of relationship with your job. (Ahmad, Interview 1)*

This finding thus affirms the notion that “people tend to invest in goals that they value more” (Petrides & Frederickson, 2011, p. 99).

The promise of employment upon acquiring the knowledge and skills from the AW class was observable in Maya's response, “*The job market requires graduates who can speak and write well in English*” (Maya, Interview 1). To further illustrate this point, Mustafa explained that he wanted to be a lecturer and wished to do his master's degree: “*So yes, AW paper is directly involved*” (Maya, Interview 1). In this sense, the learners' engagement in the AW class can be seen as being propelled by their motivation toward academic literacy and its connection with their future goals, be it to further their studies or to gain better career prospects. This finding resonates that of other engagement studies related to retention and attrition (Krause, et al., 2010; Tinto, 2010). Since the AW paper is not compulsory, the students enroll in the paper for various reasons, the majority of the students reported on the great value and relevance of the AW paper in regard to their goals. Therefore, it is probable that students' clarity, in relation to their aspirations and sense of purpose, was a further discriminator of their engagement in the AW class.

Students' successful negotiation for legitimacy could be perceived in the way they managed internal conflicts and their level of conformity. Some students (e.g. Eliza, Siew Lee, Joanne) readily accommodated the new writing conventions through behavioral and cognitive participation in class activities, and the conceptualisation of the rules of academic writing conventions, with regard to the existing academic community. These students' sense of legitimacy was also evident in the reported established networks they had with peers, senior students and instructors. On the other hand, there were instances which resulted in de-personalised relationships, and learners

relinquishing the actual community (e.g. Nurul). Nurul's desire to be "*transparent*" or "*invisible*" in the AW classes may indicate that she does not feel adequately supported by the institution and the respective academic community or have a sense of belonging to it. This sense of alienation could be attributed to the conflict between her personal sentiments regarding English and the fact that academic legitimacy in the current context is contingent on the language.

Nevertheless, since legitimacy is granted through various ways, such as practice, activities in the AW class and interaction with the 'expert' members, it was evident that the students in the study were doing the best that they could. Most students in this study (with the exception of Nurul) continuously tried to participate in the AW class whenever they felt it was possible. For some students (e.g. Imran), legitimacy could be gained by engaging behaviourally in the class, and for other students (e.g. Siew Lee and Joanne) it might be gained by establishing a good relationship with the AW class instructors. The variations in student engagement in this study therefore may depict the various stages that learners were at as they navigated their way from peripheral to fuller participation. These stages may include students' movement from peripheral observation, to partial peripheral participation and finally full participation behaviourally, affectively and cognitively in the AW class. This process has been discussed by Wenger (1998) and Lave and Wenger (1991) as continually evolving, which enables a newcomer to gain increasing access to information and membership of the community.

Student engagement in this study appears to be shaped by socio-historical elements. That the majority of students persisted despite the challenges faced in the AW class, may relate significantly to their successes in achieving academic literacy and legitimacy. Therefore in this study, it is likely that the various motivations for academic literacy and legitimacy do not appear to be in opposition, but instead they work together to complement and enhance student engagement.

## **Student engagement in the AW class**

The discussion now moves on to considering the key engagement dimensions. It highlights how internal and external influences, discussed previously, manifest themselves through cognitive, behavioural and affective engagement in the AW class.

### **Cognitive engagement: Regulating learning strategies in the AW class**

Student engagement was identified through responses that indicated preference for hard work, and willingness to make an investment in learning academic writing in English. The majority of the students indicated significant cognitive engagement levels in the AW class. However, reports regarding challenges to cognitive engagement in the AW class were also considerable. The two main challenges were related to the English language (e.g. Nurul and Maya), and unfamiliarity with the academic writing conventions (e.g. Siew Lee and Joanne) as noted earlier.

The issue regarding the English language carries great consequences for learners' academic literacy acquisition (e.g. poor vocabulary impedes comprehension of academic texts). This also implies that the students were not adequately prepared for the demands of tertiary literacy. For some students (e.g. Siew Lee and Maya), although they wished to engage cognitively, there were impediments in the form of English proficiency levels. For example, in Siew Lee's case, she explained: *"Since my English is not so good, when it comes to really formal writing ... you really need a good vocabulary ... So that becomes a problem"* (Siew Lee, Interview 1). Maya expressed a similar concern regarding her inability to engage cognitively in academic writing, *"Honestly, it's very hard to follow the rules, because I am weak in English"* (Maya, Interview1).

Despite the reported challenges, self-regulation emerged as an important theme. Self-regulated learning "involves metacognitive, motivational, and behavioural processes that are personally initiated to acquire knowledge and skill" (Zimmerman, 2001, p. 13855), that range from surface level strategies to deep and appropriate strategies. In this study, self-regulatory behaviour and its respective strategies (ranging from simple to deep and sophisticated learning strategies) appeared frequently across cases. These strategies are examined in detail in this section.

The types and quality of strategies employed by the students in this study seem to be contingent on several factors, such as English proficiency level, self-efficacy beliefs (e.g. in English or writing in English), and learning goal orientations. Based on these factors, it was discerned that some students adopted more purposeful and appropriate strategies (e.g. Joanne, Ahmad, Siew Lee, Eliza and Imran) while others (e.g. Nurul), who felt that the demands of writing were overwhelming, tended to adopt self-handicapping strategies such as procrastination. To illustrate, Imran who was proficient in English and had higher self-efficacy beliefs in L1 (compared to the other cases) also revealed advanced metacognitive strategies. He explained: *"I try to think in English. Yes, it is hard but I am trying to practice to think in English because I want to express what I have been thinking accurately"* (Imran, Interview 1). It appears that Imran believed that thinking in English would facilitate his writing process in English, just as thinking in L2 might allow for gradual exploration of ideas 'naturally' in the target language. This was a surprising finding, as the task of thinking in English is not easy for an ESL learner. This finding also illuminated the importance Imran placed on ideas in his writing, instead of language-related concerns which were expressed by several other cases in the study.

Joanne, on the other hand, reported a less complex cognitive strategy, emphasising that she used memory and recall to enhance her vocabulary, *"I study a lot. Not reading the newspaper but reading the dictionary ... read word by word"* (Joanne, Interview 1). Nonetheless, Joanne complemented the memory-recall strategy with her time management and organizational skills. For example she stated: *"I will set a timetable. Maybe the first week I will find the relevant information ... second week I will start writing the points and draft. Third week I will write the essay and finally submit"* (Joanne, Interview 1). Her self-regulation in planning, managing and scheduling her time also reflected her metacognitive engagement in the writing task.

Nurul who was not proficient in English explained: *"I leave things [writing related tasks] to the very last minute"* (Nurul, Interview 2). This strategy suggests that in coping with the cognitive challenges in the AW class she protected herself from any anticipated failure by deflecting attention away from her lower level of English proficiency. For example, in leaving her writing tasks to the very last minute, a potential failure or a bad grade could be attributed to the time factor, instead of her English

proficiency level. These findings, as demonstrated by Nurul, Siew Lee and Joanne reflected that the students were capable of using different learning strategies ranging from metacognitive to cognitive and social mediation strategies (O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Kupper, & Russo, 1985), for different tasks, in different contexts. Despite the perceived inability by many students to engage cognitively through complex and sophisticated strategies, these students still reported high behavioural engagement. This is discussed in greater detail next.

### **Behavioural engagement: Persevering and taking risks**

In the findings, significant levels of behavioural engagement were identified. Despite some evidence of cognitive and affective disengagement, students reported engaging in positive conduct in the AW class, effort and commitment to learning in the AW class, level of participation, and resilience in the face of adversity.

The majority of the students (all except for Ahmad) expressed that learning academic writing in English was challenging, not only due to proficiency issues but also the perception that academic writing was a foreign subject to them. Nonetheless, these students persevered and were also optimistic about possible improvement in the near future. Most of the students exhibited (i) persistence: *“In my opinion it [AW] is difficult to start, but after we write a little bit more and learn more about it, it is actually quite easy”* (Imran, Interview 1 ); (ii) resourcefulness: *“[When faced with a complicated writing task] I think I will go and see my supervisor and seek for advice”* (Siew Lee, Interview 1); and (iii) resilience: *“I got a D [for academic writing] ... So I am taking another English class to repair my grades”* (Maya, Interview 1) during the course of learning academic writing.

Maya explained that although she failed the AW paper the first time, she was willing to keep on trying to improve her English proficiency. It is possible that Maya's resilience may have been influenced by the emphasis on education in her current academic setting. Although the importance of resilience in higher education has been debated (e.g. Walker, Gleaves, & Grey, 2006), Maya's resilience seemed to moderate the effects of learning demands in the AW class. This was observable through her capacity to rebound from her failure (getting a D in academic writing) and to persevere despite her unfamiliarity

with academic writing conventions and English proficiency issues. Maya, as did other students, continued to independently strive to achieve academic legitimacy and literacy.

Despite facing cognitive challenges in their AW class, for most students (except Nurul) these challenges did not appear to impact on their behavioural engagement. It is probable that the position of English in the socio-historical context of Malaysia, influenced students' behavioural engagement in the AW class. Instances in which students were unable to engage cognitively, but attempted to engage behaviourally instead, are a testament to this. Moreover, since access to higher education is extremely competitive in Malaysia (Altbach, 2004; Bennell & Pearce, 2003), students in this study represent those who have successfully gained admission into higher learning, and thus, were already highly engaged towards collective goals with academic focus. Therefore, their prior academic success may be a factor in their ongoing perseverance.

The qualitative findings also appear to indicate a strong sense of positive engagement with the learning demands in the AW class. With the exception of Nurul, all of the students said they had positive interactions in the AW class with both peers and the instructor. These students reported that they listened and responded well to lectures in class, and they enjoyed contributing (and debating) ideas during class discussions. The majority of the students appeared to be very resourceful in their learning and formed a network of support consisting of classmates and senior students (e.g. Eliza, Joanne and Siew Lee). It is probable that activities such as debates, discussion and presentations in the AW class also helped to foster student engagement since the students were challenged beyond their comfort zones (e.g. using the English language for more than just writing). This appears consistent with Umbach and Wawrzynski's (2005) findings in that "students are more likely to interact with faculty on campuses where those faculty offer greater academic challenges" (p. 166). Therefore it is possible that student engagement in the AW class can be enhanced by activities that are perceived as challenging, yet manageable.

In contrast to the generally high level of behavioural engagement evident in the study, there were other instances when English proficiency issues seem to obstruct students' behavioural engagement in the AW class. This has been discussed in more depth in the section on cognitive engagement. Some students explained that their lack of

engagement was due to low confidence, which could also imply that they wish to engage but they do not yet possess the necessary skills. Ahmad explained why he sometimes hesitated to ask questions in class *“Like myself, I have questions but I sometimes I feel afraid to ask because of my language”* (Ahmad, Interview 2). Similarly, Nurul said, *“I don't feel confident when speaking because I will wonder whether she or he [instructors] will understand me”* (Nurul, Interview 2). Based on these findings, it appears that behavioural engagement may also be linked with affective engagement. The following section moves on to discuss affective engagement in the AW class in further detail.

### **Affective engagement in the AW class**

In this study, students' affective engagement was identified through their feelings of connection to the AW class, identification with academic writing, positive attitude towards learning and belonging in the AW writing class. Although there were several reports of anxiety (e.g. Siew Lee) and frustration (e.g. Nurul), most of the students reported a positive sense of affective engagement such as interest in learning (e.g. Imran), identification with academic writing (e.g. Joanne and Ahmad) and appreciation of the learning outcome (e.g. Mustafa and Maya). These positive affective engagements appear to relate considerably to how they value the AW class and the AW subject.

The data also appear to indicate that students' sense of identification with the AW class is closely linked to their goals and future endeavours. The specificity and type of goals reported by these learners may also have also influenced the nature, intensity and quality of affective engagement. A variation of the nature of goals is evident across cases. Nurul, who reported performance goals, tended to have lower levels of engagement, *“I just want to pass”* (Nurul, Interview 1); as opposed to students who aimed for mastery goals, such as Imran who stated: *“[I want] to know how to write in a proper and formal [academic] way”* (Imran, Interview 1). In Imran's case, his engagement was perhaps likely to be more enduring and sustainable as he was prepared to forego immediate gratification for more long-term success. Imran, who aspired to further his studies at postgraduate level, reported high levels of engagement. He stated: *“I enjoyed it [AW class]. It's a useful class ... for me it is important for me to take it earlier because I want to practice it before the write up of my final year project”* (Imran,

Interview 1). These statements illustrate how his affective engagement in the AW class was influenced by his intended future. The link between Imran's emphasis on his future goals and his high level of engagement is consistent with earlier studies (e.g. Elliot & Murayama, 2009; J. Lee, et al., 2010; Petrides & Frederickson, 2011; Pizzolato, 2006), which state that current behaviour is motivated by a sense of purpose for valued future outcomes. Therefore, it is likely that the degree to which the AW class is able to meet students' needs and expectations, and accommodate their various educational backgrounds, could further influence student engagement in the AW class.

Unsurprisingly, the activities related to academic writing were highly regarded by the students. The relevance and value of academic writing and the tasks associated with academic writing seemed to allow students access to not only their own disciplinary communities of practice, but also to the overall university community whereby the opportunity for legitimacy was afforded by competency in academic writing. This idea was reflected in Imran's justification for taking the AW paper: "*So that I will gain knowledge about writing academically. I will write proper essays and I will also be more confident*" (Imran, Interview 2). This highlights how the purposeful activities in the AW class were perceived to lead to gains, and then enhanced Imran's learning satisfaction, hence offering a way in to better understand how affective engagement can be enhanced in the AW class.

Affective engagement in the AW class also appeared to involve a sense of belonging to peers. This finding is further supported by Meeuwisse et al. (2010). As mentioned in the section on behavioural engagement within this chapter, the quality of interaction with peers and instructors also determines whether a sense of belonging can be cultivated, which will then motivate student engagement. The fact that Siew Lee seemed to cope better than Nurul, yet both had English proficiency issues in the AW class, may have been due to Siew Lee's network of support consisting of peers and senior students. Thus, in addition to academic integration, affective engagement may need to include the component of social integration as suggested by Tinto (2009).

In this study, students' affective engagement appeared also to be shaped by the relationship that students had with their instructors. Reports about teachers being "*more advanced*" (e.g. Mustafa), "*hard working*", "*motivated*" (e.g. Joanne),

“*enthusiastic*” (e.g. Siew Lee and Ahmad) and providing positive feedback (e.g. Joanne and Mustafa), offer evidence that students' perception of the teachers' knowledge and skills, and the teachers' behaviour in the AW class, influence student engagement. It is also probable that instructors who were perceived to be approachable in the AW class (e.g. Joanne, Siew Lee and Eliza) and acknowledged students' contributions (e.g. Mustafa) further sustained students' engagement in the AW class. These findings therefore highlight how students' affective engagement in the AW class may be profoundly shaped by the instructors in their immediate context. Students' reports on critical feedback from instructors reflect Krause and Coates' (2008) findings in which “empathetic attitudes and behaviours on the part of academics who take a personal interest in their students” have a “... profound influence on student satisfaction and sense of belonging in the learning community” (p. 501).

An effective relationship with instructors outside of class appears to foster students' sense of belonging in the class and further influence students' affective engagement. Although some students (e.g. Maya, Nurul and Ahmad) expressed reticence, in relation to interactions with their teachers due to their level of English language proficiency, studies in both Western (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005) and non-Western settings (e.g. Huang & Fisher, 2011) have indicated that a student-faculty relationship is necessary for student engagement, especially in higher learning. This information offers implications for pedagogy and institutional policy, in relation to the ways quality relationships between the instructor and students in the AW class could be enhanced.

Overall, student engagement in the AW class has ultimately been revealed in this study to be shaped by multiple internal and external influences. Moreover, students' affective, behavioural and cognitive engagement in the AW class seems to be interrelated. This finding affirms that, in order to fully understand and enhance student engagement in the AW class, all dimensions should be taken into consideration. While a psychological perspective has helped to elucidate how engagement dimensions interacted in the learning process, the broader sociocultural aspects have helped to provide further insights into the role of contextual influences on student engagement in the AW class, and how these were driven by (and also drive) motivation towards academic literacy and legitimacy.

The following section moves on to discuss the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and student engagement in the AW class in more detail.

## **7.4 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SELF-CONCEPT IN ACADEMIC WRITING AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT**

The final research question in this study explored the relationship between Malaysian learners' self-concept in academic writing and their engagement in the AW class. Prior to discussing the nature and role of the relationship, it is first useful to review the commonalities (that emerged in Section 7.2 and Section 7.3) which link the two constructs together.

Both of the constructs of self-concept in academic writing and student engagement appear to be shaped by multiple internal and external factors, many which are related to the Malaysian context. It appears that there is a close link between the internal influences of student engagement and self-concept in academic writing. In particular, within an academic context, self-concept in academic writing is part of learners' identity development; and the students' ability and willingness to engage depends on this development. The findings in this study also appear to indicate that a student's future orientation links the two constructs of self-concept and engagement in academic writing. The common denominators, which link students' self-concept in academic writing and student engagement in this study, appear to be students' goals, future selves and desires for academic legitimacy and literacy.

Thus, based on the findings regarding the existence of a relationship between self-concept in academic writing and student engagement, the model that emerges is a combination of both self-concept and engagement ecologies (see Figure 7.4). The two circles on either side of Figure 7.4 represent self-concept in academic writing and student engagement in the AW class. Since a relationship exists, the two circles overlap and the intersection of these two circles (which is shaded in the diagram) represents what links the two constructs together: that is, goals, learners' future selves and desires for academic legitimacy and literacy. However, the bond between the two constructs is

also susceptible to contextual influences. Furthermore, the broader context framing these two ecologies are influential in shaping the intensity and function of the relationship.

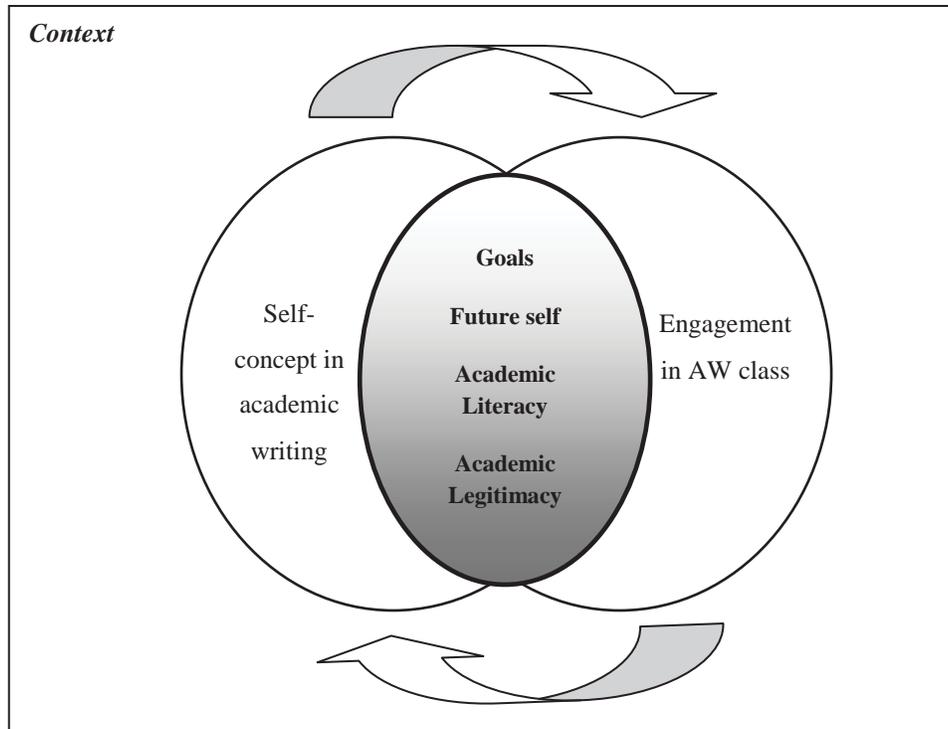


Figure 7.4. A model of the relationship between self-concept and engagement in the AW class.

In the following section, the discussion focuses on the nature of the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement. The discussion begins by looking at the reciprocal nature of the relationship.

### **Self-concept and engagement in AW: A reciprocal relationship**

The qualitative findings on the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement in the AW class appear to demonstrate that it is reciprocal in nature (as indicated by the bidirectional arrows in Figure 7.4). Eight out of nine students seem to take an active role in managing, planning and mediating the two constructs of self-concept in academic writing and engagement in the AW class, in order to achieve a specific outcome. The ways in which the students appear to play an active role in determining the outcomes (e.g. choices made, level of persistence and effort expended) or the pathway of the relationship, are now discussed in detail.

In this study, students' engagement in the class emerges as purposeful and strategic. In the case of Imran, who acknowledged the value of academic writing in L2, the reciprocity between self-concept in academic writing and engagement appeared to be manifested in his conscious decision to enrol in the AW paper. Imran explained: "*If our SC is more to learn about AW, we will try to participate more and try to grab as much information from that course*" (Imran, Interview 2). This finding revealed that, for these students, engagement perhaps not only indicates how students relate affectively and cognitively to AW, but may also be a process of students acting according to these self-concepts. Based on this reasoning, it is of paramount importance that a better understanding of students' motive for engaging in academic writing in L2 is gained to ensure that appropriate support and teaching-learning approach is provided.

Further proof of the reciprocal relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement was apparent in the cases where students reported of explicit benefits gained from the relationship. For example, Nurul reported that she believed interactions with her instructor would be beneficial since: "*As a student I will be identified and I will get the help that I need*" (Nurul, Interview 2). This highlights Nurul's awareness of the benefits gained from the relationship between the self-concept aspect of the instructor's perception of her as a student, and her engagement in the AW class. In Nurul's case, the benefits appear to be a motive for her self-enhancement (e.g. recognition and increased self-efficacy). This finding appears to be consistent with Eccles and Roeser (2011), who maintained that beliefs held about the ability to be successful in an activity, and the values held for that activity, will influence achievement behaviour.

Nurul's case also illustrated how, within the reciprocal relationship between her self-concept in academic writing and engagement, contextual demands appear to exercise their influence. For example, Nurul's initial interview excerpts reflected her minimal regard for the AW class and the English language. However, the academic demands imposed by the university (and perhaps the emphasis put on education by the socio-historical context of Malaysia) have gradually shaped her engagement in the AW class. This was observable through her immediate goal of graduating and aiming to do her best in her Final Year Project. This finding confirms (i) the motivating effects of self-concept on academic-related achievements (as suggested by H. W. Marsh & Martin,

2011; Wigfield & Eccles, 2002), and that (ii) student engagement is “a function of the individual as well as the environment” (Singh, Chang, & Dika, 2010, p. 165).

The reciprocal relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement in this study had different drivers as evidenced by the varied interpretations of the reciprocal relationship in the qualitative findings. Six out of the eight students, emphasized ‘*me-myself-I*’ as agency in the interviews. In these cases, agency seems to play a more dominant role in the self-concept in academic writing – engagement relationship. This primacy was especially evident in situations where the context could enhance or threaten the self-concept. To illustrate, Maya expressed that her motivation for learning and improving herself was due to the fact that she was “*challenged*” by her brother’s criticisms and disparagement. Since her brother viewed her negatively and has always been critical of her academic achievements, Maya adopted purposive strategies such as working hard to pass her university entrance exam (STPM) and taking the AW class to help her do well in her other content papers in university. This finding resonates with that of Cross and colleagues (2011) who maintain that “self-enhancement ... is motivated by the need to see oneself with positive regard and to protect the self from negative information” (p. 161). It is therefore probable that the drivers of the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement varied due to individual differences and the circumstances in which the learners are embedded.

Conversely, only two students explicitly stated that engagement had more weight in the relationship between self-concept and engagement (refer to Figure 6.8 in Chapter 6), thus causing their engagement to have more bearing on the relationship. Joanne explained, “*Engagement pushes me forward*” (Joanne, Interview 2). Joanne perceived that being engaged in the class would provide her with resources, which will then allow her to function effectively in her learning experience. A similar idea was expressed by Ahmad, who believed that “*all these things (the activities in the AW class) are helping you in your writing and in your writing ability*” (Ahmad, Interview 2). In these two cases, engagement was seen as a means of acquiring the necessary tools and skills that would allow these two students to perform better in their new academic community. This in turn, facilitated the reformulation of their sense of selves. This finding demonstrates metacognitive awareness of strategies that may be useful in the AW class. It is probable that students’ ability to reflect, understand and manage their learning in

the AW class is a by-product of the students' unique past learning experience, for example, secondary school experiences, ever-changing language policies and the students' success (or otherwise) in adapting to these changes.

The quality of the reciprocal relationship between self-concept and student engagement appears to be contingent on the level of learners' self-concept in academic writing and engagement. This was apparent in Nurul's case study, in that her negative self-concept influenced the nature of her engagement in the AW class. To illustrate, she recounted a past incident during a school assembly which affected her present self-concept. She also explained that being selected to go to a fully residential school "*made me feel very small among the other cleverer students*" (Nurul, Interview 1) due to her low English proficiency level. Consequently, Nurul appears to have limited her participation in that particular academic context. The reciprocal nature of the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement emerged again in Nurul's present context whereby, her lack of engagement, impacted on her confidence in her L2 (English). It was later revealed that this lack of self-efficacy had a lasting detrimental impact on her self-efficacy in L2 in the tertiary setting, especially when it involved having to interact with the instructor in L2. In the same manner, positive self-concept was manifested in the form of high cognitive, affective and behavioural engagement for Ahmad and Imran in the AW class.

Based on the findings from this study, it seems reasonable to posit that the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement in the AW class appears to be influenced by either learners' self-concept in academic writing or engagement. That is, this reciprocal nature (represented by the pair of curved arrows in Figure 7.4) suggests that the characteristics of self-concept in academic writing influence students' engagement, and vice versa. This finding is consistent with the expectancy-value model theory (Wigfield & Eccles, 2002), whereby students' beliefs about their abilities in academic writing and their likelihood of succeeding could predict their subsequent efforts in the learning context. At the same time, Newmann et al. (1992) articulated that one of the bases of student academic engagement theory is the fundamental human need to develop and express competence. This was evidenced in the findings of this current study, in which some students perceived their engagement as providing feedback and

recognition in the AW class. Kuh (2003) explains this by saying “the more students practice and get feedback on their writing, analyzing, or problem solving, the more adept they become” (p. 25). Knowledge therefore, in turn, informs students' self-concepts.

Although the reciprocal nature of the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement may raise the possibility of having a series of negative reciprocal relationships between self-concept in academic writing and student engagement (e.g. Nurul), this was not always the case. Some students (e.g. Joanne and Maya) reported themselves as being average to poor academic writers, but also made attempts to positively engage in the AW class. This finding supports the idea that students' “readiness-to-engage will evolve over time, as a result of experiences and socialisation processes embedded in the students' *habitus* and in wider contexts” (Handley, Price, & Millar, 2011, p. 551). Maya's illustration of the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement (see Figure 6.5) also shows that the outcomes in the AW class do not appear to be pre-determined exclusively by one's self-concept or engagement. The uncertainty of outcomes, as suggested by Maya, perhaps alludes to the fact that there are a myriad of contextual factors that could impact on the reciprocal relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement. Therefore, this finding highlights that, although learners have agency, this alone does not guarantee that students are able to act on it. In fact, Winne and Nesbit (2010) maintain that “Agency is reciprocally governed: As learners change their local environment, the environments' web of causal factors modulates affordances available to them” (p.657). This is consistent with findings in this study, which reveal how relationships between self-concept in academic writing and engagement could be susceptible to influences from context (e.g. support from peers and instructors).

Overall, the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement that emerges in this study appears to be reciprocal in nature. Therefore, the links between self-concept in academic writing and engagement should be emphasized, since both appear to play a role in enhancing desirable educational outcomes in the AW class.

## **The complementary nature of factors in the ecology**

The discussion in this section puts forward the premise that there is a complementary relationship between multiple internal and/or external factors that are available to students, and that this may influence the nature of their actions in the AW class. In particular, the relationship between self-concept and engagement in academic writing appears to be altered by the balance of factors within the two ecologies (self-concept and engagement in academic writing) of any individual student. It is therefore suggested that there is a link between learners' context, self, and engagement. The different proportion of each of these multiple factors creates individual difference in the way each student's ecology of self-concept and engagement in academic writing operates.

In this study, each of the students also reported a unique combination of engaging behaviourally, cognitively and affectively in the AW class. To illustrate, Siew Lee's reported "average" English proficiency appeared to have impeded her cognitive engagement in the AW class. However, at the same time she had a network of peers which appeared to propel and sustain her self-concept, and hence her behavioural and affective engagement in the AW class. Siew Lee also actively sought help from her instructor which in turn, boosted her cognitive engagement in the AW class. Therefore, it is probable that the relationship between self-concept and engagement in Siew Lee's case provides information and feedback, to assist internal and external factors to be balanced in a complementary fashion. Hence, the ecologies of self-concept and engagement in academic writing allow students to compensate when particular internal or external factors are not available or not as strong.

It also appears that the particular levels of various internal and/or external factors that are available to individual students may influence how learners operate. This was particularly evident in the example of Ahmad, who drew from, and was guided by, the energizing properties of his self-concept in academic writing (e.g. "*I activated myself*" [Interview 1]) and his engagement in the AW class (e.g. "*I read a lot of academic writing, books and journals that are related to my academic field*" [Interview 1]). He identified appropriate learning strategies, set realistic goals, and consequently he engaged positively in the AW class. As the social (e.g. his peers and family) and educational context in which he was embedded (e.g. instructor and institutional aims)

also put great emphasis on academic importance, these factors may have further facilitated and nurtured the plausibility of this future self (J. Lee, et al., 2010; Vasquez & Buehler, 2007). It is therefore probable that the desired learning outcomes may be contingent on the proportionate availability of both internal and external factors, and whether their goals are aligned with the balance within their ecologies of self-concept and engagement in academic writing.

The way in which internal and external factors are balanced in the relationship between self-concept and engagement in academic writing could also help learners reach their goals in a realistic and accurate manner. In fact, students who had knowledge regarding the function of the relationship between self-concept and engagement appeared more aware that they had control over actions and, therefore, could determine their own learning outcomes. For example, increased effort is likely to have successful outcomes for motivating and restructuring the self to adapt to contextual demands. This awareness was expressed by Imran, who reported that a strong relationship existed because he understood the value of the AW class, "*compared to someone who doesn't care and just takes a course for fun*" (Imran, Interview 2). This finding is critical since it implies that when both constructs are enhanced, it can lead to further academic success. As a study by Thang and colleagues (2011) in six public universities in Malaysia identified, students predominantly attribute their academic success to what they perceived as external and uncontrollable factors such as "teacher influence" and "getting a good grade" (p. 472). It is probable that the lack of academic ownership might lessen the likelihood of sustained academic engagement. In the context of this study, students who continued to persist in the AW class, perceived their success or failure as contingent on the effort they put into learning (e.g. Joanne, Siew Lee and Maya). Those who chose to disengage (e.g. Nurul) seem to attribute their inability to cope in the AW class to external factors such as difficulty of tasks in AW or having to learn in L2. This finding reflects Weiner's (1972) Attribution Theory in which the effort a student invests in a particular activity is contingent on how they perceive success or failure as dependent on internal/external and controllable/uncontrollable factors (e.g. effort versus luck).

Indeed, the proportions of various factors that are available within the self-concept and engagement in academic writing ecology appear to be crucial in facilitating learners to reach their desired goals of academic literacy and academic legitimacy. However, this

may also be contingent of the nature of self-concept and engagement itself. If both constructs are positive, the outcomes tend to be desirable, such as improved academic learning or academic achievement and legitimacy (as an L2 academic writer), in addition to empowerment within the students' learning experience (e.g. Ahmad and Imran). On the other hand, a negative self-concept in academic writing may tend to foster lower levels of engagement, such as in the case of Nurul. It can therefore be argued that a healthy positive balance between self-concept in academic writing and the student engagement in the AW class will probably facilitate the learners' academic and social integration into tertiary learning. This supports the findings of other research in which negative self-concepts in students tend to lead to poorer adjustment in the academic setting (Alicke & Sedikides, 2009; E. Johnson & Nozick, 2011).

All of the students in this study appeared to differentially access various factors within their respective ecologies, and the balance was contingent on factors which were available to them. For these reasons, the findings in this study appear to demonstrate that striving for a positive equilibrium between the internal or external factors that are available to students may influence their engagement in the AW class.

## **7.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

As a result of this study, self-concept in academic writing and engagement have been shown to have some commonalities, thus affirming a relationship between the two constructs. Self-concept in academic writing and engagement both appear to be dynamic in nature, since they are influenced by multiple internal and external factors that are unique to the context in which the learners are embedded (see Figure 7.2). Self-concept and engagement in academic writing appears to have a reciprocal relationship, and the common factor that ties the two constructs together is the drive for future attainments. The relationship between self-concept and engagement in academic writing also appears to be altered by the weighting of internal and external factors within the two ecologies. Therefore, this suggests a link exists between learners' context, self, and engagement.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **8.1 INTRODUCTION**

To conclude, this chapter first summarises the study and its key findings, and reviews its limitations. Then, in Section 8.3 there is consideration of the implications for theory and methodology. In Section 8.4, implications for practice and policy are presented, and this leads to recommendations for students, instructors, institutions, curriculum designers and policymakers within the Malaysian tertiary context. Following suggestions for future research in Section 8.5, there are some final words regarding the researchers' own journey towards understanding the experience of second language learners in a higher learning institution, through the lenses of self-concept in academic writing and student engagement in the AW class.

#### **8.2 THE STUDY REVISITED**

The study aimed to explore the relationship between Malaysian learners' self-concept in academic writing and their engagement in the Academic Writing class. In doing so, it also aimed to identify areas and opportunities for improvement in the academic writing curricula. The study utilised a mixed methods approach, in which priority was given to the qualitative phase. An initial survey was distributed to 170 students, in order to examine the general trends of Malaysian learners' self-concept in academic writing and engagement within one university. The questionnaire also afforded the opportunity for an exploratory correlational analysis between the two constructs of self-concept in academic writing and student engagement. This was followed by two qualitative interviews, with each of eight participants, who had differing self-concepts in academic writing and differing levels of engagement.

The first phase of the study, which utilised a questionnaire, revealed variations in the learners' level and facets of self-concept in academic writing. Similar variations were found in the data on student engagement where, although the majority of the students

were highly engaged in the academic writing class, there were differences in the level of affective, cognitive and behavioural dimensions of this engagement. The correlational analysis affirmed there was a moderately positive relationship between the two constructs in the AW class and it highlighted the possibility of other internal and external influences, shaping this relationship. These findings provide further evidence that self-concepts are dynamic and susceptible to change (see Section 2.2).

The qualitative phase of the study, which utilized a case study approach with eight student participants, complemented and expanded the findings in the quantitative phase. The semi-structured interviews revealed that students were gradually becoming more self-aware, and were at various stages of their self-concept development and engagement process. Furthermore, the case studies revealed a number of internal and external factors which shaped individual self-concepts in academic writing and engagement in the AW class. The nature of and roles of self-concept in academic writing and engagement play in students' learning experience in the AW class were uncovered. In particular, 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.

### **Limitations of the study**

As with all research, this investigation had limitations. The limitations in this study are due to: (i) its reliance on particular sources of data, (ii) sample size, (iii) time and travel constraints of the researcher, and (iv)

Firstly, it must be acknowledged that the information in this study was based on the students' perception of self-concept in academic writing and their engagement in the AW class. This study accepts that self-reports from both the questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews have shortcomings. Not all elements of self-concept and engagement would have been readily accessible through the students' conscious reflections or may have been "so well-rehearsed that they become automatic" (Markus

& Wurf, 1987, p. 304). This may make it difficult to construct a complete picture of an individual's sense of self, a holistic depiction of student engagement, and to identify all salient factors within a particular situation. It is also important to acknowledge the possibility of ambiguity in meaning in terms of students' understanding of self-concept and engagement for both questionnaire and interview items. Nonetheless, the data from both methods have provided rich insights into these areas.

Secondly, the number of students involved in Phase Two of the study was limited. While the findings in the qualitative section of the study have been enriching, and to a certain extent are supported by the current literature, the description may be unique to this particular group of individuals, within this particular setting. Furthermore, the students who participated in Phase Two of the study were all average or high in terms of their self-concepts and engagement in academic writing. It is probable that university entry has led to this student profile. In fact, based on the quantitative finding, the average-high self-concept and engagement in academic writing was representative of the student population surveyed.

Thirdly, due to time and travel limitations, it was not possible to address the issue of temporal triangulation. A longitudinal study would show more about the development of self-concept, and identity transformation in the AW class. However, some insights into past, present and future influences were included in students' interview data

Fourthly, due to methodological limitations, the researcher acknowledges the predispositions and potential biases that could have affected data collection, analysis and interpretation.

Limitations noted above provide impetus for future research. Suggestions for this are addressed later in the chapter. The following section moves on to the implications of this study.

### 8.3 THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

Key theoretical implications of this study include: (i) identification of a link between self, engagement and context, (ii) the significance of context, and (iii) an ecological perspective of student engagement. These are discussed in detail as follows.

#### **Link between self, engagement and context**

The findings of this study have not only affirmed the existence of a relationship between self-concept in academic writing and engagement, but also revealed that the relationship between self-concept and engagement in academic writing appears to be altered by the balance of internal and external factors within the two ecologies (of self-concept and engagement in academic writing) of any individual student. In particular, the ecology allowed students to compensate when particular internal or external factors are not available or not as strong, such as in the case of Siew Lee who resorted to seek help from her network of peers in the AW class due to the fact that her English proficiency was low. Therefore, a theoretical implication of this study is that the exploration of self-concept and engagement in academic writing can help explain the link between self, engagement and context.

Learners' self-concepts in academic writing appeared to play the role of motivating and restructuring their sense of selves in order to adapt to contextual changes and learning demands in the AW class. This was evidenced in the findings which revealed, self-concept in academic writing was not only a means of self-evaluation, but also a key driver through which learners set goals, incorporated strategies and monitored progress in the AW class. Subsequently, there appears to be a link between self, engagement and context that is manifested in students' cognitive, behavioural and affective engagement. In particular, this link was also revealed in the way students redefine their self-concepts in academic writing and negotiate their engagement in the AW class through the complementary balance of various internal and external factors (e.g. language, peers and instructor) in their ecologies.

Finally, the reciprocal nature of the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and student engagement not only highlighted varied points for self-concept and

engagement 'intervention', but also provided important clues to the motives and needs that guided these learners' thoughts and actions in the AW class. The fact that students differentially access internal and external factors within their respective ecologies indicates there is potential for improvement through addressing both internal and external factors. It is thought that addressing both internal and external factors could perhaps further strengthen and promote a healthy self-concept in academic writing and more meaningful student engagement in the AW class.

### **The influence of context and self-concept**

The study highlights that, if the research objective is to better understand the learners in regard to their self-concepts, contextual factors have to be examined. In this study, sensitivity to context, through the qualitative insights, has greatly facilitated the identification of certain social conditions (e.g. background, circumstances, settings and situations), which influenced the nature of self-concept in academic writing. Furthermore, sensitivity to context has allowed for a closer examination of the social network within the learners' ecology of self-concept in academic writing and the factors within this that impact on self. It was within this ecology that self-concept trajectories were ascertained, as part of each student's adaptation and socialisation processes. This process involved not only self-concept stability, but also identity conflict and identity transformation. Thus, the study has demonstrated that self-concept is simultaneously: (i) structure and process, (ii) stable and dynamic, and (iii) personal and social.

The specificity of the academic writing context highlights influences which are exclusive to these participants and this particular setting. In fact, many individual differences emerged as unexpected internal influences for self-concept in academic writing and engagement. Although there may be some value for similar settings where academic writing is taught in a second language, within other post-colonial contexts, influences, such as conflicting identities, L1-L2-L3 shift, constant educational flux and inconsistencies in the medium of instruction may be endemic to the Malaysian context. For this reason, one contribution of this study to theory is the importance of sensitivity to contextual factors, within any investigation that explores self-concept in academic writing for second language learners.

### **An ecological perspective of student engagement**

A further theoretical implication of this study is the need to extend the current literature of student engagement that includes internal and external factors within the context. Hence, the ecological model that is proposed in this study is that which consists of internal and external factors. The psychological perspective has illuminated significant individual factors. However, we cannot afford to ignore socio-historical aspects in understanding student engagement, especially in the Malaysian context. For example, the findings have ascertained that when students attempt to engage, multiple factors (both internal and external) can impede or enable this process. Thus, the understanding of student engagement in this study has not only been enriched by awareness of the socio-historical context, but also through the insights into how student engagement can be enhanced and sustained meaningfully through capitalizing on internal and external factors that impact on student actions.

For these learners, learning academic writing in English had both positive and negative ramifications. During the students' attempts to gain literacy and legitimacy, certain individuals had more access to these outcomes, and some were more marginalised in the process. The socio-historical aspect of the Malaysian context (e.g. position of English, identity conflicts, and the emphasis on education) appear pertinent in each student's ability and decisions about engaging in the AW class. This study, therefore, offers a different way of understanding student engagement in the AW class, as a process that requires enhancement of learners' legitimacy, positive self-concepts, and identities. Thus, it offers significant insights into research on student engagement as well as filling the gap in current research from a Malaysian perspective.

### **8.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In this study, pragmatism, as the underlining research paradigm allowed the researcher to investigate self-concept and engagement from different perspectives. The mixed methods research design allowed for varied sources of data to be integrated into one study. The different ways of collecting and analyzing data produced a more in-depth, contextualized understanding of self-concept and engagement in academic writing, and the relationship between these two constructs. Therefore, a methodological implication

of this study is that through mixed methods and data integration, the dynamic interplay of individual and contextual factors can be better illuminated.

## **8.5 IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND POLICY**

In this section, implications for students, instructors, curriculum designers and policy makers from the findings of the study are discussed. Practical recommendations are also provided for each of these groups.

### **Implications and recommendations for students**

During the study, students discussed their self-concepts in academic writing in tandem with language related concerns, such as accuracy of grammar and the extent of vocabulary that they possess. These issues appeared to impact on students' willingness to interact with the language and their readiness to use the language in a more advanced way. This narrow perspective of language competence can be detrimental not only to learners' self-concept in academic writing, but also to student engagement in the AW class. This highlights not only students' lack of knowledge regarding the writing process (e.g. writing organization, development of ideas, and knowledge of content area), but also their lack of awareness regarding issues of accuracy and fluency in the AW class.

Learning a new subject such as AW in a second language, in a new setting, can be a demanding experience. The students' overall academic achievement, academic legitimacy and job prospects are also contingent on the language proficiency and the communicative skills learnt from the AW class. However, learning academic writing in L2 does not have to be an isolated process. The study has ascertained that there are multiple external and internal factors that could influence self-concept in academic writing and engagement in a positive way. These factors include the quality of interaction students have with peers and instructors, and the existence of a network of support in the form of peers and senior students. Such factors may also compensate for other areas in which individuals may not be as strong.

In light of these findings from the study, it is recommended that students:

1. ensure their perceptions of academic writing incorporate notions of fluency, accuracy and knowledge of their respective disciplines; and
2. be resourceful in their writing process by actively seeking help from peers and using resources made available by the institution (e.g. instructors, library and database).

### **Implications and recommendations for instructors**

The findings of this study have important implications for instructors in the AW class. Since they have the most frequent and proximal contact with students in the AW class, instructors play a critical role in shaping both learners' self-concepts in academic writing and their engagement. In this study, some students perceived their participation in the AW class was impeded by their inadequate English proficiency level. This in turn impacted on how they valued the AW class. Therefore, instructors need to make it explicit to the students that the course objectives are aimed at the students' academic literacy development, and are also designed for them to gain necessary academic writing skills that are transferable to other subjects. Clarifying the learning outcomes explicitly to the students throughout the AW tasks and activities, and also prior to enrolling, would provide students with clear expectations and a sense of purpose in learning AW.

For some students, the act of learning academic writing in English was perceived to be a threat to their sense of self and identity as a learner. Consequently they were selective in their participation and at times reported being disengaged in the AW class. Therefore, it is paramount that the notion of having multiple selves is discussed with the students. In the context of the AW class for example, the student's core identity does not become lost. Instead, certain more peripheral identities can be activated and become more salient in the AW class. It is paramount that learners understand that the promotion of a new academic identity does not have to result in the loss of one's already established identity. Furthermore, the instrumental value of learning academic writing also needs to be emphasised in order to enhance the constructs of self-concept and engagement in academic writing.

It was clear that the students in this study were unfamiliar with the routines and conventions associated with academic writing. For the new students, AW was not only unfamiliar, but also inaccessible due to language barriers. The findings from this study seem to indicate that students were being taught in the AW class under the assumption that they had already acquired language and composition skills; whereas, some of the students did not even have a basic knowledge of basic writing skills and thus, their proficiency was limited.

In light of the findings from the study, it is recommended that instructors:

1. communicate to students about the nature of academic writing and provide opportunities for peer interaction, support and information about available resources;
2. create learning opportunities in the AW classroom by having a co-ordinated emphasis on both academic writing conventions, content and L2 knowledge;
3. make the link between course objectives and writing tasks related to academic literacy development more explicit to students; and
4. highlight the positive gains associated with learning academic writing in L2 (e.g. relevance to their final year project and goals of pursuing postgraduate studies, improvement in L2 communication, greater job prospects and thus upward social mobility).

### **Implications and recommendations for institutions**

This study demonstrates the need to provide a supportive educational environment in order to develop a positive foundation for self-concept enhancement and student engagement. Students' limited access to instructors, large classes and the consequent lack of individual attention throughout the writing process, all present impediments to their engagement in the AW class. Therefore, to maximize the quality of the relationship, an appropriate student-teacher ratio needs to be put in place.

The findings of the study also revealed that students face various challenges in learning academic writing in L2. These challenges were not only limited to language concerns (e.g. grammar and vocabulary), but also include other writing aspects (e.g. organisation, academic writing conventions, stylistic issues). These different issues call for

constructive, personalised and informative feedback to be provided for individual learners. Therefore, institutions need to invest in a form of ongoing support in which students' individualised needs can be addressed. Individualised attention should address issues such as unclear expectations for writing tasks, anxiety due to a lack of proficiency, and social peer comparisons.

This study therefore recommends that the participating institution:

1. reduce AW class size to provide more effective student-instructor ratio; and
2. provide writing support to further assist learners in their writing (e.g. in a learning support centre or through a writing tutor).

### **Implications and recommendations for curriculum designers**

The findings in the study suggest students engage in the AW class not only for the purposes of gaining academic literacy and to do well academically (short term goal), but also to gain upward mobility (e.g. better job prospects and doing postgraduate studies). With this in mind, there is a need to capitalize on and integrate learners' goals into the academic writing curricula since the congruency of their future selves with the current academic context provides an ideal motivation for learning academic writing in L2.

Students also appeared to do few drafts when undertaking academic writing. The use of portfolios, in which students can collect and record their work throughout the duration of the AW class, could fill this gap. By including the various stages that led them to the final writing product (e.g. mind-maps, outlines and multiple drafts [with self-editing], and feedback from instructors), the inclusion of a portfolio as part of the assessment would also facilitate the students' goal for legitimacy, since this act can be seen as socialising these apprentice writers so that they can become legitimate members of the academic community.

Finally, although a majority of the students went through pre-university programmes (e.g. matriculation), they still expressed that they were ill-equipped, and had misconceptions regarding writing in tertiary level. Therefore, it is imperative that secondary school learners are made aware of the writing expectations at tertiary level. Furthermore, they may need to be supported in moving from general English (in

secondary school) to English for Academic Purposes (EAP) or English for Specific Purposes (ESP), pertinent to their studies at tertiary level.

It is therefore suggested that curriculum designers:

1. make clearer links between activities in the AW class and students' goals (e.g. tentative language for writing results and discussion in laboratory reports, summarizing and paraphrasing skills for the literature review section in their Final Year Project);
2. incorporate the use of writing portfolios in assessment of academic writing so learners can perceive writing as a continuous process, and monitor writing progress at both micro and macro level; and
3. ensure that the pre-university (e.g. matriculation) writing curricula bridge the gap between the writing curricula in secondary level and tertiary level through a more discipline-specific approach (e.g. ESP for Engineering and ESP for Business Studies).

### **Implications and recommendations for policymakers**

The findings from this study suggest that the policy changes regarding the linguistic medium of instruction caused some students to have difficulty adapting. This lack of continuity also affected some students negatively in the AW class (e.g. low value of AW in L2, and minimal participation in the AW class). However, although change is inevitable in the Malaysian context, transparency from policymakers (both government and institution) is needed in terms of the medium of instruction and the clarification of the position of English not only for the institutions, but also for instructors and students in a prescribed curriculum in Malaysia. The findings suggest that students may not have had a clear understanding about why such policy changes occur, resulting in misconceptions regarding the purpose of learning academic writing in English.

Changes involving one's sense of self can take time. In this study, the qualitative case studies reveal how learners continuously struggle with the changes they are required to make. This disruption to self-concept development and the lack of stability can have a detrimental impact on the learners' performance and their outlook, when they are learning AW in L2. Therefore, the implementation of policy changes should be

executed within a timeframe that is practical and feasible. Furthermore, those involved in change (e.g. institutions, instructors and students) should be supported adequately in order for the move into higher learning to be made effectively.

It is recommended that policymakers:

1. exercise transparency about the position of English and the intended outcomes of any policy changes;
2. provide transition time in order for those involved (institution, instructors and students) to adjust to policy changes; and
3. provide support for instructors and institutions alike through extensive professional development programmes to cope with any major curriculum change.

## **8.6 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The results of this study suggest further research would be helpful to provide a more holistic understanding of the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and student engagement in writing classes, in higher education in Malaysia.

The findings have highlighted the crucial need for further investigation with regard to second language learners, in particular those from a developing country such as Malaysia. This is important as many individual differences that emerged as internal and external influences on self-concept in academic writing and engagement are endemic to this particular context. These factors have been highlighted within the context of literacy and other processes of individual development and socialization, which are unique to the Malaysian context.

In this study, self-concept has been found to continuously change and evolve. This reconstructing and renegotiating the sense of self is what Hormuth (1990) calls stabilising and destabilising processes of the self. Future research could be undertaken within a wider range of higher learning institutions, following students over a longer period of time. This will assist in further documenting the developmental nature of self-concept in academic writing and student engagement in the AW class. The longitudinal emphasis will provide a better understanding of changes to peripheral self-concepts (e.g.

whether these are integrated as part of the central or core sense of self or abandoned altogether by students). Additionally, further research would also confirm specific catalysts (both internal and external) that trigger changes in learners' developmental self-concept. More knowledge of the ecology of self-concept in academic writing would also provide more understanding of the possibilities for self-concept change in learners.

The literature also highlights the nature of engagement (e.g. Kahu, 2011; Price, et al., 2011), where there may be factors impeding student engagement, and thus causing disengagement. Therefore, there is a need to better understand the influences shaping student engagement in the AW class which can be enhanced (self-efficacy, English proficiency, teacher-student relationship and network of support from peers), in order to circumvent disengagement.

In order to increase the generalisability of this study, further research on the relationship between Malaysian learners' self-concept in academic writing and their engagement would need to be conducted, not only with a larger sample, but also including more institutions.

In this study, only the students' perspectives (through interviews and self-reports) were taken into account. Data from additional methods of naturalistic inquiry, such as think-aloud strategy, analyses of course outlines, writing assignments, students' compositions and observations may also be useful, to ensure a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between self-concept in academic writing and student engagement.

The inclusion of a wider range of data would also provide further opportunities to examine the learning strategies that learners use, in line with their self-concept and engagement in a particular subject or skill. The identification of such strategies would help to identify, with greater confidence, the links between context, self and engagement, as part of the learning experience in the AW class. In doing so, a greater understanding regarding the nature of the relationship can be achieved.

## 8.7 CONCLUDING REMARKS

As an L2 writing instructor, the researcher in the past has tended to focus mainly on the cognitive aspects in teaching writing to second language learners. Aspects such as grammar, vocabulary and the conventions of academic writing also took precedence in the researcher's previous understanding of self-concept in academic writing. Nonetheless, the exploration of engagement has highlighted how the learning experience is also very much a social process. Thus, the cognitive, affective and behavioural aspects, and the integration of these, should never be overlooked when attempting to understand and engage learners in the classroom. Therefore, this study has provided me personally with a greater understanding of self-concept and engagement in academic writing both as individual constructs, as well as understanding how the interactions and relationships between them have the potential to empower students towards academic development and achievement.

This study reveals self-concept and engagement as vital constructs in the students' lives. It has also brought into focus the importance of acknowledging individual differences in the self-concept and engagement in academic writing ecologies of second language learners in a classroom context. Using self-concept as a point of reference has illuminated how learners interpret and respond differently to internal and external factors within their learning experience. An understanding of the significance of self-concept in academic writing, engagement, and the perceptions of those involved, may thus contribute, in some way, towards a better appreciation of students' learning experiences, be it their successes or failures.

Reflecting on why I decided to embark on this study, and the questions which became the impetus of this study, it is clear that the simple question of why students do what they do in the AW class has complex answers. Through the lenses of self-concept and student engagement, I realise I now have a better understanding of the writing experience for a second language learner. It is without a doubt a dynamic journey, which is embedded with struggles, challenges and conflict, but can also lead to success. Writing in a second language is not (and should not be) a solitary act. As an instructor, I am now very aware that the type of support that learners need in the AW classroom

transcends that of merely providing the correct writing strategies or proficiency-related resources. The unique individual differences represented by the students' diversity means that my responsibility goes beyond developing their academic literacy. Since I am part of the learners' ecology of self-concept and engagement in academic writing, I have an obligation to assist the learners to achieve a positive sense of self, as part of their individual and social development, in the hope that they will eventually become positive and engaged members of the academic community.

*Each to each a looking-glass  
Reflects the other that doth pass  
(Cooley, 1902)*

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abasi, A. R., Akbari, N., & Graves, B. (2006). Discourse appropriation, construction of identities, and the complex issue of plagiarism: ESL students writing in graduate school. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 15*, 102-117.
- Abasi, A. R., & Graves, B. (2008). Academic literacy and plagiarism: Conversations with international graduate students and disciplinary professors. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes, 7*(4), 221-233.
- Abdol Latif, L., & Bahroom, R. (2004). Priority satisfaction survey: A tool in developing effective retention strategies. Retrieved from <http://eprints.oum.edu.my/339/>
- Abdol Latif, L., Sungsi, S., & Bahroom, R. (2009). Managing retention in ODL institutions: A case study on Open University Malaysia and Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University. *ASEAN Journal of Open and Distance Learning, 1*(1), 1-10.
- Abdul Samad, A., Syed Abd Rahman, S. Z., & Norbaiti, S. (2008). Refining English language tests for university admission: A Malaysian example. *Asean Journal University of Education, 4*(1), 57-68.
- Abdullah, A. (2008). The communicative sensitivity of bilingual societies: Are Malaysia's globalizing tendencies compatible with her multicultural environment? In R. Jacobson (Ed.), *The pulse of a Malaysian university* (pp. 69-76). New York: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Abdullah, M. R., Abu Bakar, Z., Ali, R. M., Raja Yaacob, R. A. I., Rahman, A., Embong, A. M., et al. (2011). Writing strategies of Malaysian ESL undergraduate engineering learners. *International Journal of Engineering and Technology, 11*(2), 1-9.
- Ali, Z., & Yunus, M. (2004). An ESL writing course: Unravelling students' needs and concerns. Retrieved from <http://www.melta.org.my/ET/2004/2004-114.pdf>
- Alicke, M., & Sedikides, C. (2009). Self-enhancement and self-protection: What they are and what they do. *European Review of Social Psychology, 20*, 1-48.
- Altbach, P. G. (2004). Higher education crosses borders. *Change, 36*(2), 18-24.
- Amiot, C. E., De la Sablonniere, R., Terry, D. J., & Smith, J. R. (2007). Integration of social identities in the self: Toward a cognitive-developmental model. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 11*(4), 364-388.
- Anastasi, A., & Urbina, S. (1997). *Psychological Testing*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc.
- Anderman, E. M., & Anderman, L. H. (1998). Present and possible selves during adolescence. (*ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 419 205*). Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov>
- Anstrom, K., DiCerbo, P., Butler, F., Katz, A., Millet, J., & Rivera, C. (2010). A review of the literature on academic English: Implications for K-12 English language learners. Retrieved from [www.ceee.gwu.edu](http://www.ceee.gwu.edu)
- Areepattamannil, S., & Freeman, J. G. (2008). Academic achievement, academic self-concept, and academic motivation of immigrant adolescents in the greater Toronto area secondary schools. *Journal of Advanced Academics, 19*, 700-743.
- Astin, A. (1993). *What matters in college? Four critical years revisited*. San Fransisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Au, R., Watkins, D., & Hattie, J. (2010). Academic risk factors and deficits of learned hopelessness: A longitudinal study of Hong Kong secondary school students. *Educational Psychology, 30*(2), 125-138.
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.
- Banks, M. (2001). *Visual methods in social research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Barbour, R. S. (2008). *Introducing qualitative research: A student guide to the craft of doing qualitative research*. London: Sage.
- Barcelos, A. M. F. (2003). Teachers' and students' beliefs within a Deweyan framework: Conflict and influence. In P. Kalaja & A. M. F. Barcelos (Eds.), *Beliefs about SLA: New research approaches* (pp. 171-200). Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Barker, K., Dowson, M., & McInerney, D. (2006). Relations between students' goal orientations and academic self-concept: A more comprehensive model of student motivation. Retrieved from <http://www.aare.edu.au/06pap/bar06851.pdf>
- Baumeister, R. F., Campbell, J. D., Krueger, J. I., & Vohs, K. D. (2005). Exploding the self-esteem myth. *Scientific American, 292*, 84-92.
- Bennell, P., & Pearce, T. (2003). The internationalisation of higher education: exporting education to developing and transitional economies. *International Journal of Educational Development, 23*(2), 215-232.
- Bennet, M., & Sani, F. (2004). Introduction: Children and social identity. In M. Bennet & F. Sani (Eds.), *The development of the social self* (pp. 1-28). New York: Psychology Press.
- Bennet, R. (2009). Academic self-concept among business students in a recruiting university: Definition, measurement and potential effects. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 33*(2), 141-158.
- Berman, R., & Cheng, L. (2010). English academic language skills: Perceived difficulties by undergraduate and graduate students, and their academic achievement. *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics, 4*(1-2), 25-40.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. London: Routledge.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1996). Culture's in-between. In S. Hall & P. du Guay (Eds.), *Questions of cultural identity* (pp. 53-60). London: Sage.
- Biber, D., & Gray, B. (2010). Challenging stereotypes about academic writing: Complexity, elaboration, explicitness. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes, 9*, 2-20.
- Bland, D. C. (2008, March). "Voices of possibility and hope": What at-risk students can tell teachers about classroom engagement. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association (AERA), New York. Retrieved from <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/13522/>.
- Blumstein, P. (2001). The production of selves in personal relationship. In A. Branaman (Ed.), *Self and Society* (pp. 183-197). Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell.
- Boersma, F. J., & Chapman, J. W. (1977). *Student's Perception of Ability Scale*. Edmonton: University of Alberta.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2003). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods* (4th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods* (5th ed.). Boston: Pearson International Edition.
- Bong, M. (2008). Effects of parent-child relationships and classroom goal structures on motivation, help-seeking avoidance, and cheating. *Journal of Experimental Education, 76*(2), 191-217.
- Bong, M., & Skaalvik, E. M. (2003). Academic self-concept and self-efficacy: How different are they really? *Educational Psychology Review, 15*(1), 1-40.
- Bornholt, L. J. (2000). Social and personal aspects of self knowledge: A balance of individuality and belonging. *Learning and Instruction, 10*(5), 415-429.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). The economics of linguistic exchanges. *Social Science Information, 16*(6), 645-668.
- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. (1977). *Reproduction in education, society and culture*. London SAGE.
- Bowman, N. A. (2011). Promoting participation in a diverse democracy. *Review of Educational Research, 81*(1), 29-68.
- Boylan, M. (2010). Ecologies of participation in school classrooms. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 26*, 61-70.
- Bracken, B. (1996). *Handbook of self-concept: Developmental, social and clinical considerations*. New York: John Wiley & Sons Inc.
- Braine, G. (2002). Academic literacy and the nonnative speaker graduate student. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes, 1*(1), 59-68.
- Breakwell, G. M. (1992). *Social psychology of identity and the self-concept*. London: Surrey University Press.
- Brewer, M. (1991). The social self: On being the same and different at the same time. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 17*(5), 475-482.
- Brewer, M., & Gardner, W. (1996). Who is this "We"? Levels of collective identity and self representations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 71*(1), 83-93.
- Brewer, M. B., & Pierce, K. P. (2005). Social identity complexity and outgroup tolerance. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 31*(3), 428-437.
- Brown, C. M., Young, S. G., & McConnell, A. R. (2009). Seeing close others as we see ourselves: One's own self-complexity is reflected in perceptions of meaningful others. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 45*(3), 515-523.
- Brown, G. (2007). Making ethnic citizens: The politics and practice of education in Malaysia. *International Journal of Educational Development, 27*(3), 318-330.
- Bryman, A. (2008). *Social research methods* (3rd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bryson, C., & Hand, L. (2007). The role of engagement in inspiring teaching and learning. *Innovations in Teaching and Education International 44*(4), 349-362.
- Buhs, E. S. (2005). Peer rejection, negative peer treatment, and school adjustment: Self-concept and classroom engagement as mediating processes. *Journal of School Psychology, 43*(5), 407-424.
- Burgess, A., & Ivanic, R. (2010). Writing and being written: Issues of identity across timescales. *Written Communication, 27*(2), 228-255.
- Byrne, B. M. (1996). *Measuring self-concept across the life span: Issues and instrumentation*. Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association.

- Byrne, B. M., & Shavelson, R. J. (1986). On the structure of adolescent self-concept. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 78*, 474-481.
- Canagarajah, S. (1999). *Resisting linguistic imperialism in English teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Caprara, G. V., Vecchione, M., Alessandri, G., Gerbino, M., & Barbaranelli, C. (2011). The contribution of personality traits and self-efficacy beliefs to academic achievement: A longitudinal study. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 81*(1), 78-96.
- Carini, R., Kuh, G., & Klein, S. (2006). Student engagement and student learning: Testing the linkages. *Research in Higher Education, 47*(1), 1-32.
- Cattell, R. B. (1996b). The scree test for the number of factors. *Multivariate Behavioral Research, 1*, 245-276.
- Chen, J. (2008). Grade-level differences: Relations of parental, teacher and peer support to academic engagement and achievement among Hong Kong students. *School Psychology International, 29*(2), 183-198.
- Cheng, Y.-S., Horwitz, E. K., & Schallert, D. L. (1999). Language anxiety: Differentiating writing and speaking components. *Language Learning, 49*(3), 417-446.
- Chiu, M. M., & Chow, B. (2010). Culture, motivation and reading achievement: High school students in 41 countries. *Learning and Individual Differences, 20*(6), 579-592.
- Chiu, M. M., & Klassen, R. M. (2009). Calibration of reading self-concept and reading achievement among 15-year-olds: Cultural differences in 34 countries. *Learning and Individual Differences, 19*, 372-386.
- Chiu, M. M., & Klassen, R. M. (2010). Relations of mathematics self-concept and its calibration with mathematics achievement: Cultural differences among fifteen-year-olds in 34 countries. *Learning and Instruction, 20*(1), 2-17.
- Choi, N. (2005). Self-efficacy and self-concept as predictors of college students' academic performance. *Psychology in the Schools, 42*(2), 197-205.
- Chong, W. H. (2007). The role of personal agency beliefs in academic self-regulation: An Asian perspective. *School Psychology International, 28*(1), 63-76.
- Coates, H. (2007). A model of online and general campus-based student engagement. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education, 32*(2), 121-141.
- Coates, H. (2010). Development of the Australasian survey of student engagement (AUSSE). *Higher Education, 60*, 1-17.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in education* (6th ed.). London: Routledge.
- Cooley, C. H. (1902). *Human nature and the social order*. New York: Scribner.
- Cooley, C. H. (1964). *Human nature and the social order*. New York: Schocken Books.
- Cox, M., Jordan, J., Ortmeier-Hooper, C., & Schwartz, G. (2010). *Reinventing identities in second language writing*. Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. (2007). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. London: Sage.

- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. (2010). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.
- Cronbach, L. J. (1951). Coefficient alpha and the internal structure test. *Psychometrika*, 16, 297-334.
- Cross, S. E., Hardin, E. E., & Gercek-Swing, B. (2011). The what, how, why and where of self-construal. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 15(2), 142-179.
- Cumming, A. (2001). Learning to write in a second language: Two decades of research. *IJES*, 1(2), 1-23.
- Cumming, A. (2006). *Goals for academic writing: ESL students and their instructors*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Darr, C., Ferral, H., & Stephanou, A. (2008, January). *The development of a scale to measure student engagement*. Paper presented at the 3rd International Rasch Measurement Conference, Perth, Australia.
- Day, C., Kingtona, A., Stobart, G., & Sammons, P. (2006). The personal and professional selves of teachers: Stable and unstable identities. *British Educational Research Journal*, 32(4), 601-616.
- de Vaus, D. A. (2002). *Surveys in social research* (5th ed.). New South Wales, Australia: Allen & Unwin.
- Deaux, K. (1992). Personalizing identity and socializing self. In G. M. Breakwell (Ed.), *Social psychology of identity and the self-concept* (pp. 9-34). Surrey: Surrey University Press.
- Defazio, J., Jones, J., Tennant, F., & Hook, S. A. (2010). Academic literacy: The importance and impact of writing across the curriculum: A case study. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 10(2), 34-47.
- Deil-Amen, R. (2011). Socio-academic integrative moments: Rethinking academic and social integration among two-year college students in career-related programs. *Journal of Higher Education*, 82(1), 54-91.
- Delen, D. (2010). A comparative analysis of machine learning techniques for student retention management. *Decision Support Systems*, 49(4), 498-506.
- Demo, D. H. (1992). The self-concept over time: Research issues and directions. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 18, 303-326.
- Denscombe, M. (2008). Communities of practice: A research paradigm for the mixed methods approach. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 2(3), 270-283.
- Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (2003). *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Denzin, N. K. (2010). Moments, mixed methods, and paradigm dialogs. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(6), 419-427.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2000). *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Department of Statistics Malaysia. (2011). Population and Demographics. from <http://www.statistics.gov.my/portal/index.php>
- Donmoyer, R. (2006). Take my paradigm...please! The legacy of Kuhn's construct in educational research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 19(1), 11-34.
- Dornyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in Applied Linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Drew, C., Hardman, M., & Hosp, J. (2008). *Designing and conducting research in education*. Los Angeles, California: Sage.

- Duff, P. A. (2007). Second language socialization as sociocultural theory: Insights and issues. *Language Teaching*, 40(4), 309-319.
- Eccles, J. S., & Roeser, R. W. (2011). Schools as developmental contexts during adolescence. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 21(1), 225-241.
- Elliot, A. J., & Murayama, K. (2009). The joint influence of personal achievement goals and classroom: Goal structures on achievement-relevant outcomes. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 101(2), 432-447.
- Elton, L. (2010). Academic writing and tacit knowledge. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 15(2), 151-160.
- Erkman, F., Caner, A., Sart, Z. H., Borkan, B., & Sahan, K. (2010). Influence of perceived teacher acceptance, self-concept, and school attitude on the academic achievement of school-age children in Turkey. *Cross-cultural Research*. Retrieved from <http://ccr.sagepub.com/cgi/rapidpdf/1069397110366670v1.pdf>
- Fan, W., & Williams, C. M. (2010). The effects of parental involvement on students' academic self-efficacy, engagement and intrinsic motivation. *Educational Psychology: An International Journal of Experimental Educational Psychology*, 30(1), 53 - 74.
- Feilzer, M. Y. (2010). Doing mixed methods research pragmatically: Implications for the rediscovery of pragmatism as a research paradigm. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 4(1), 6-16.
- Ferenz, O. (2005). EFL writers' social networks: Impact on advanced academic literacy development. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 4(4), 339-351.
- Ferla, J., Valcke, M., & Cai, Y. (2009). Academic self-efficacy and academic self-concept: Reconsidering structural relationships. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 19(4), 499-505.
- Ferris, D. R. (2010). Second language writing research and written corrective feedback in SLA. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 32(Special Issue 02), 181-201.
- Field, A. (2009). *Discovering statistics using SPSS* (3rd ed.). London: Sage.
- Finn, J. D., & Cox, D. (1992). Participation and withdrawal among fourth-grade pupils. *American Educational Research Journal*, 29(1), 141-162.
- Finn, J. D., & Voelkl, K. E. (1993). School characteristics related to student engagement. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 62(3), 249-268.
- Firestone, W. (1987). Meaning in method: The rhetoric of quantitative and qualitative research. *Educational Researcher*, 16(7), 16-21.
- Flowerdew, J. (1999). Problems in writing for scholarly publication in English: The case of Hong Kong. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 8(3), 243-264.
- Fong, L. L., Kim, L. S., Stapa, S., & Darus, S. (2009). The culture of writing of L2 writers in transition from secondary school to postsecondary education. *Asian Journal of University Education*, 5(2), 45-65.
- Fontana, A., & Frey, J. (2003). From structured questions to negotiated text. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (pp. 61-106). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Foo, B., & Richards, C. (2004). English in Malaysia. *RELC Journal*, 35, 229-240.

- Foo, T. (2007). *The effects of the process-genre approach to writing instructions on the expository essays of ESL students in a Malaysian secondary school (Unpublished doctoral dissertation)*. Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia.
- Fredricks, J. A., Blumenfeld, P. C., & Paris, A. H. (2004). School engagement: Potential of the concept, state of the evidence. *Review of Educational Research*, 74(1), 59-109.
- Furlong, M. J., & Christenson, S. L. (2008). Engaging students at school and with learning: A relevant construct for all students. *Psychology in the Schools*, 45(5), 365-368.
- Furlong, M. J., Whipple, A. D., St. Jean, G., Simental, J., Soliz, A., & Punthuna, S. (2003). Multiple contexts of school engagement: Moving toward a unifying framework for educational research and practice. *The California School Psychologist*, 8, 99-114.
- Gall, J. P., Gall, M. D., & Borg, W. R. (1999). *Applying educational research: A practical guide*. (4th ed.). New York: Longman.
- Gang, L., Wei, C., & Duanmu, J. L. (2010). Determinants of international students' academic performance. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 14(4), 389-405.
- Garcia, T., & Pintrich, P. R. (1995). The role of possible selves in adolescents perceived competence and self-regulation. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 386 437). Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov>
- Gardner, R. C., & MacIntyre, P. D. (1991). An instrumental motivation in language study. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 13(1), 57-72.
- Gay, L. R., Mills, G. E., & Airasian, P. (2009). *Educational research: Competencies for analysis and applications* (9th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- George, D., & Mallery, P. (2003). *SPSS for Windows step by step: A simple guide and reference* (4th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Gerring, J. (2007). *Case study research: Principles and practices*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gest, S. D., Rulison, K. L., Davidson, A., J., & Welsh, J., A. (2008). A reputation for success (or failure): The association of peer academic reputations with academic-self-concept, effort, and performance across the upper elementary grades. *Developmental Psychology*, 44(3), 625-636.
- Gill, S. (2005). Language policy in Malaysia: Reversing direction. *Language Policy*, 4(3), 241-260.
- Gill, S. (2006). Change in language policy in Malaysia: The reality of implementation in public universities. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 7(1), 82 - 94.
- Gillaerts, P., & Van de Velde, F. (2010). Interactional metadiscourse in research article abstracts. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 9(2), 128-139.
- Gillies, D., Wilson, A., Soden, R., Gray, S., & McQueen, I. (2010). Capital, culture and community: Understanding school engagement in a challenging context. *Improving Schools*, 13(1), 21-38.
- Glanville, J. L., & Wildhagen, T. (2007). The measurement of school engagement. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 67(6), 1019-1041.
- Goddard, C. (1997). Contrastive semantics and cultural psychology: 'Surprise' in Malay and English. *Culture and Psychology*, 3(2), 153-181.

- Goddard, C. (2001). Sabar, ikhlas, setia -- patient, sincere, loyal? Contrastive semantics of some 'virtues' in Malay and English. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 33(5), 653-681.
- Gorard, S. (2002). Can we overcome the methodological schism? Four models for combining qualitative and quantitative evidence. *Research Papers in Education*, 17(4), 345-361.
- Grabe, W., & Kaplan, R. B. (1996). *Theory and practice of writing*. Harlow, England: Pearson Education.
- Green, D. (2010). Words fail us: How academics view language and ideas in higher education research. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 15(1), 47-59.
- Greene, J. (2007). *Mixed methods in social inquiry*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Greene, J., & Caracelli, V. (2003). Making paradigmatic sense of mixed methods. In A. Tashakkori & C. Teddlie (Eds.), *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research* (pp. 91-110). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Greve, W., & Wentura, D. (2010). True lies: Self-stabilization without self-deception. *Consciousness and Cognition*, 19(3), 721-730.
- Griffiths, M. (1998). Facts and values: Power/ knowledge. In M. Griffiths (Ed.), *Educational research for social justice: Getting off the fence* (pp. 44-64). Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Gu, M. M. (2010). Identities constructed in difference: English language learners in China. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 42, 139-152.
- Guay, F., Ratelle, C. F., Roy, A., & Litalien, D. (2010). Academic self-concept, autonomous academic motivation, and academic achievement: Mediating and additive effects. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 20(6), 644-653.
- Hammim, R., & Othman, A. F. (2011, November 6). No flip-flop over PPSMI policy, says Muhyiddin. *New Straits Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nst.com.my/nst/articles//04badd/Article/>
- Handley, K., Price, M., & Millar, J. (2011). Beyond 'doing time': Investigating the concept of student engagement with feedback. *Oxford Review of Education*, 37(4), 543-560.
- Harklau, L. (2006). From the "Good kids" to the "Worst": Representations of English language learner across educational settings. In P. K. Matsuda, M. Cox, J. Jordan & C. Ortmeier-Hooper (Eds.), *Second-language writing in the composition classroom* (pp. 103-130). Boston: St. Martins.
- Harris, L. (2010). Delivering, modifying or collaborating? Examining three teacher conceptions of how to facilitate student engagement. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 16(1), 131 - 151.
- Harter, S. (1999). *The construction of the self: A developmental perspective*. New York: Guilford.
- Hartnett, M. (2010). *Motivation to learn in online environments: An exploration of two tertiary education contexts (Unpublished doctoral dissertation)*. Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand.
- Hashim, A. (2009). Not plain sailing: Malaysia's language choice in policy and education. *AILA Review*, 22, 36-51.
- Hattie, J. (1992). *Self-concept*. Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Hattie, J. (2003, July ). *The status and direction of self-concept research: The Importance of importance*. Paper presented at the Human Development Conference, Waiheke Island, New Zealand.

- Heirdsfield, A. M., Walker, S., & Walsh, K. M. (2008). Enhancing the first year experience - Longitudinal perspectives on a peer mentoring scheme. Retrieved from <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/12150/>
- Hirano, E. (2008). Learning difficulty and learner identity: A symbiotic relationship. *ELT Journal*, 63(1), 33-41.
- Hirvela, A., & Belcher, D. (2001). Coming back to voice: The multiple voices and identities of mature multilingual writers. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 10, 83-106.
- Hock, F. M., Deshler, D., & Schumaker, J. B. (2006). Enhancing student motivation through the pursuit of possible selves. In C. Dunkel & J. Kerpelman (Eds.), *Possible selves: Theory, research and applications* (pp. 205-220). New York: Nova Science Publishers.
- Hockings, C., Cooke, S., Yamashita, H., McGinty, S., & Bowl, M. (2008). Switched off? A study of disengagement among computing students at two universities. *Research Papers in Education*, 23(2), 191-201.
- Holland, B., & Ramaley, J. A. (2008, July). *Creating a supportive environment for community-university engagement: Conceptual framework*. Paper presented at the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA). Retrieved from <http://www.herdsa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/conference/2008/papers/Holland%20&%20Ramaley.pdf>
- Hormuth, S. E. (1990). *The ecology of the self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Horwitz, E. K. (2010). Foreign and second language anxiety. *Language Teaching*, 43(2), 154-167.
- Hoshmand, L. T. (2003). Can lessons of history and logical analysis ensure progress in psychological science? *Theory and Psychology*, 13, 39-44.
- Howe, K., & Moses, M. (1999). Ethics in educational research. *Review of Research in Education*, 24, 21-60.
- Howe, K. R. (1988). Against the quantitative-qualitative incompatibility thesis, or, dogmas die hard. *Educational Researcher*, 17, 10-16.
- Hoyle, R. H., & Sherrill, M. R. (2006). Future orientation in the self-system: Possible selves, self-regulation, and behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74(6), 1673-1696.
- Hu, S., & Kuh, G. (2002). Being (dis)engaged in educationally purposeful activities: The influences of student and institutional characteristics. *Research in Higher Education* 43(5), 555-575.
- Huang, S.-y. L., & Fisher, D. L. (2011). Associations of the university learning environment with academic engagement and satisfaction among science majors in Taiwan. *Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, 20(2), 291-307.
- Huhtala, A., & Lehti-Eklund, H. (2010). Writing a new self in the third place: Language students and identity formation. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 18(3), 273 - 288.
- Hussey, T., & Smith, P. (2010). Transitions in higher education. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 47(2), 155-164.
- Hyland, K. (2002a). Authority and invisibility: Authorial identity in academic writing. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 34, 1091-1112.
- Hyland, K. (2002b). Options of identity in academic writing. *ELT Journal*, 56, 351-358.

- Hyland, K. (2010). Community and individuality: Performing identity in applied linguistics. *Written Communication, 27*(2), 159-188.
- Inglehart, M. R. (1987). The impact of possible selves on academic achievement-A longitudinal analysis. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 285 067). Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov>
- Ionin, T., & Montrul, S. (2010). The role of L1 transfer in the interpretation of articles with definite plurals in L2 English. *Language Learning, 60*(4), 877-925.
- Ismail, W. R., Mustafa, Z., Muda, N., Abidin, N. Z., Isa, Z., Zakaria, A. M., et al. (2010). Students' inclination towards English language as medium of instruction in the teaching of science and mathematics. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 18*, 353-360.
- Ivanic, R. (1998). *Writing and identity*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Ivanic, R. (2005). The discursual construction of writer identity. In R. Beach, J. Green, M. Kamil & T. Shanahan (Eds.), *Multidisciplinary perspectives on literacy research* (pp. 391-416). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Ivanic, R. (2006). Language, learning and identification. In R. Kiely, P. Rea-Dickins, H. Woodfield & G. Clibbon (Eds.), *Language, culture and identity in applied linguistics* (pp. 7-29). London: Equinox.
- Ivankova, N. V., Creswell, J. W., & Stick, S. L. (2006). Using mixed-methods sequential explanatory design: From theory to practice. *Field Methods, 18*(1), 3-20.
- Jalaluddin, N. H., Mat Awal, N., & Abu Bakar, K. (2008). The mastery of English language among lower secondary school students in Malaysia: A linguistic analysis. *European Journal of Social Sciences, 7*(2), 106-119.
- James, R., McInnis, C., & Devlin, M. (2002). Assessing learning in Australian universities. Retrieved from <http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/assessinglearning/docs/AssessuingLearning.pdf>
- James, W. (1890). *Principles of psychology*. New York: Henry Holt & Co.
- Jamil, H. (2010). The aspiration for educational rights in educational policies for national integration in Malaysian pluralistic society. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 9*(0), 158-173.
- Janesick, V. (2000). The choreography of qualitative research design. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed., pp. 379-399). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Janopoulos, M. (1986). The relationship of pleasure reading and second language writing proficiency. *TESOL Quarterly, 20*(4), 763-768.
- Janosz, M., Archambault, I., Morizot, J., & Pagani, L. S. (2008). School engagement trajectories and their differential predictive relations to dropout. *Journal of Social Issues, 64*(1), 21-40.
- Jary, D., & Lebeau, Y. (2009). The student experience and subject engagement in UK sociology: A proposed typology. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 30*(6), 697 - 712.
- Johnson, E., & Nozick, K. J. (2011). Personality, adjustment, and identity style influences on stability in identity and self-concept during the transition to university. *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research, 11*(1), 25-46.
- Johnson, R. B., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2004). Mixed methods research: A research paradigm whose time has come. *Educational Researcher, 33*(7), 14-26.
- Kahu, E. R. (2011). Framing student engagement in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education, 1*-16.

- Kaiser, H. F. (1960). The application of electronic computers to factor analysis. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 20, 141-151.
- Kaplan, R. B. (1966). Cultural thought patterns in intercultural education *Language Learning*, 16(1-2), 1-20.
- Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia (Ministry of Education Malaysia). (2000). *Sukatan Pelajaran Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah (The Malaysian National Syllabus for Secondary School)*. Kuala Lumpur: Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia.
- Kezar, A. J., & Kinzie, J. L. (2006). Examining the ways institutions create student engagement: The role of mission. *Journal of College Student Development*, 47(2), 149-172.
- Kieft, M., Rijlaarsdam, G., Galbraith, D., & van den Bergh, H. (2007). The effects of adapting a writing course to students' writing strategies. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 77, 565-578.
- Kift, S. M., & Moody, K. E. (2009). Harnessing assessment and feedback in the first year to support learning success, engagement and retention. Retrieved from <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/28849/1/28849.pdf>
- Kift, S. M., Nelson, K. J., & Clarke, J. (2010). Transition pedagogy: A third generation approach to FYE - A case study of policy and practice for the higher education sector. *International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education*, 1(1), 1-20.
- Kivetz, Y., & Tyler, T. R. (2007). Tomorrow I'll be me: The effect of time perspective on the activation of idealistic versus pragmatic selves. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 102(2), 193-211.
- Kivetz, Y., & Tyler, T. R. (2007). Tomorrow I'll be me: The effect of time perspective on the activation of idealistic versus pragmatic selves. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 102, 193-211.
- Klassen, R. (2010). Confidence to manage learning: The self-efficacy for self-regulated learning of early adolescents with learning disabilities. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 33, 19-30.
- Kline, P. (1999). *An easy guide to factor analysis*. London: Routledge.
- Knigge, M., & Hannover, B. (2011). Collective school-type identity: Predicting students' motivation beyond academic self-concept. *International Journal of Psychology*, 46(3), 191-205.
- Komaraju, M., Karau, S. J., & Ramayah, T. (2007). Cross-cultural differences in the academic motivation of university students in Malaysia and the United States. *North American Journal of Psychology*, 9(2), 275-292.
- Komaraju, M., Musulkin, S., & Bhattacharya, G. (2010). Role of student-faculty interactions in developing college students' academic self-concept, motivation, and achievement. *Journal of College Student Development*, 51(3), 332-342.
- Kornbrot, D. (2005). *Point biserial correlation*: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
- Kornilova, T. V., Kornilov, S. A., & Chumakova, M. A. (2009). Subjective evaluations of intelligence and academic self-concept predict academic achievement: Evidence from a selective student population. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 19, 596-608.
- Korte, R. F. (2007). A review of social identity theory with implications for training and development. *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 31(3), 166-180.

- Krause, K. (21-22 September 2005). *Understanding and promoting student engagement in university learning communities*. Paper presented at the Sharing Scholarship in Learning and Teaching: Engaging Students, James Cook University, Townsville/Cairns, Queensland.
- Krause, K., & Coates, H. (2008). Students' engagement in first-year university. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 33(5), 493 - 505.
- Krause, K., James, R., & Jennings, C. (2010). The first year experience in Australian Universities: Findings from 1994 to 2009. Retrieved from [http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/research/FYE\\_Report\\_1994\\_to\\_2009.pdf](http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/research/FYE_Report_1994_to_2009.pdf)
- Kuh, G. (2001). Assessing what really matters to student learning: Inside the National Survey of Student Engagement. *Change*, 33(3), 10-66.
- Kuh, G. (2003). What we're learning about student engagement from NNSE. *Change*, 35(2), 24.
- Kuh, G. (2009). What student affairs professionals need to know about student engagement. *Journal of College Student Development*, 50(6), 683-706.
- Kuh, G., Kinzie, J., Buckley, J., Bridges, B., & Hayek, J. (2007). *Piecing together the student success puzzle: Research, propositions, and recommendations*. San Fransisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Kuo, I. C. (2006). Addressing the issue of teaching English as a lingua franca. *ELT Journal*, 60(3), 213-221.
- Lam, S. F., & Law, Y. K. (2007). The roles of instructional pactices and motivation in writing performance. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 75(2), 145-164.
- Langan-Fox, J. (1991). The stability of work, self and interpersonal goals in young women and men. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 21(5), 419-428.
- Lareau, A., & Weininger, E. B. (2003). Cultural capital in educational research: A critical assessment. *Theory and Society*, 32(5/6), 567-606.
- Lather, P. (2006). Paradigm proliferation as a good thing to think with: Teaching research in education as a wild profusion. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 19(1), 35-57.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lee, J., McInerney, D., Liem, G., & Ortiga, Y. (2010). The relationship between future goals and achievement goal orientations: An intrinsic-extrinsic motivation perspective. *Contemporary Educational Psycyhology*. doi:10.106/j.cedpsych.2010.04.004
- Lee, K. S. (2004). Exploring the connection between the testing of reading and literacy: The case of the MUET. *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies*, 4(1), 1-12. Retrieved from <http://pkukmweb.ukm.my/~ppbl/Gema/gemaarchives.html>
- Lee, M. N. N. (1999). Education in Malaysia: Towards Vision 2020. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement: An International Journal of Research, Policy and Practice*, 10(1), 86 - 98.
- Lee, S. K. (2003). Multiple identities in a multicultural world: A Malaysian perspective. *Journal of Language, Identity and Education*, 2(3), 137-158.
- Leki, I. (2011). Learning to write in a second language: Multilingual graduates and undergraduates expanding genre repertoires In R. Manchón (Ed.), *Learning-to-write and Writing-to-learn in an additional language* (pp. 85-110). Netherlands: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

- Leki, I., Cumming, A., & Silva, T. (2008). *A synthesis of research on second language writing in English*. New York: Routledge.
- Leondari, A. (2007). Future time perspective, possible selves, and academic achievement. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 114, 17-26.
- Li, X. (2007a). Identities and beliefs in ESL writing: From product to process. *TESL Canada Journal*, 25(1), 41-64.
- Li, X. (2007b). Souls in exile: Identities of bilingual writers. *Journal of Language, Identity and Education*, 6(4), 259-275.
- Lillis, T. M. (2001). *Student writing: Access, regulation and desire*. New York: Routledge.
- Longden, B. (2006). An institutional response to changing student expectations and their impact on retention rates. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 28(2), 173-187.
- Macbeth, K. P. (2010). Deliberate false provisions: The use and usefulness of models in learning academic writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 19(1), 33-48.
- MacDonald, S. P. (1987). Problem definition in academic writing. *College English*, 49(3), 315-331.
- MacLean, L., Mechthild, M., & Alma, E. (2004). Improving accuracy of transcripts in qualitative research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 14(1), 113-123.
- Malaysian Examinations Council. (2011). Malaysian University English Test (MUET). from <http://www.mpm.edu.my/bi/main.php>
- Malaysian Examinations Council. (2012). Peperiksaan Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia (STPM). Retrieved from <http://www.mpm.edu.my/en/laporan-tahunan>
- Mandelman, S. D., Tan, M., Kornilov, S. A., Sternberg, R. J., & Grigorenko, E. L. (2010). The metacognitive component of academic self-concept: The development of a triarchic self-scale. *Journal of Cognitive Education and Psychology*, 9(1), 73-86.
- Markus, H., & Kitayama, S. (2010). Cultures and selves. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 5(4), 420-430.
- Markus, H., & Nurius, P. (1986). Possible selves. *American Psychologist*, 41(9), 954-969.
- Markus, H., & Wurf, E. (1987). The dynamic self-concept: A social psychological perspective. *Annual Review of Psychology* 38, 299-337.
- Marsh, H. W. (1986). Verbal and math self-concepts: An internal/external frame of reference model. *American Educational Research Journal*, 23(1), 129-149.
- Marsh, H. W. (1990). *Self Description Questionnaire (SDQ II): A theoretical and empirical basis for the measurement of multiple dimensions of adolescent self-concept: An interim test manual and a research monograph*. San Antonio, TX: Psychological Corporation.
- Marsh, H. W., & Craven, R. G. (1997). Academic self-concept: Beyond the dustbowl. In G. Phye (Ed.), *Handbook of classroom assessment: Learning, achievement and adjustment* (pp. 131-198). Orlando, FL: Academic.
- Marsh, H. W., & Craven, R. G. (2006). Reciprocal effects of self-concept and performance from a multidimensional perspective: Beyond seductive pleasure and unidimensional perspectives. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 1, 133-163.

- Marsh, H. W., Craven, R. G., & McInerney, D. (2003). *New frontiers for self-research*. Greenwich, Connecticut: Information Age Publishing.
- Marsh, H. W., Craven, R. G., & McInerney, D. (2005). *International advances in self research: New frontiers for self research*. Greenwich, Connecticut: Information Age Publishing.
- Marsh, H. W., Hau, K. T., & Kong, C. K. (2002). Multilevel causal ordering of academic self-concept and achievement: Influence of language of instruction (English compared with Chinese) for Hong Kong students. *American Educational Research Journal*, 39(3), 727-763.
- Marsh, H. W., Koller, O., Trautwein, U., Lüdtke, O., & Baumert, J. (2005). Academic self-concept, interests, grades, and standardized test scores: Reciprocal effects models of causal ordering. *Child Development*, 76(2), 397-416.
- Marsh, H. W., Lüdtke, O., & Trautwein, U. (2009). Classical latent profile analysis of academic self-concept dimensions: Synergy of person-and variable-centered approaches to theoretical models of self-concept. *Structural Equation Modelling*, 16, 191-225.
- Marsh, H. W., & Martin, A. J. (2010). Academic self-concept and academic achievement: Relations and causal ordering. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*. doi:10.1348/000709910X503501
- Marsh, H. W., & Martin, A. J. (2011). Academic self-concept and academic achievement: Relations and causal ordering. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 81(1), 59-77.
- Marsh, H. W., & O'Mara, A. (2008). Reciprocal effects between academic self-concept, self-esteem, achievement and attainment over seven adolescent years: Unidimensional and multidimensional perspectives of self-concept. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 34(4), 542-552.
- Marsh, H. W., Relich, J. D., & Smith, I. D. (1983). Self-concept: The construct validity of interpretations based upon the SDQ. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 45(1), 173-187.
- Marshall, S. (2010). Re-becoming ESL: Multilingual university students and a deficit identity. *Language and Education*, 24(1), 41-56.
- Martin, A. J., & Dowson, M. (2009). Interpersonal relationships, motivation, engagement, and achievement: Yields for theory, current issues, and educational practice. *Review of Educational Research*, 79(1), 327-365.
- Mason, J. (2006). Mixing methods in a qualitatively-driven way. *Qualitative Research*, 6(1), 9-25.
- Matsuda, P. K., Canagarajah, A. S., Harklau, L., Hyland, K., & Warschauer, M. (2003). Changing currents in second language writing research: A colloquium. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 12(2), 151-179.
- Matsuda, P. K., Cox, M., Jordan, J., & Ortmeir-Hooper, C. E. (2006). *Second language writing in the composition classroom: A critical sourcebook*. Boston: Bedford.
- Matsuda, P. K., & Silva, T. (2005). *Second language writing research*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Matsuda, P. K., & Tardy, C. (2007). Voice in academic writing: The rhetorical construction of author identity in blind manuscript review. *English for Specific Purposes*, 26, 235-249.
- McConnell, A. R. (2011). The multiple self-aspects framework: Self-concept representation and its implications. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 15(1), 3-27.

- McInerney, D. (2008). Personal investment, culture and learning: Insights into school achievement across Anglo, Aboriginal, Asian and Lebanese students in Australia. *International Journal of Psychology*, 43(5), 870-879.
- McInerney, D. (2010). The role of sociocultural factors in shaping student engagement in Hong Kong: An ethnic minority perspective. Retrieved from <http://repository.ied.edu.hk/dspace/handle/2260.2/10261>
- McInerney, D., Walker, R. A., & Liem, G. E. (2011). *Sociocultural theories of learning and motivation: Looking back, looking forward*. Charlotte, North Carolina: Information Age Publishing Inc.
- McInnis, C. (2001). Signs of disengagement? The changing undergraduate experience in Australian universities. Inaugural professorial lecture. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 466720). Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov>
- Mead, G. H. (1934). *Mind, self and society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Meeuwisse, M., Severiens, S., & Born, M. (2010). Learning environment, interaction, sense of belonging and study success in ethnically diverse student groups. *Research in Higher Education*, 51(6), 528-545.
- Mercer, S. (2011). *Towards an understanding of language learner self-concept*. New York: Springer.
- Mertens, D. (2010). *Research and evaluation in education and psychology*. Los Angeles, California: Sage.
- Ministry of Education Malaysia. (2011). Matriculation Programme. from <http://www.moe.gov.my/?id=88&lang=en>
- Mohamed, M. (2008). Globalization and its impact on the medium of instruction in higher education in Malaysia. *International Education Studies*, 1(1), 89-94.
- Molloy, L. E., Gest, S. D., & Rulison, K. L. (2011). Peer influences on academic motivation: Exploring multiple methods of assessing youths' most "influential" peer relationships. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, 31(1), 13-40.
- Morgan, D. (2007). Paradigms lost and pragmatism regained: Methodological implications of combining qualitative and quantitative methods. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 1(48), 48-76.
- Mornane, A. (2009). The adolescent students' views of factors influencing their learning. *International Journal of Learning*, 16(5), 221-229.
- Moser, C. A., & Kalton, G. (1972). *Survey methods in social investigation*. London: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Moss, J., Deppeler, J., Astley, L., & Pattison, K. (2007). Student researchers in the middle: Using visual images to make sense of inclusive education. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 7(1), 46-54.
- Mutch, C. (2005). *Doing educational research: A practitioners' guide to getting started*. Wellington, NZ: NZCER Press.
- National Survey of Student Engagement. (2011). Fostering student engagement campuswide: Annual Results 2011. Retrieved from [http://nsse.iub.edu/NSSE\\_2011\\_Results/pdf/NSSE\\_2011\\_AnnualResults.pdf#page=17](http://nsse.iub.edu/NSSE_2011_Results/pdf/NSSE_2011_AnnualResults.pdf#page=17)
- Navés, T., Torras, M. R., & Celaya, M. L. (2003). Long-term effects of an earlier start : An analysis of EFL written production. *EUROSLA Yearbook*, 3, 103-129.

- Nelson, K. J., Duncan, M. E., & Clarke, J. A. (2009). Student success : The identification and support of first year university students at risk of attrition. *Studies in Learning, Evaluation, Innovation and Development*, 6(1), 1-15.
- Newmann, F. M., Wehlage, G. G., & Lamborn, S. (1992). The significance and sources of student engagement. In F. M. Newmann (Ed.), *Student engagement and achievement in American secondary schools* (pp. 11-39). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Niaz, M. (2008). A rationale for mixed methods (integrative) research programmes in education. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 42(287-305).
- Nitko, A. J., & Brookhart, S. M. (2007). *Educational assessments of students*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Norris, J. M., & Ortega, L. (2010). Research synthesis. *Language Teaching*, 43(04), 461-479.
- Norton, B. (2000). *Identity and language learning: Gender, ethnicity and educational change*. Harlow, England: Longman/ Pearson.
- Norton, B. (2010). Language and identity. In N. Hornberger & S. McKay (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics and Language Education* (pp. 349-369). Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Nückles, M., Hübner, S., Dümer, S., & Renkl, A. (2010). Expertise reversal effects in writing-to-learn. *Instructional Science*, 38(3), 237-258.
- Nunan, D. (1992). *Research methods in language learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- O'Malley, J. M., Chamot, A. U., Stewner-Manzanares, G., Kupper, L., & Russo, R. P. (1985). Learning strategies used by beginning and intermediate ESL students. *Language Learning*, 35(1), 21-46.
- Okeke, N. A., Howard, L. C., Kurtz-Costes, B., & Rowley, S. J. (2009). Academic race stereotypes, academic self-concept, and racial centrality in African American youth. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 35(3), 366-387.
- Oliver, D. G., Serovich, J. M., & Mason, T. L. (2005). Constraints and opportunities with interview transcription: Towards reflection in qualitative research. *Social Forces*, 84 (2), 1273–1289.
- Ommundsen, Y., Haugen, R., & Lund, T. (2005). Academic self-concept, implicit theories of ability, and self-regulation strategies. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 49(5), 461-474.
- Ong, J., & Zhang, L. J. (2010). Effects of task complexity on the fluency and lexical complexity in EFL students' argumentative writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 19(4), 218-233.
- Onorato, R. S., & Turner, J. C. (2004). Fluidity in the self-concept: The shift from personal to social identity. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 34(3), 257-278.
- Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Leech, N. L. (2005). Taking the “Q” out of research: Teaching research methodology courses without the divide between quantitative and qualitative paradigms. *Quality and Quantity*, 39(3), 267-295.
- Oropeza, M. V., Varghese, M. M., & Kanno, Y. (2010). Linguistic minority students in higher education: Using, resisting, and negotiating multiple labels. *Equity and Excellence in Education*, 43(2), 216–231.
- Ortmeier-Hooper, C. (2010). The shifting nature of identity. In M. Cox, J. Jordan, C. Ortmeier-Hooper & G. Schwartz (Eds.), *Reinventing identities in second language writing* (pp. 5-28). Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English.

- Othman, S. B., & Mohamad, F. (2009, November). *Students' response to teacher feedback on multiple-draft compositions in ESL classroom* Paper presented at the International Conference of Teaching and Learning (ICTL), INTI University College, Malaysia. Retrieved from [http://ictl.inital.edu.my/ictl2009/proceeding/Parallel%20Sessions%202/2C/2C-03-P64%20\(Malaysia\).doc](http://ictl.inital.edu.my/ictl2009/proceeding/Parallel%20Sessions%202/2C/2C-03-P64%20(Malaysia).doc).
- Oyserman, D. (2004). Self-concept and identity. In M. B. Brewer & M. Hewstone (Eds.), *Self and Social identity* (pp. 5-24). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Pace, C. (1980). Measuring the quality of student effort. *Current Issues in Higher Education*, 2(10-16).
- Pace, C., & Kuh, G. (1998). *College student experiences questionnaires*. (4th ed.). Indiana: Indiana University.
- Pajares, F. (1996). Self-efficacy beliefs in academic settings. *Review of Educational Research*, 66(4), 543-578.
- Pajares, F. (2003). Self-efficacy beliefs, motivation, and achievement in writing: A review of the literature. *Reading and Writing Quarterly*, 19, 139-158.
- Pajares, F., & Cheong, Y. F. (2003). Achievement goal orientations in writing: A developmental perspective. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 39, 437-455.
- Pascarella, E. (1991). The impact of college on students: The nature of the evidence. *The Review of Higher Education*, 14(1), 453-466.
- Pascarella, E., & Terenzini, P. (2005). *How college affect students: A third decade of research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Pavlenko, A., & Blackledge, A. (2004). *Negotiation of identities in multilingual context*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Pekrun, R., & Linnenbrink-Garcia, L. (2012). Academic engagement and student emotions. In S. L. Christenson, A. L. Reschly & C. Wylie (Eds.), *Handbook of research on student engagement* (pp. 259-282). New York: Springer.
- Petric, B. (2006). Interdisciplinary and writer identity: Students' views and experiences. In R. Kiely, P. Rea-Dickins, H. Woodfield & G. Clibbon (Eds.), *Language, culture and identity in applied linguistics* (pp. 119-132). London: Equinox.
- Petrides, K. V., & Frederickson, N. (2011). An application of belief-importance theory in the domain of academic achievement. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 81(1), 97-111.
- Pierce, B. N. (1995). Social identity, investment and language learning. *TESOL Quarterly*, 29(1), 9-31.
- Pinxten, M., Fraine, B. D., Damme, J. V., & D'Haenens, E. (2010). Causal ordering of academic self-concept and achievement: Effects of type of achievement measure. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*. Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20307375>
- Pizzolato, J. E. (2006). Achieving college student possible selves: Navigating the space between commitment and achievement of long term identity goals. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 12(1), 57-69.
- Powell, K. C. (2009). The role of concept of self and societal expectations in academic and career achievement. *Journal of Adult Education*, 38(2), 32-40.

- Powlishta, K. (2004). Gender as a social category: Intergroup processes and gender role development. In M. Bennet & F. Sani (Eds.), *The development of the social self* (pp. 103-134). New York: Psychology Press.
- Price, M., Handley, K., & Millara, J. (2011). Feedback: Focusing attention on engagement. *Studies in Higher Education, iFirst Article*, 1–18. doi: 10.1080/03075079.2010.483513
- Pring, R. (2000). The 'false dualism' of educational research. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 34(2), 247-260.
- Puteh, S. N., Rahamat, R., & Karim, A. A. (2010). Writing in the second language: Support and help needed by the low achievers. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 7, 580-587.
- Rajadurai, J. (2010). "Malays are expected to speak Malay": Community ideologies, language use and the negotiation of identities. *Journal of Language, Identity and Education*, 9, 91-106.
- Rajendran, N., 361-374. (2005). Teachers teaching students from a multicultural background: The case of Malaysia. *Higher Education Policy*, 18, 361-374.
- Raman, S. R., & Sua, T. Y. (2010). Ethnic segregation in Malaysia's education system: Enrolment choices, preferential policies and desegregation. *Paedagogica Historica: International Journal of the History of Education*, 46(1), 117 - 131.
- Ramanathan, A., & Atkinson, D. (1999). Individualism, academic writing, and ESL writers. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 6, 45-75.
- Ransdell, S., & Barbier, M. (2002). *New directions for research in L2 writing*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Ratner, C. (2002). *Cultural psychology: Theory and method*. New York: Plenum.
- Ravid, R. (2005). *Practical statistics for educators* (3rd ed.). New York: University Press of America.
- Reason, R., Cox, B. E., Quaye, B., & Terenzini, P. T. (2010). Faculty and institutional factors that promote student encounters with difference in first-year courses. *The Review of Higher Education* 33(3), 391-414.
- Reynolds, C. R., Livingston, R. B., & Willson, V. (2009). *Measurement and assessment in education* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Riazi, A. (1997). Acquiring disciplinary literacy: A social-cognitive analysis of text production and learning among Iranian graduate students of education. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 6(2), 105-137.
- Rinn, A. N., Jamieson, K. M., Gross, C. M., & McQueen, K. S. (2009). A canonical correlation analysis of the influence of social comparison, gender, and grade level on the multidimensional self-concepts of gifted adolescents. *Social Psychology Education*, 12, 251-269.
- Roccas, S., & Brewer, M. (2002). Social identity complexity. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 6(2), 88-106.
- Rodriguez, C. M. (2009). The impact of academic self-concept, expectations and the choice of learning strategy on academic achievement: The case of business students. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 28(5), 523-539.
- Rokeach, M. (1968). *Beliefs, attitudes, and values: A theory of organization and change*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- Rorty, R. (1999). *Philosophy and social hope*. London: Penguin Books.
- Rosenberg, M. (1989). Self-concept research: A historical overview. *Social Forces*, 68(1), 34-44.
- Roy, D. (2010, July). *Reading strategies for procedural information in EFL business writing environment: An exploratory analysis*. Paper presented at the Professional Communication Conference (IPCC), IEEE International. Retrieved from <http://ieeexplore.ieee.org/stamp/stamp.jsp?arnumber=05529827>
- Rubin, B., Katznelson, H., & Perpignan, H. (2005). Learning for life: The potential of academic writing courses for individual EFL learners. *System*, 33(1), 17-27.
- Ruble, D. N., Alvarez, J., Bachman, M., Cameron, J., Fuligni, A., Coll, C. G., et al. (2004). The development of a sense of "we": The emergence and implications of children's collective identity. In M. Bennet & F. Sani (Eds.), *The development of the social self*. New York: Psychology Press.
- Russell, B., & Slater, G. (2010). Factors that encourage student engagement: Insights from a case study of "first time" students in a New Zealand university. Retrieved from [http://www.tlri.org.nz/assets/A\\_Project-PDFs/9261-Zepke/9261-Case-Study3-.pdf](http://www.tlri.org.nz/assets/A_Project-PDFs/9261-Zepke/9261-Case-Study3-.pdf)
- Ryan, A. M. (2011). Peer relationships and academic adjustment during early adolescence. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, 31(1), 5-12.
- Ryan, G., & Bernard, H. (2003). Data management and analysis methods. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (pp. 259-309). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Saiegh-Haddad, E., & Geva, E. (2010). Acquiring reading in two languages: An introduction to the special issue. *Reading and Writing*, 23(3), 263-267.
- Sale, J. E. M., Lohfeld, L. H., & Brazil, K. (2002). Revisiting the quantitative-qualitative debate: Implications for mixed-methods research. *Quality & Quantity*, 36(1), 43-53.
- Salkind, N. J. (2010). *Statistics for people who (think they) hate statistics*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.
- Sammons, P. (2010). The contribution of mixed methods to recent research on educational effectiveness. In A. Tashakkori & C. Teddlie (Eds.), *Sage handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research* (pp. pp. 697-723). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Santos, T. (1988). Professors' reactions to the academic writing of nonnative-speaking students. *TESOL Quarterly*, 22(1), 69-90.
- Sasaki, M. (2011). Effects of varying lengths of study-abroad experiences on Japanese EFL students' L2 writing ability and motivation: A longitudinal study. *TESOL Quarterly*, 45(1), 81-105.
- Schunk, D., & Zimmerman, B. (2006). Competence and control beliefs: Distinguishing the means and ends. In P. A. Alexander & P. H. Winne (Eds.), *Handbook of educational psychology (2nd ed.)* (pp. 349-368). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Schunk, D., & Zimmerman, B. (2008). *Motivation and self-regulated learning: Theory, research and applications*. New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Scott, D., & Usher, R. (1999). *Researching education: Data, methods and theory in education enquiry*. London: Continuum.

- Sedikides, C., Gaertner, L., & O'Mara, E. (2011). Individual self, relational self, collective self: Hierarchical ordering of the tripartite self. *Psychological Studies*, 56(1), 98-107.
- Sedikides, C., & Hepper, E. (2009). Self-Improvement. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 3(6), 899-917.
- Seli, H., Dembo, M. H., & Crocker, S. (2009). Self in self-worth protection: The relationship of possible selves and self-protective strategies. *College Student Journal*, 43(3), 832-842.
- Seta, C. E., Schmidt, S., & Bookhout, C., M. (2006). Social identity orientation and social role attributions: Explaining behavior through the lens of the self. *Self and Identity*, 5, 355-364.
- Shafie, L. A., & Nayan, S. (2011). The characteristics of struggling university readers and instructional approaches of academic reading in Malaysia. *International Journal of Human Sciences*, 8(1). Retrieved from <http://www.insanbilimliri.com/en>
- Shamsudin, S., & Mahady, N. (2010). Corpus linguistics based error analysis of first year Universiti Teknologi Malaysia students' writing. *Universiti Teknologi Malaysia Institutional Repository*. Retrieved from <http://eprints.utm.my/10276/>
- Sharp, J. L., Mobley, C., Hammond, C., Withington, C., Drew, S., Stringfield, S., et al. (2011). A mixed methods sampling methodology for a multisite case study. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, XX(X), 1-21.
- Shavelson, R. J., Hubner, J. J., & Stanton, G. C. (1976). Self-concept: Validation of construct interpretations. *Review of Educational Research*, 46, 407-441.
- Sheldon, E. (2009). From one *I* to another: Discursive construction of self-representation in English and Castilian Spanish research articles. *English for Specific Purposes*, 28(4), 251-265.
- Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information*, 22(2), 63-75.
- Sherry, M., Thomas, P., & Chui, W. (2010). International students: A vulnerable student population. *Higher Education*, 60(1), 33-46.
- Siegle, D., Rubenstein, L. D. V., Pollard, E., & Romey, E. (2010). Exploring the relationship of college freshmen honors students' effort and ability attribution, interest, and implicit theory of intelligence with perceived ability. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 54(2), 92-101.
- Silver, C., & Lewins, A. (2009). QSR NVivo 8: Distinguishing features and functions. Retrieved from <http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/794/1/NVivo8distinguishingfeatures.pdf>
- Silverthorn, N., Dubois, D. L., & Crombie, G. (2005). Self-perceptions of ability and achievement across the high-school transition: Investigation of a state-trait model. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 73(3), 191-218.
- Simons-Morton, B., & Chen, R. (2009). Peer and parent influences on school engagement among early adolescents. *Youth and Society*, 41(3), 3-25.
- Singh, K., Chang, M., & Dika, S. (2010). Ethnicity, self-concept, and school belonging: Effects on school engagement. *Educational Research for Policy and Practice*, 9(3), 159-175.
- Skaalvik, E. M., & Skaalvik, S. (2002). Internal and external frames of reference for academic self-concept. *Educational Psychologists*, 37(4), 233-244.

- Skaalvik, E. M., & Skaalvik, S. (2009). Self-concept and self-efficacy in mathematics: Relation with mathematics motivation and achievement. *Journal of Education Research*, 3(3), 255-278.
- Skinner, E., Furer, C., Marchand, G., & Kinderman, T. (2008). Engagement and disaffection in the classroom: Part of a larger motivational dynamic. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 100(4), 765-781.
- Skyrme, G. (2010). Is this a stupid question? International undergraduate students seeking help from teachers during office hours. doi:10.1016/j.jeap.2010.02.012
- Smith, M., Ghazali, N., & Noor Minhad, S. F. (2007). Attitudes towards plagiarism among undergraduate accounting students: Malaysian evidence. *Asian Review of Accounting*, 15(2), 122-146.
- Snygg, D., & Combs, A. W. (1949). *Individual behaviour: A new frame of reference for psychology*. New York: Harper.
- Spencer, S. (2011). *Visual research methods in the social sciences: Awakening visions*. New York: Routledge.
- Stacey, J. (2010). Writer identity while learning discipline-specific academic literacy in an additional language. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies*, 27(3), 345 - 356.
- Stake, R. E. (2000). Case studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 443-466). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Steinman, L. (2003). Cultural collisions in L2 academic writing. *TESL Canada Journal*, 20(2), 80-91.
- Sternberg, R. J. (1997). *Successful intelligence*. New York: Plume.
- Stets, J. E., & Burke, P. J. (2003). A sociological approach to self and identity. In M. L. Leary & J. P. Tangney (Eds.), *Handbook of self and identity* (pp. 128-152). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Stevenson, J., & Clegg, S. (2011). Possible selves: Students orientating themselves towards the future through extracurricular activity. *British Educational Research Journal*, 37(2), 231 - 246.
- Stewart, E. B. (2008). School structural characteristics, student effort, peer associations, and parental involvement: The influence of school and individual-level factors on academic achievement. *Education and Urban Society*, 40(2), 179-204.
- Stoner, J., Perrewe, P. L., & Munyon, T. P. (2011). The role of identity in extra-role behaviors: Development of a conceptual model. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 26(2), 94-107.
- Storch, N. (2005). Collaborative writing: Product, process, and students' reflections. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 14(3), 153-173.
- Storch, N. (2009). The impact of studying in a second language (L2) medium university on the development of L2 writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 18(2), 103-118.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory—procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.
- Subramani, S., & Kempner, K. (2002). Malaysian higher education: Captive or post-western? *Australian Journal of Education*, 46(3), 31-54.
- Swales, J. M., & Feak, C. B. (2004). *Academic writing for graduate students: Essential tasks and skills*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press.
- Tan, K. E., Lim, C. S., & Chew, C. M. (2011). Talking mathematics in English. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, 21(1), 133-143.

- Tan, K. E., & Miller, J. (2007). Writing in English in Malaysian high schools: The discourse of examinations. *Language and Education*, 21(2), 124-140.
- Tan, Y. S. (2010). Democratization of secondary education in Malaysia: Emerging problems and challenges of educational reform. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 32(1), 53-64.
- Tashakkori, A., & Teddlie, C. (2003). *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioural research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Thang, S. M., Gobel, P., Mohd. Nor, N. F., & Suppiah, V. L. (2011). Students' attributions for success and failure in the learning of English as a second language: A Comparison of undergraduates from six public universities in Malaysia. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities*, 19(2), 459-474.
- Thomas, C. R., & Gadbois, S. A. (2007). Academic self-handicapping: The role of self-concept clarity and students' learning strategies. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 77, 101-119.
- Tinto, V. (1982). Limits of theory and practice in student attrition. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 53(6), 687-700.
- Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (2nd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Tinto, V. (2009, February). *Taking student retention seriously: Rethinking the first year of university*. Paper presented at the ALTC FYE Curriculum Design Symposium. Retrieved from <http://www.yorku.ca/retentn/rdata/Takingretentionseriously.pdf>
- Tinto, V. (2010). From theory to action: Exploring the institutional conditions for student retention In J. C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (pp. 51-89). Netherlands: Springer.
- Trowler, V. (2010). Student engagement literature review. Retrieved from <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/York/documents/ourwork/studentengagement/StudentEngagementLiteratureReview.pdf>
- Tuan, L. T. (2010). Enhancing EFL learners' writing skill via journal writing. *English Language Teaching*, 3(3), 81-88.
- Tunmer, W. E., Prochnow, J. E., & Chapman, J. W. (2003). Science in educational research In J. Swann & J. Pratt (Eds.), *Educational research in practice: Making sense of methodology* (pp. 84-97). London: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Turner, J. (1981). The experimental social psychology of intergroup behavior. In J. Turner & H. Giles (Eds.), *Intergroup Behavior* (pp. 66-101). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Turner, J., & Onorato, R. S. (1999). Social identity, personality and the self-concept: A self-categorization perspective. In T. R. Tyler, R. M. Kramer & O. P. John (Eds.), *The psychology of the social self* (pp. 11-46). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Ujang, Z. (2009). *The elevation of higher learning*. Johor: Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.
- Umbach, P. D., & Wawrzynski, M. R. (2005). Faculty do matter: The role of college faculty in student learning and engagement. *Research in Higher Education*, 46(2), 153-184.

- Universiti Teknologi Mara. (2012). Course Outlines: Writing for Specific Purposes. from <http://www.language-academy.utm.my/courses.html>
- Usborne, E., & Taylor, D. M. (2010). The role of cultural identity clarity for self-concept clarity, self-esteem, and subjective well-being. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, XX(X), 1-15. doi:10.1177/0146167210372215
- Van Teijlingen, E. R., Rennie, A.-M., Hundley, V., & Graham, W. (2001). The importance of conducting and reporting pilot studies: The example of the Scottish births survey. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 34(3), 289-295.
- Varma, S. (2006). Preliminary item statistics using point-biserial correlation and *p*-values. Retrieved from <http://www.eddata.com/resources/>
- Vasquez, N. A., & Buehler, R. (2007). Seeing future success: Does imagery perspective influence achievement motivation? *Personal and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 33(10), 1392-1405.
- Walker, C., Gleaves, A., & Grey, J. (2006). Can students within higher education learn to be resilient and, educationally speaking, does it matter? *Educational Studies*, 32(3), 251-264.
- Wallace, R. (2009). Social partnership in learning: Negotiating disenfranchised learner identities. *Education Review*, 6(6), 37-46.
- Weiner, B. (1972). Attribution theory, achievement motivation, and the educational process. *Review of Educational Research*, 42(2), 203-215.
- Weis, L. (1992). Reflections on the researcher in a multicultural environment. In C. Grant (Ed.), *Research and multicultural education: From the margins to the mainstream* (pp. 47-57). London: Falmer Press.
- Weitzman, E. (2003). Software and qualitative research. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (pp. 310-339). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wentzel, K. R., & Watkins, D. E. (2002). Peer relationship and collaborative learning as contexts for academic enablers. *School Psychology Review*, 31(3), 366-377.
- Wette, R. (2010). Evaluating student learning in a university-level EAP unit on writing using sources. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 19(3), 158-177.
- Wigfield, A., & Cambria, J. (2010). Students' achievement values, goal orientations, and interest: Definitions, development, and relations to achievement outcomes. *Developmental Review*, 30(1), 1-35.
- Wigfield, A., & Eccles, J. S. (2002). The development of competence beliefs, expectancies for success, and achievement values from childhood through adolescence. In A. Wigfield & J. S. Eccles (Eds.), *Development of achievement motivation* (pp. 15-31). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Wiles, R., Crow, G., Heath, S., & Charles, V. (2006, July). *Anonymity and confidentiality*. Paper presented at the ESRC Research Methods Festival. Retrieved from [http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/423/1/0206\\_anonymity%2520and%2520confidentiality.pdf](http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/423/1/0206_anonymity%2520and%2520confidentiality.pdf)
- Winne, P. H., & Nesbit, J. C. (2010). The psychology of academic achievement. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 61, 653-678.

- Woon, C. L., & Wang, C. K. (2005). Academic self-concept: A cross-sectional study of grade and gender differences in a Singapore secondary school. *Asia Pacific Education Review* 6(1), 20-27.
- Wu, W., & Hammond, M. (2011). Challenges of university adjustment in the UK: a study of East Asian Master's degree students. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 35(3), 423-438.
- Wylie, R. (1961). *The self-concept: A critical survey of pertinent research literature*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Yaacob, A., Awal, N. A. M., Idris, F., Hassan, Z., Kaur, S., & Noor, M. M. (2011). The role of the language of unity at higher education institution: Malaysian experience. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 15, 1457-1461.
- Yah Awg, N., Hamzah, A., & Hasbollah, R. (September, 2010). *Why writing in ESL is difficult for undergraduates in a public university in Malaysia*. Paper presented at the Educational and Information Technology (ICEIT). Retrieved from [http://ieeexplore.ieee.org/xpls/abs\\_all.jsp?arnumber=5607514&tag=1](http://ieeexplore.ieee.org/xpls/abs_all.jsp?arnumber=5607514&tag=1)
- Yazzie-Mintz, E. (2007). Voices of students on engagement: A report on the 2006 High School Survey of Student Engagement. Retrieved from <http://www.ceep.indiana.edu>
- Yi, Y. (2010). Adolescent multilingual writers' transitions across in-and out-of-school writing contexts. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 19(1), 17-32.
- Yigitoglu, N. (2010). Review of academic writing and plagiarism: A linguistic analysis. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 9(3), 223-225.
- Yonezawa, S., Jones, M., & Joselowsky, F. (2009). Youth engagement in high schools: Developing a multidimensional, critical approach to improving engagement for all students. *J Educ Change*, 10, 191-209.
- Yorke, M., & Thomas, L. (2003). Improving the retention of students from lower socio-economic groups. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 25(1), 63-74.
- Zaaba, Z., Ramadan, F. I., Anning, I. N. A., Gunggut, H., & Umamoto, K. (2011). Language-in-education policy: A study of policy adjustment strategy in Malaysia. *International Journal of Education and Information Technologies*, 5(2), 157-165.
- Zamel, V., & Spacek, R. (2006). Teaching multilingual learners across the curriculum: Beyond the ESOL classroom and back again. *Journal of Basic Writing*, 25(2), 126-152.
- Zepke, N., Leach, L., & Butler, P. (2010). Engagement in post-compulsory education: Students' motivation and action. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 15(1), 1 - 17.
- Zhang, Y., & Mi, Y. (2010). Another look at the language difficulties of international students. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 14(4), 371-388.
- Zhu, W. (2004). Faculty views on the importance of writing, the nature of academic writing, and teaching and responding to writing in the disciplines. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 13(1), 29-48.
- Zimmerman, B. (1990). Self-regulated learning and academic achievement: An overview. *Educational Psychologist*, 21, 3-17.
- Zimmerman, B. (2001). Self-regulated learning. In J. S. Neil & B. B. Paul (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences* (pp. 13855-13859). Oxford: Pergamon.



## **APPENDICES**



MASSEY UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
TE KUPENGA O TE MÁTAURANGA

***Impact of Self-Concept in Academic Writing on Malaysian Learners'  
Engagement in One Higher Learning Institution***

What people think and believe about themselves influences their actions. Based on this, this study aims to examine the impact of learners' self-concept in academic writing in English on their engagement in the academic writing class. It is hoped that by investigating the self-concepts held by learners about academic writing, the behavioural, cognitive and affective engagement displayed in the writing classroom can be further understood.

*Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti impak konsep sendiri pelajar mengenai penulisan akademik di dalam Bahasa Inggeris ke atas penyertaan dan penglibatan pelajar di peringkat institut pengajian tinggi. Penyelidik berharap melalui kajian mengenai konsep sendiri pelajar mengenai penulisan akademik di dalam Bahasa Inggeris ini, penglibatan dari konteks tingkah laku, kognitif dan afektif pelajar di dalam kelas penulisan tersebut dapat difahami dengan lebih mendalam.*

This is not a test. Your participation and the data provided in this questionnaire will not affect your academic grades. All the information provided will be kept confidential.

*Soalselidik ini bukan penilaian. Penyertaan anda di dalam kajian ini tidak akan mempengaruhi keputusan akademik anda. Segala maklumat yang diberikan adalah dirahsiakan dan ianya hanya untuk kepentingan kajian sahaja.*

Completion and return of this questionnaire implies your consent to participate in the study.

*Dengan menjawab soalan-soalan yang dikemukakan dan mengembalikan soal selidik ini, anda telah memberi persetujuan untuk terlibat dalam soal selidik ini.*

Thank you for your participation.

*Terima kasih atas kerjasama anda.*

## Instructions

(Arahan)

- This questionnaire has THREE sections.  
(Borang soal selidik ini mengandungi TIGA bahagian.)  
**Section A: Background Information** (Maklumat Latarbelakang)  
**Section B: Self-Concept about Academic Writing** (Konsep Kendiri mengenai Penulisan Akademik)  
**Section C: Engagement** (Penglibatan dan Penyertaan)
- If you are willing to participate in a follow-up interview, please provide your contact details in the space provided at the end of the questionnaire.  
(Sekiranya anda ingin terlibat dalam temuramah sebagai susulan borang soal selidik ini, sila isi maklumat peribadi anda di penghujung borang soal selidik, di ruang yang disediakan.)
- Indicate the answer that most describes you. There are no right or wrong answers.  
(Pilih jawapan berdasarkan kenyataan yang paling tepat menggambarkan diri anda. Tiada jawapan yang betul atau salah.)
- There are four possible answers for each question, "False, Mostly False, Mostly True and True". Choose your answer to each question and put a tick  in the box under the answer you choose.  
(Terdapat empat respon untuk setiap kenyataan, "Tidak Benar, Kerap Kali Tidak Benar, Kerap Kali Benar dan Benar". Pilih jawapan anda dengan menandakan tik  di bawah respon yang berkenaan)

Example:

(Contoh):

	False	Mostly False	Mostly True	True
I enjoy reading in English	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- If you wish to change an answer you have marked, cross out the tick and put a new tick in another box in the same line.  
(Sekiranya anda ingin menukar jawapan yang telah anda tandakan, pangkah tik tersebut dan letak tik di ruang yang berkenaan tersebut.)
- Please tick only **ONE** answer for each question unless requested otherwise.  
(Tik hanya **SATU** ruang kecuali diarahkan sebaliknya.)
- Please return the questionnaire to the sealed box provided at the CLS reception area within 7 days.  
(Setelah selesai, kembalikan borang soal selidik tersebut di kotak yang telah disediakan terletak di ruang legar CLS.)

Thank you for your participation.

(Terima kasih atas sumbangan masa dan fikiran anda.)

Ida Fatimawati bt Adi Badiozaman

## SECTION A: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

(BAHAGIAN A: MAKLUMAT LATARBELAKANG)

Please tick  the appropriate boxes.  
(Tik  di ruang berkenaan)

1. Gender (*Jantina*)  Male (*Lelaki*)  Female (*Perempuan*)
2. Ethnicity (You may tick more than one box)  
(*Etnik. Anda boleh tik lebih dari satu ruang*)  
 Malay  Iban  Chinese  Other (Please  
 Bidayuh  Indian  Melanau  
Specify) \_\_\_\_\_
3. MUET results (*Keputusan MUET*)  
 Band 6  Band 5  Band 4  Band 3
4. What is the main language used for everyday communication?  
(*Bahasa utama yang digunakan untuk tujuan komunikasi*)  
 Malay  English  Chinese  Iban  
 Tamil  Bidayuh  Melanau  
 Other (Please Specify) \_\_\_\_\_
5. Which other languages do you frequently use? (You may tick more than one box)  
(*Bahasa kedua yang sering digunakan*)  
 Malay  English  Chinese  Iban  
 Tamil  Bidayuh  Melanau  
 Other (Please Specify) \_\_\_\_\_
6. Academic Major (*Pengkhususan*)  
 Economic and Business  Engineering  
 Computer Science & Information Technology  Applied & Creative Arts  
 Cognitive Science & Human Development  Social Science  
 Resource Science & Technology  Medicine & Health Science
7. I am a \_\_\_\_\_ student in my undergraduate degree.  
(*Saya merupakan pelajar Sarjana Muda tahun ke \_\_\_\_\_*)  
 First year  Second year  Third year  Fourth year  
(*Tahun Pertama*) (*Tahun Kedua*) (*Tahun Ketiga*) (*Tahun Akhir*)
8. Hours of study allocated for academic writing class per week (not including class hours)  
(*Jam diperuntukkan untuk mengulangkaji bagi kelas Penulisan Akademik dalam seminggu. Tidak termasuk waktu kelas*)  
 None  1-2 hours  3-4 hours  More than  
(*Tiada*) (*Satu-Dua jam*) (*Tiga-Empat jam*) (*Lebih dari lima jam*)

**SECTION B: SELF-CONCEPT IN ACADEMIC WRITING**  
(BAHAGIAN B: KONSEP KENDIRI MENGENAI PENULISAN AKADEMIK)

Here are some statements students often make about academic writing in English. Indicate with a tick  which choice best reflects you.

(Berikut adalah beberapa kenyataan tentang konsep sendiri pelajar mengenai penulisan akademik di dalam Bahasa Inggeris. Sila nyatakan pendapat anda dan tik  di ruang yang berkenaan).

	False (Tidak benar)	Mostly False (Kerap kali tidak benar)	Mostly True (Kerap kali benar)	True (Benar)
9 Academic writing is one of my best subjects <i>(Penulisan akademik adalah mata pelajaran terbaik saya)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10 I always look forward to my Academic Writing class <i>(Saya tidak sabar untuk menghadiri kelas Penulisan Akademik saya)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11 Tasks in Academic Writing classes are easy for me <i>(Saya dapati tugas dalam kelas Penulisan Akademik saya mudah)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12 I like writing in English <i>(Saya suka menulis menggunakan Bahasa Inggeris)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13 I often need help in the Academic Writing class <i>(Saya sering memerlukan bantuan di kelas Penulisan Akademik)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14 I often do badly in academic writing tests <i>(Saya kerap mendapat keputusan yang tidak memuaskan dalam ujian penulisan akademik)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15 I have poor writing skills <i>(Saya tidak mempunyai kemahiran menulis yang baik)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16 I learn things quickly in my Academic Writing class <i>(Saya mudah memepelajari sesuatu di dalam kelas Penulisan Akademik)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17 I enjoy studying for academic writing <i>(Saya seronok belajar di kelas Penulisan Akademik)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18 It is important for me to do well in academic writing <i>(Adalah penting bagi saya untuk mencapai prestasi yang baik di kelas penulisan akademik)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19 I find writing essays interesting <i>(Bagi saya, menulis esei adalah menyeronokkan)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20 I find writing essays challenging <i>(Menulis esei bagi saya adalah mencabar)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

21	Academic writing is easy for me <i>(Penulisan akademik adalah mudah bagi saya)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22	I am hopeless when it comes to academic writing <i>(Saya memang tidak berkemahiran langsung dalam penulisan akademik)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23	I feel confident in my ability to write in English <i>(Saya yakin dengan kebolehan saya menulis dalam Bahasa Inggeris)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24	I make a lot of mistakes when writing in English <i>(Saya sering membuat banyak kesilapan apabila menulis dalam Bahasa Inggeris)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25	I have always done well in academic writing <i>(Biasanya, saya mencapai keputusan yang baik di dalam Penulisan Akademik)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
26	I consider myself a good writer <i>(Saya beranggapan saya adalah seorang penulis yang baik)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**SECTION C: LEARNER ENGAGEMENT IN THE ACADEMIC WRITING CLASS**  
(BAHAGIAN C: PENGLIBATAN DAN PENYERTAAN PELAJAR)

What do you consider to be your engagement and participation level in the academic writing class? Below are some statements about learner engagement in the academic writing classroom. Put a  for the choice that best reflects you.

*(Apakah persepsi anda tentang penyertaan, penglibatan dan komitmen anda di dalam kelas penulisan akademik? Disenaraikan di bawah ini beberapa kenyataan tentang penyertaan, penglibatan dan tahap komitmen pelajar di dalam kelas penulisan akademik. Sila nyatakan pandangan anda dan tik  di ruang yang berkenaan.)*

		False <i>(Tidak benar)</i>	Mostly False <i>(Kerap kali tidak benar)</i>	Mostly True <i>(Kerap kali benar)</i>	True <i>(Benar)</i>
27	I work hard in my Academic Writing class <i>(Saya mengambil berat tentang kelas penulisan akademik)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
28	I do as little as possible; I just want to pass <i>(Saya hanya melakukan usaha minimal di kelas untuk lulus)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
29	When writing gets difficult, I stop trying <i>(Apabila tugasan penulisan bertambah sukar, saya berhenti mencuba)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
30	I pay attention in class <i>(Saya memberi tumpuan penuh di kelas penulisan akademik)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
31	I always participate in class discussions <i>(Saya selalu terlibat secara aktif dalam perbincangan kelas)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
32	I prepare two or more drafts of an assignment before final submission <i>(Saya menyediakan beberapa draf sebelum menyerahkan tugasan)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
33	I look forward to my Academic Writing class <i>(Saya seronok dan tidak sabar untuk ke kelas penulisan Akademik)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
34	I am proud to be in the Academic Writing class <i>(Saya bangga berada di dalam kelas penulisan akademik)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
35	The writing class feels like a waste of time <i>(Kelas ini merupakan satu pembaziran masa)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- |    |  |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|----|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 36 | I think that academic writing is important for my future<br><i>(Saya beranggapan kelas penulisan akademik ini penting untuk masa depan saya)</i>   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 37 | I often help others in the Academic Writing class<br><i>(Saya sering membantu pelajar lain di dalam kelas)</i>   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 38 | In class, I really care that I do my best work<br><i>(Di dalam kelas, saya pastikan tugas yang saya lakukan adalah yang terbaik)</i>   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 39 | Writing in English helps me organize my ideas<br><i>(Menulis di dalam Bahasa Inggeris membantu saya dalam menyusun dan merangka idea)</i>  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 40 | I take care to ensure that my essays are done properly<br>(E.g.: formatting, referencing, paraphrasing)<br><i>(Saya sentiasa memastikan karangan saya dilakukan dengan betul-format, rujukan, bibliografi)</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 41 | I often look for ways to improve my English writing<br><i>(Saya sering berusaha untuk meningkatkan kemahiran penulisan akademik saya)</i>  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 42 | It is easy to organize my thoughts into sentences in English<br><i>(Saya merasakan mudah untuk mengarang ayat di dalam Bahasa Inggeris)</i>  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 43 | I feel that academic writing helps me to do well in my content papers<br><i>(Saya beranggapan penulisan akademik banyak membantu dalam kelas pengkhususan)</i>   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 44 | I find it hard to express my ideas effectively in English<br><i>(Sukar bagi saya untuk menyatakan idea saya secara berkesan dalam Bahasa Inggeris)</i>   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Invitation to Participate in Two Interviews

Are you willing to receive information about two 50-minutes interviews with me? If yes, please write down your contact details (name, telephone number or email address).

*(Adakah anda berminat untuk mengambil bahagian dalam dua temubual susulan borang soal selidik ini selama 50 minit? Jika Ya, sila berikan maklumat peribadi anda seperti nama, nombor telefon atau alamat email.)*

---



---



---

Please return the completed questionnaire and put it into the sealed box provided. Completion and return of the questionnaire implies your consent to participate in the research. Thank you for your participation.

*(Soal selidik tamat. Sila serahkan borang soal selidik yang telah selesai diisi didalam kotak yang telah disediakan. Dengan menjawab soalan-soalan yang dikemukakan dan mengembalikan soal selidik ini, anda telah memberi persetujuan untuk terlibat dalam soal selidik ini. Terima kasih atas kerjasama anda.)*



SCHOOL OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES  
Private Bag 11 222  
Palmerston North  
New Zealand  
T 64 6 356 9099  
F 64 6 351 3385  
www.massey.ac.nz

## ***Impact of Self-Concept in Academic Writing on Malaysian Learners' Engagement in One Higher Learning Institution***

### INFORMATION SHEET FOR PILOT QUESTIONNAIRE

#### **Name of Researcher**

Ida Fatimawati bt Adi Badiozaman

#### **Introduction**

This Information Sheet is intended to provide a brief introduction to my research and to invite your participation. After having been an English teacher at secondary school and tertiary level for 7 years, I am currently undertaking a PhD degree in Education at Massey University New Zealand. I am interested in the area of second language learning, especially in the discipline of academic writing. You are invited to take part in a pilot study for a research investigating the 'Impact of Self-Concept in Academic Writing on Malaysian Learners' Engagement in One Higher Learning Institution'. This research is part of my PhD Thesis at Massey University, New Zealand.

#### **Project Description and Invitation**

The study aims to:

1. explore learners' self-concept in relation to academic writing, especially the role it plays in their engagement in the Academic Writing class;
2. identify areas and opportunities for improvement in the academic writing curricula.

At this stage you are being invited to take part in the questionnaire pilot. The questionnaire will include sections on background information, self-concept and engagement. With regards to self-concept, this will involve a series of statements on your feelings about learning academic writing in English and how you value academic writing. Items on engagement will involve a series of statements about your participation as interpreted through actions in the Academic Writing classroom.

#### **Participant Identification and Recruitment**

You have been identified as a potential participant for the pilot study as you are a member of Massey University Malaysia student Association (MUMSA). For this part of the study, up to seven students are being invited to participate in the pilot and in a follow-up group discussion. This number was chosen to ensure that sufficient feedback will be given by respondents to help refine the questionnaire.

---

**Project Procedures**

If you decide to participate, a mutually convenient location will be decided. The pilot questionnaire will take no longer than 30 minutes to complete and has a Bahasa Malaysia translation. If you decide to help, you will complete the questionnaire and after that give feedback on the items (see attached) in a group discussion.

**Participants' Rights**

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- withdraw from the pilot before April 2009;
- decline to answer any particular question;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- be given access to the summary of the project findings. Please leave your contact details in the consent form for this purpose.

**Project Contacts**

If you are willing to participate in the pilot study, please provide contact details by emailing me (the researcher), Pn. Ida Fatimawati bt Adi Badiozaman of Massey University at my email, [mizzida79@yahoo.com](mailto:mizzida79@yahoo.com) or telephone +64 021 0601199/ 64 06 3533991).

If you have any questions about this research please contact my research supervisor, Dr. Penny Haworth of Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand, [phaworth@massey.ac.nz](mailto:phaworth@massey.ac.nz) at 64 06 356 9099 ext 8869.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, Application 09/ 04. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor John O'Neill, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, telephone 06 350 5799 x 8771, email [humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz).

Yours Sincerely,

---

(Ida Fatimawati bt Adi Badiozaman)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



**Massey University**  
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
Te Kupenga o Te Mātauranga

SCHOOL OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES  
Private Bag 11 222  
Palmerston North  
New Zealand  
T 64 6 356 9099  
F 64 6 351 3385  
www.massey.ac.nz

***Impact of Self-Concept in Academic Writing on  
Malaysian Learners' Engagement in  
One Higher Learning Institution***

**PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM FOR PILOT STUDY**

**This form will be held for a period of five (5) years**

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree to not disclose anything discussed in the Focus Group Yes/ No

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet Yes/ No

**Signature:**

**Date:**

**Full Name – printed**

**Email/ Postal  
Address to send  
summary if required**



**Massey University**  
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
Te Kupenga o Te Mātauranga

SCHOOL OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES  
Private Bag 11 222  
Palmerston North  
New Zealand  
T 64 6 356 9099  
F 64 6 351 3385  
www.massey.ac.nz

***Impact of Self-Concept in Academic Writing on  
Malaysian Learners' Engagement in  
One Higher Learning Institution***

**CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT FOR PILOT STUDY**

I ..... (Full Name - printed)  
agree to keep confidential all information concerning the project .....  
.....(Title of Project).

I will not retain or copy any information involving the project.

Signature: ..... Date: .....



MASSEY UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
TE KUPENGA O TE MATAURANGA

Ida Fatimawati bt Adi Badiozaman  
9 Hilton Grove  
Kelvin Grove  
Palmerston North 4414  
New Zealand

Dean  
Centre of Language Studies  
University X  
Malaysia

1<sup>st</sup> April 2009

Dear Dr. \_\_\_\_\_

Requesting Access to Centre of Language Studies (CLS) Students for PhD Research

This letter is intended to provide a brief introduction to my research and formally request permission to conduct this project. After having been an English teacher at secondary school and tertiary level for 7 years, I am currently undertaking a PhD degree in Education at Massey University New Zealand. I am interested in the area of second language learning, especially in the discipline of academic writing. UNIMAS is invited to take part in a research investigating the 'Impact of Self-Concept in Academic Writing on Malaysian Learners' Engagement in One Higher Learning Institution'. This research is part of my PhD Thesis at Massey University, New Zealand.

The purpose of the study is to examine learners' self-concept in academic writing and their engagement in relation to the self-concepts. It aims to:

1. explore learners' self-concept in relation to academic writing, especially the role it plays in their engagement in the Academic Writing class;
2. identify areas and opportunities for improvement in the academic writing curricula.

The institution was chosen as it is a state institution which means it is a representative of the broad population of university students in Malaysia. The project will include two main instruments: questionnaire and semi-structured interview. The project procedure will be discussed as follows.

*Questionnaire*

The projected time for the questionnaire will be in April 2009. The questionnaire is expected to take no more than 30 minutes to complete and has English and Bahasa Malaysia versions. Students are encouraged to complete the questionnaire in their own time and return the completed questionnaire into a sealed box provided at the CLS reception area. The researcher will collect the sealed box that will be provided after two weeks and the questionnaires will then be posted back to New Zealand for analysis. If students are willing to participate in an interview at a later date they are required to provide contact details at the end of the questionnaire.

*Interview*

The interview part of the study will take two weeks from end of July to mid-August 2009. The six students involved will be selected from those who have given contact details for the researcher for a follow up meeting. The participants will also be chosen to represent different parts of the spectrum of responses as identified by the quantitative analysis of the questionnaire. I will interview each student twice and each interview will take no longer than one hour. I would be grateful if I could use a small room in the CLS for some interviews.

Accordingly, I would like to request access to CLS students for the questionnaires and the interviews. In addition, I would also like to request access to CLS staff, specifically the coordinators of the Academic Writing paper and the tutors during the duration of the data collection in CLS. I would also be grateful if I could use a small room in CLS for the interviews.

If you are willing to participate in the study, please sign the consent form and provide contact details by emailing me (the researcher), Pn. Ida Fatimawati bt Adi Badiozaman of Massey University at my email, [mizzida79@yahoo.com](mailto:mizzida79@yahoo.com) or telephone +64 021 0601199/ 64 06 3533991).

If you have any questions about this research please contact my research supervisor, Dr. Penny Haworth of Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand, [phaworth@massey.ac.nz](mailto:phaworth@massey.ac.nz) at 64 06 356 9099 ext 8869.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, Application 09/ 04. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor John O'Neill, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, telephone 06 350 5799 x 8771, email [humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz).

I thank you for your time and cooperation.

Yours Sincerely,

---

(Ida Fatimawati bt Adi Badiozaman)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



MASSEY UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
TE KUPENGA O TE MĀTAURANGA

***Impact of Self-Concept in Academic Writing on  
Malaysian Learners' Engagement in  
One Higher Learning Institution***

**INSTITUTION CONSENT FORM**

**This form will be held for a period of five (5) years**

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I give permission for the research to be done in University X Yes/ No

I give permission to have access to staff (coordinators and teachers) Yes/ No

I give permission to have access students for the questionnaire and interview Yes/ No

I give permission to use facilities of universities (E.g.: a classroom for the interview) Yes/ No

**Signature:**

**Date:**

**Full Name - printed**



SCHOOL OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES  
 Private Bag 11 222  
 Palmerston North 4442  
 New Zealand  
 T 64 6 356 9099  
 F 64 6 351 3385  
[www.massey.ac.nz](http://www.massey.ac.nz)

## *Impact of Self-Concept in Academic Writing on Malaysian Learners' Engagement in One Higher Learning Institution*

### INFORMATION SHEET FOR QUESTIONNAIRE

#### Name of Researcher

Ida Fatimawati bt Adi Badiozaman

#### Introduction

This information sheet is intended to provide a brief introduction to my research and to invite your participation. After having been an English teacher at secondary school and tertiary level for 7 years, I am currently undertaking a PhD degree in Education at Massey University New Zealand. I am interested in the area of second language learning, especially in the discipline of academic writing. You are invited to take part in a research investigating the 'Impact of Self-Concept in Academic Writing on Malaysian Learners' Engagement in One Higher Learning Institution'. This research is part of my PhD Thesis at Massey University, New Zealand.

#### Project Description and Invitation

The study aims to:

1. explore learners' self-concept in relation to academic writing, especially the role it plays in their engagement in the Academic Writing class;
2. identify areas and opportunities for improvement in the academic writing curricula.

The study will be conducted in two parts: questionnaire and interview. At this stage you are being invited to take part in the questionnaire. The questionnaire will include sections on background information, self-concept and engagement. With regards to self-concept, this will involve a series of statements on your feelings about learning academic writing in English and how you value academic writing. Items on engagement will involve a series of statements about learner participation as interpreted through actions in the Academic Writing classroom.

#### Project Procedures

You are encouraged to complete the questionnaire in your own time, independently. The questionnaire will take no longer than 30 minutes to complete and has a Bahasa Malaysia translation to further facilitate respondents' understanding of the items. A sealed box will be provided at the Centre of Language Studies (CLS) reception for you to return the completed questionnaires. Completion and return of the questionnaire indicate consent to participate in the study. Note that your responses in the questionnaire will remain confidential. At the end of the questionnaire, there will be a question asking if you would like to participate in the interview. If you are willing to be interviewed, please provide contact details in the space provided and the researcher will arrange for a follow-up meeting. If you have been chosen to participate in the interview, the researcher will contact you in early July and you will receive an information sheet and a consent form.

**Data Management**

Data obtained from the questionnaire will be posted back to New Zealand for analysis. According to university regulations I will retain the data in a secure location for five years following the completion of the study and will then destroy them. The data will only be available to me and my supervisors. After this time, it will be destroyed. The e-data will be stored in the researcher's laptop which is password protected. The data will be destroyed five years after the completion of the study.

**Participants' Rights**

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- withdraw from the study before July 2009;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded. A copy of the thesis will be made available in UNIMAS library upon completion of the study in 2012.

**Project Contacts**

If you are willing to participate in the interview, please provide contact details by emailing me the researcher, Pn. Ida Fatimawati bt Adi Badiozaman of Massey University at my email, [mizzida79@yahoo.com](mailto:mizzida79@yahoo.com) or telephone +64 021 0601199/ 64 06 3533991).

If you have any questions about this research please contact my research supervisor, Dr. Penny Haworth of Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand, [phaworth@massey.ac.nz](mailto:phaworth@massey.ac.nz) at 64 06 356 9099 ext 8869.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, Application 09/ 04. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor John O'Neill, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, telephone 06 350 5799 x 8771, email [humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz).

Yours Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_

(Ida Fatimawati bt Adi Badiozaman)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



**Massey University**

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
Te Kupenga o Te Mātauranga

SCHOOL OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES  
Private Bag 11 222  
Palmerston North  
New Zealand  
T 64 6 356 9099  
F 64 6 351 3385  
www.massey.ac.nz

## ***Impak Konsep Kendiri Mahasiswa Malaysia Mengenai Penulisan Akademik dalam Bahasa Inggeris ke atas Penglibatan dan Penyertaan Mahasiswa di Institut Pengajian Tinggi***

### **KERTAS MAKLUMAT SOALSELIDIK**

#### **Nama Penyelidik**

Ida Fatimawati bt Adi Badiozaman

#### **Pengenalan**

Surat ini bertujuan memberi satu penerangan ringkas mengenai penyelidikan yang sedang saya lakukan dan juga merupa pelawaan kepada anda untuk menyertainya. Setelah menjadi guru bahasa Inggeris di sekolah menengah dan di institut pengajian tinggi selama tujuh tahun, sekarang saya sedang mengikuti pengajian peringkat PhD dalam bidang pendidikan di Universiti Massey New Zealand. Saya meminati pembelajaran bahasa kedua, terutama sekali dalam bidang penulisan akademik. Saya ingin memohon kerjasama anda untuk terlibat sama sebagai responden kepada soalselidik dalam kajian saya mengenai 'Impak Konsep Kendiri Mahasiswa Malaysia Mengenai Penulisan Akademik dalam Bahasa Inggeris ke atas Penglibatan dan Penyertaan Mahasiswa di Institut Pengajian Tinggi'. Kajian ini adalah sebahagian daripada keperluan dalam pengajian peringkat Ijazah Kedoktoran Falsafah saya di Universiti Massey New Zealand.

#### **Penerangan Mengenai Projek dan Pelawaan**

Kajian ini bertujuan melihat konsep sendiri anda mengenai penulisan akademik dan hubungannya dengan penglibatan serta penyertaan anda dalam kelas penulisan akademik anda. Secara khusus kajian ini bertujuan untuk:

1. Meninjau konsep sendiri mahasiswa berhubung dengan penulisan akademik, terutama sekali mengenai peranannya dalam mempengaruhi penglibatan serta penyertaan mereka dalam kelas penulisan akademik;
2. mengenalpasti ruang dan peluang untuk penambahbaikan kurikulum penulisan.

Kajian ini dikendalikan dalam dua bahagian: soalselidik dan temubual. Pada peringkat pertama ini anda dijemput untuk menjadi responden kepada soalselidik ini. Soalselidik ini mengandungi bahagian-bahagian mengenai maklumat latarbelakang; konsep sendiri dan penglibatan serta penyertaan. Berhubung dengan konsep sendiri, item dalam soalselidik ini merangkumi domain mengenai perasaan anda tentang penulisan akademik dalam bahasa Inggeris dan mengenai penilaian anda tentang penulisan akademik. Penglibatan dan penyertaan pula akan diukur melalui pelakuan anda dalam kelas penulisan akademik.

### **Prosedur Projek**

Penyelidik akan berjumpa dengan responden untuk memberi penerangan tentang tujuan penyelidikan. Penyelidik juga akan memberi penjelasan mengenai hal-hal etikal seperti mengenai hak responden. Selepas itu, penyelidik akan mengedar kertas maklumat untuk terlibat sama dalam penyelidikan. Anda digalakkan untuk mengisilengkap soalselidik ini dalam tempoh yang sesuai dan secara bersendirian. Biasanya ia tidak akan mengambil masa lebih daripada 30 minit. Sila pulangkan soalselidik yang sudah diisilengkap ke dalam kotak yang disediakan di Ruang Legar di Centre of Language Studies (CLS). Soalselidik itu kemudiannya dihantar ke New Zealand bagi tujuan analysis. Pada penghujung soalselidik anda diminta untuk menyatakan persetujuan sama ada anda berminat atau tidak untuk menyertai sesi temubual. Sekiranya anda berminat, sila isi maklumat yang berkaitan dalam kotak yang disediakan. Penyelidik akan mengatur satu sesi perjumpaan susulan untuk penerangan lanjut. Sekiranya anda dipilih, anda akan dihubungi pada awal Julai, dan anda akan diberi bahan-bahan yang berkaitan untuk tujuan tersebut.

### **Pengurusan Data**

Soalselidik yang telah dipulangkan akan disimpan secara berasingan di pejabat penyelidik di tempat kerja dan di rumah. Data yang dikutip daripada soalselidik akan dianalisis di New Zealand. E-data akan disimpan dalam komputer peribadi penyelidik yang terkawal oleh password. Soalselidik yang telah dipulangkan akan dimusnahkan selepas penyelidikan ini selesai dijalankan.

### **Hak Responden**

Anda tidak diwajibkan untuk menerima pelawaan dan jemputan ini. Sekiranya anda menerima, anda mempunyai hak untuk:

- tidak memberi respon kepada mana-mana soalan yang difikirkan tidak munasabah;
- menarik diri daripada menyertai kajian ini sebelum Julai 2009;
- bertanya tentang kajian ini pada bila-bila masa di sepanjang tempoh penyertaan anda;
- memberi maklumat atas dasar bahawa nama anda tidak akan digunakan kecuali anda memberi kebenaran kepada penyelidik;
- diberi kebenaran untuk melihat rumusan dapatan daripada kajian ini apabila ia sudah selesai dilakukan.

### **Kontak Projek**

Sekiranya anda bersetuju untuk menyertai soalselidik ini sebagai responden, sila beri maklumat perhubungan anda kepada saya, Pn. Ida Fatimawati bt Adi Badiozaman dari Massey University melalui alamat e-mail, [mizzida79@yahoo.com](mailto:mizzida79@yahoo.com) atau +64 021 0601199 / +64 06 3533991.

Sekiranya anda ada apa-apa pertanyaan mengenai penyelidikan ini, silalah berhubung dengan penyelia penyelidikan saya, Dr. Penny Haworth, Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand, [phaworth@massey.ac.nz](mailto:phaworth@massey.ac.nz) atau di talian +64 06 356 9099 ext 8869.

Projek ini telah diulas dan dilulus oleh Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, Application 09/04. Sekiranya anda mempunyai sebarang kemuskilan mengenai pengendalian penyelidikan ini, silalah berhubung dengan Professor John O'Neill, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, di talian +64 06 350 5799 sambungan 8771, atau melalui alamat e-mail, [humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz).

Yang benar,

---

(Ida Fatimawati bt Adi Badiozaman)

## H.1 Interview 1

NO.	MAIN INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	PROBES
1	<p><b>Identity and Context</b></p> <p>Could you tell me a little bit about yourself <i>Boleh anda terangkan serba sedikit mengenai diri anda.</i></p> <p>Can you tell me your initial reaction / first response when having to write in English <i>Boleh anda ceritakan mengenai pengalaman pertama anda menulis di dalam bahasa Inggeris?</i></p> <p>Can you please tell me about a particular lesson (from your experience as a language learner) where you felt successful? <i>Boleh anda berikan sebuah contoh dimana anda merasakan kelas tersebut adalah efektif dan anda berupaya mengikuti sesi tersebut dgn sukses?</i></p> <p>Can you please complete these sentences for me: <i>Sila lengkapkan kenyataan dibawah:</i> (i) I am a _____ L1 writer (ii) I am a _____ L2 writer (iii) I am a _____ academic writer in English</p> <p><i>*Cards for learners to choose from:</i> Excellent Good Average Poor Fast Motivated practical Structured Confident <i>* learners can also provide their own answer</i></p>	<p>How long have you learnt English? <i>Bila anda mula belajar bahasa Inggeris?</i> How did it all begin? <i>Bagaimana ia bermula?</i></p> <p>When was that? What was the task about? How did you feel at that point? Do you still feel the same way now? Why do you feel that way? <i>Bila dan bagaimana ia bermula? Apakah yang anda pelajari? Apakah perasaan anda ketika itu? Mengapa anda bereaksi sedemikian?</i></p> <p>What were the important factors that made you feel that way? <i>Apakah faktor2 yang menyebabkan anda berkata demikian?</i></p> <p>Can you tell me why you say that? Is there a particular incident(s) that have made you believe that? Do you think this belief will change? What can make you change this perception? <i>Boleh anda tolong jelaskan jawapn yang anda pilih?</i> <i>Pada pendapat anda, adakah persepsi ini akan berubah? Apakah faktor2 yang berupaya merubah persepsi tersebut?</i></p>
2	<p><b>Academic Writing</b></p> <p>Tell me about you academic writing class. Can you give me an example of a particular lesson that was enjoyable / not enjoyable? <i>Apakah pandangan peribadi anda mengenai kelas penulisan akademik anda? Boleh anda ceritakan sedikit mengenai sebuah kelas dimana anda merasakn bahawa kelas itu sangat menarik/ membosankan?</i></p> <p>The results from the survey indicated that 95% of the students felt that academic writing is</p>	<p>Which part was enjoyable and which part is not enjoyable? Can you tell me if there were certain parts that were more appealing than others? Why? How do you respond if the class was interesting?</p> <p>Can you please tell me what and why it is difficult? How do you manage / deal with this</p>

	<p>difficult; do you feel the same way?  <i>Analisi daripada soal saelidik menatkan bahawa 95% daripada anda menyatakan bahawa penulisan akademik adalah sukar, adakah anda memepunyai tanggapan yang sama?</i></p> <p>Now, let's pretend that I am going to give you a task and you have to complete it. Talk me through the process or how you are going to deal with this task.  <i>Bayangkan anda berada didalam situasi ini. Guru anda mengarahkan anda untuk menulis sebuah esei bertajuk impak media ke atas masyarakat. Huraikan bagaimana anda akan melaksanakan tugas ini?</i></p>	<p>challenge? Why do you think it is important to find a way to deal with this issue / challenge?  <i>Boleh anda jelaskan apakan yang dimaksudkan sebagai 'sukar' di dalam keals penulisan akademik?Boleh anda berikan contoh? Bagaimanak anda mengatasi kesukaran yang dimaksudkan? Mengapa anda bertanggung perlu untk mengatasi menangani cabaran tersebut?</i></p> <p>What do you think the essay wants you to do? Based on this understanding of the question, what is the first thing you would do? Why? What is next? Why?  What are some of the possible challenges / difficulties you think you will face?What would you do to deal with these challenges?  <i>Apakah yang anda faham dari tugas ini?Apakah perkara pertama yang akan anda lakukan? Langkah seterusnya? Mengapa? Dan langkah setreunys? Mengapa? Pada pendapat anda, apakah cabaran / kesukaran yang anda akan lalui dalam menulis esei ini?</i></p>
<b>3</b>	<b>Goals / Imagined Future</b>	
	<p>What are your goals?? What is your motivation behind these goals?  <i>Apakah matlamat anda? Apakah motif dan motivasi di sebalik matlamat yang telah anda nyatakan tersebut?</i></p> <p>How do you plan to achieve this?  <i>Bagaimanakah anda cuba untuk mencapai matlamat tersebut?</i></p> <p>How does academic writing fit into this plan?  Apakah peranan kelas penulisan akademik ini / relevan kepada matlamat anda?</p>	<p>Is there a difference between your long term &amp; short term goals?  <i>Pada pendapat anda, adakah terdepat perbezaan antara matlamat jangka panjang dan matlamat jangka pendek?</i></p> <p>Do you have specific target, time frame or strategies to achieve this target?  Doe it play an immediate role, secondary role?  <i>Adakah anda merancang tempoh masa untuk mencapai matlamat tersebut? Adakah terdapat strategi khusus untuk emncapai matlamat tersebut?</i></p> <p><i>Peranan utama/ peranan sekunder</i></p>
	<b>Closing</b>	
	Recap what has been covered, main points and obtain verbal confirmation for next meeting.	Thank you for your time & your insight. Confirm time for second interview.

## H. 2 Interview 2

NO	MAIN INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	PROBES
1	<p><b>Engagement</b></p> <p>Can you give me an example of a lesson that you thought went really well? <i>Boleh anda berikan sebuah contoh dimana anda merasakan kelas tersebut berkualiti dan efektif?</i></p> <p>With reference to the activities or task that you do in the academic writing class, can you list some of them? <i>Dengan menggunakan kelas penulisan akademik anda sebagai rujukan, boleh anda senaraikan aktiviti atau tugas yang dilakukan di dalam kelas tersebut?</i></p> <p>Can you please rank these activities based on what you like best/ you feel very much motivated? (lecture, discussion, essay writing, oral presentation, group work, grammar exercise, language games) <i>Boleh anda susun atur berdasarkan tugas atau aktiviti yang anda rasakan menarik kepada paling tidak menarik.</i></p> <p>Now, using the same activities you listed, rank them in order of importance? <i>Sekarang, boleh anda susun atur aktiviti / tugas tersebut berdasarkan kepentingan?</i></p>	<p>What did you like about that lesson? How did you feel? What did you do as a result? What did you study about? What was the teacher doing? What were your classmates doing? <i>Apakah yang anda sukai mengenai kelas tersebut? Guru? Tugas? Topik? Apakah perasaan anda ketika itu? Adakah ini mempengaruhi tingkah laku anda? Adakah ini mendorong anda untuk terlibat dan turut serta secara aktif di dalam kelas tersebut?</i></p> <p>What are some of the things you do in the class? What topic / task have been covered? <i>Apakah perkara2 yang anda pelajari di dalam kelas tersebut?</i></p> <p>Why did you rank these in that order? How does it affect your behaviours / actions in the class? Did it make you participate more than usual? <i>Mengikut penilainan peribadi anda, mengapakah tugas A berada di atas, dan tugas B di bawah senarai anda?</i></p> <p>(Note the order if it is similar / dissimilar) Can you comment on why these two are ranked differently / similarly? <i>Boleh anda jelaskan mengapa dua senarai ini berbeza/ sama? Mengapa keadaan ini berlaku? Apa yang mendorong anda untuk berpandangan sedemikian?</i></p>
2	<p><b>Disengagement</b></p> <p>Let's move on to a lesson that is not interesting / one where you did not participate much in. Can you give me an example? <i>Sekarang, boleh anda berikan sebuah contoh sebuah kelas yang tidak menarik / membosankan dimana tahap penglibatan dan penyertaan anda sangat minimal.</i></p>	<p>Why did you feel that it was not interesting? What was the teacher doing? What was being studied? What did your friends do? Did this influence the way you behaved in the class? Can you elaborate to what extent did it influence you behaviour? <i>Mengapa anda merasakan kelas itu tidak menarik/ membosankan? Apa yang tutor lakukan? Apakah tugas / topik yang anda pelajari? Pelajar lain? Bagaimanakah ini mempengaruhi tingkahlaku anda?</i></p>

	<p>Have you ever been in a situation where you felt you were pressured to participate? <i>Pernahkan anda berada di dalam situasi dimana anda 'terpaksa' / 'tertekan' terlibat / turut serta di dalam sebuah sesi pembelajaran?</i></p> <p>Imagine if you were to teach the same class, what would you do differently? <i>Sekiranya anda diberi peluang untuk menjadi tutor dan mengajar kelas tersebut, apakah yang anda akan lakukan?</i> <i>Adakah anda mempunyai cadangan lain untuk memperbaiki kelas tersebut?</i></p>	<p>Can you give me an example of a situation? How did you feel? What was required of you? What did you do? <i>Sila berikan sebuah contoh. Apakah perasaan anda ketika itu? Apakah yang anda perlu lakukan di situasi tersebut? Apakah reaksi anda?</i></p> <p>How would you teach that particular topic? What else would you add / introduce? What would you take out? Do you have any other suggestions to further improve the class? <i>Bagaimanakah anda kan mengajar kelas tersebut? Apa yang anda akan ubah?</i></p>
<b>3</b>	<b>Relationship between self-concept and engagement</b>	
	<p>I am particularly interested in investigating the possibility of a relationship between self-concept and engagement. In your view, is there a relationship between your self-concept in academic writing and your engagement in the academic writing class? <i>Saya berminat untuk memahami struktur / hubungan antara konsep sendiri anda dengan penyertaan dan penglibatan anda.. Berdasarkan temubual pertama dan kedua, pada pendapat anda wujudkah hubungan di antara dua konsep ini?</i></p> <p>Based on the discussion we had, I would like you to look at these diagrams and choose one that best reflects your understanding of the relationship between self-concept and engagement. <i>Sila lihat diagram-digram tersebut dan pilih rajah yang paling tepat dalam menggambarkan hubungan antara konsep sendiri dan penyertaan dan penglibatan anda. Sila labelkan rajah tersebut.</i></p> <p>Could you draw the relationship that you are describing here? <i>Sila lakarkan hubungan tersebut di ruang yang telah disediakan.</i></p>	<p>Can you tell me why you have chosen that diagram? Can you describe to me the relationship? <i>Boleh anda jelaskan mengapa anda telah memilih diagram tersebut?</i></p> <p>Can you relate that to a specific lesson / incident? How did you feel? What happened? What was the teacher doing? What was the task? <i>Boleh anda ceritakan dengan lebih lanjut hubungan tersebut? Sila berikan contoh daripada kelas penulisan akademik anda.</i></p> <p>What does this mean? (arrows, directions etc) You labelled this as ___. What does this mean in relation to the incident you were describing? <i>Boleh anda huraikan dengan lebih lanjut?</i></p>
	<p><b>Closing</b></p> <p>Recap what has been covered in the interview. Thank you for your input and your time.</p>	

## Appendix I Sample Illustrations of Student Engagement

### I.1



www.shutterstock.com · 48955705

“Teacher with students in a classroom” *Shutterstockimages*. Retrieved May 20, 2011 from <http://www.shutterstock.com>

### I.2



www.shutterstock.com · 62770612

“Student uninterested in learning” *Shutterstockimages*. Retrieved May 20, 2011 from <http://www.shutterstock.com>

I.3



www.shutterstock.com · 8610934

“Adult education class raising their hands to answer questions” *Shutterstockimages*. Retrieved May 20, 2011 from <http://www.shutterstock.com>

I.4



www.shutterstock.com · 25562413

“Students at the university” *Shutterstockimages*. Retrieved May 20, 2011 from <http://www.shutterstock.com>

I.5

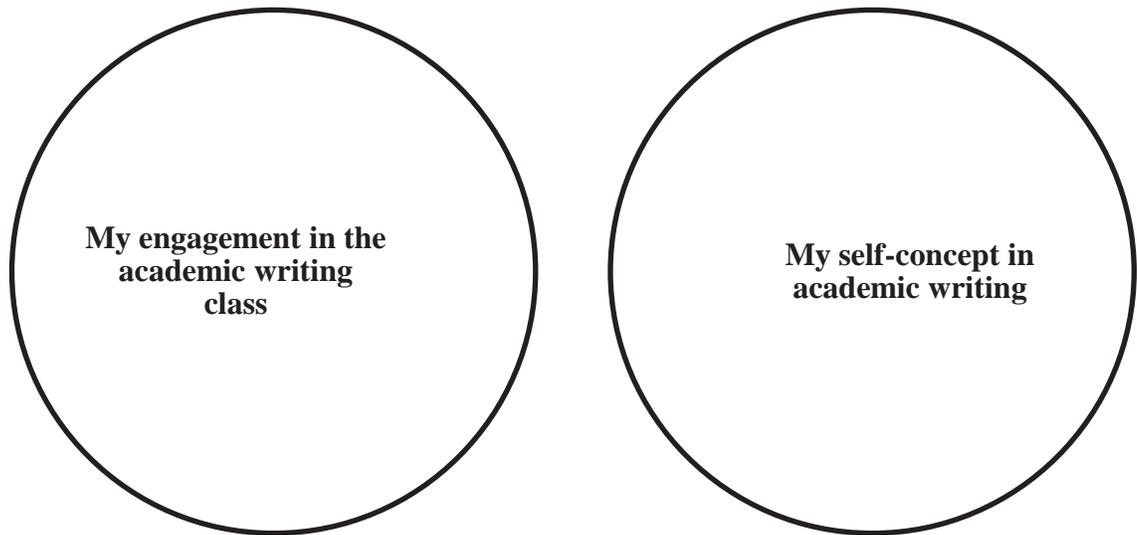


www.shutterstock.com · 48409465

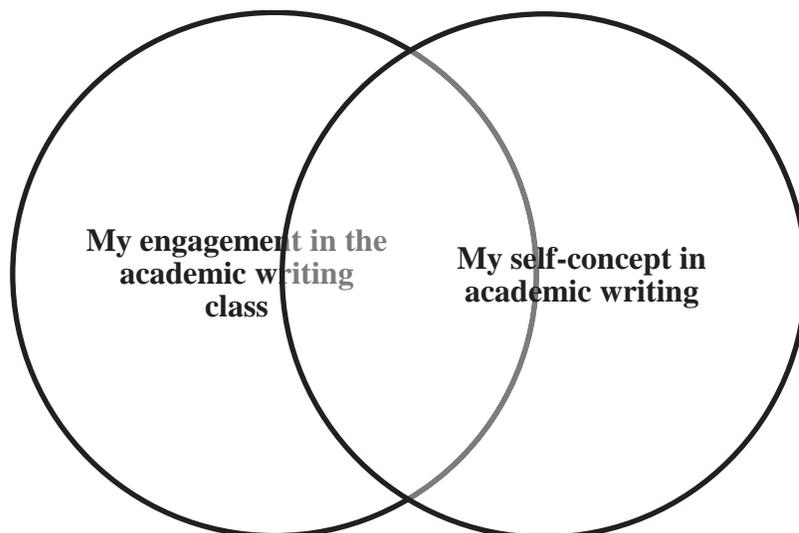
“Students passing notes in the classroom” *Shutterstockimages*. Retrieved May 20, 2011 from <http://www.shutterstock.com>

**Appendix J**      Sample Venn Diagrams as a Representation of the  
Relationship between Self-concept and Student Engagement

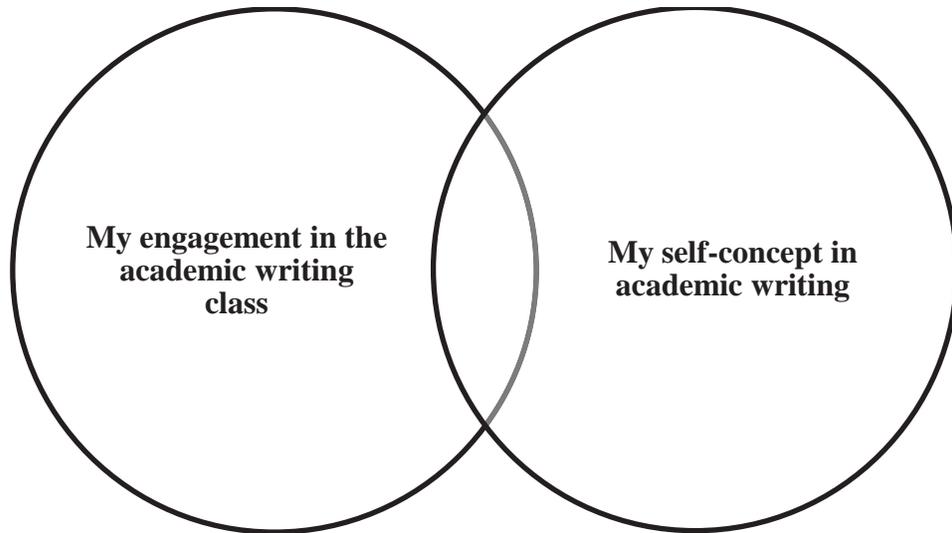
J.1      No relationship



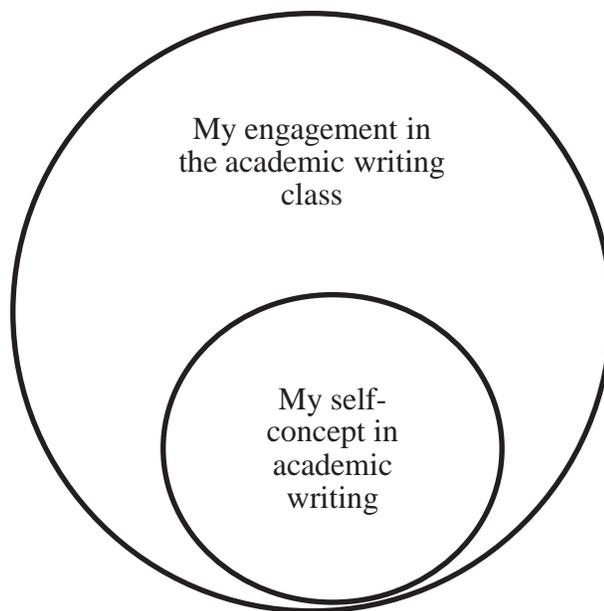
J.2      Strong relationship



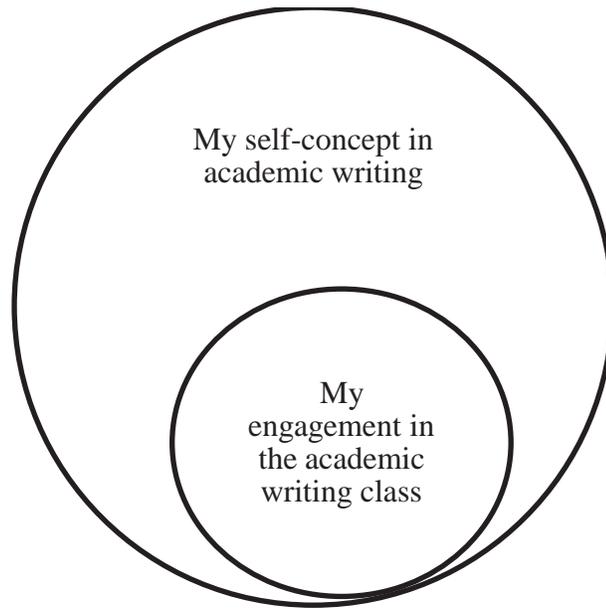
J.3 Weak relationship



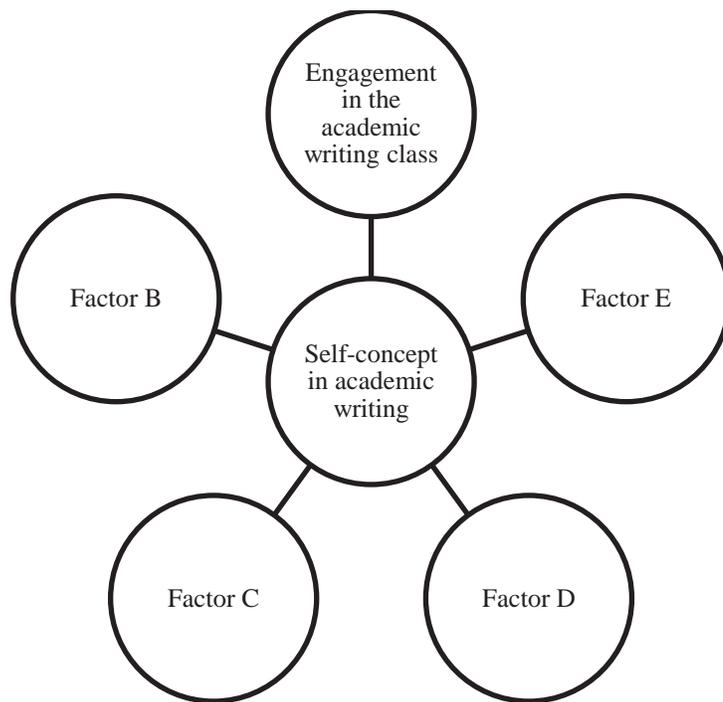
J.4



J.5



J.6





MASSEY UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
TE KUPENGA O TE MATAURANGA

## ***Impact of Self-Concept in Academic Writing on Malaysian Learners' Engagement in One Higher Learning Institution***

### INFORMATION SHEET FOR INTERVIEW

#### **Name of Researcher**

Ida Fatimawati bt Adi Badiozaman

#### **Introduction**

This Information Sheet is intended to provide a brief introduction to the second phase of my research and to invite your participation. After having been an English teacher at secondary school and tertiary level for 7 years, I am currently undertaking a PhD degree in Education at Massey University New Zealand. I am interested in the area of second language learning, especially in the discipline of academic writing. You are invited to take part in an interview for a research investigating the 'Impact of Self-Concept in Academic Writing on Malaysian Learners' Engagement in One Higher Learning Institution'. This research is part of my PhD Thesis at Massey University, New Zealand.

#### **Project Description and Invitation**

The study aims to:

1. explore learners' self-concept in relation to academic writing, especially the role it plays in their engagement in the Academic Writing class;
2. identify areas and opportunities for improvement in the academic writing curricula.

The study will be conducted in two parts: questionnaire and interview. At this stage you are being invited to take part in a follow-up interview to further explore the impact of self-concept on learners' engagement.

#### **Participant Identification and Recruitment**

You are invited to participate as you have taken the Academic Writing paper in UNIMAS. You have also provided your contact details when you participated in the questionnaire part of the study. For this part of the study, up to six students are being invited to participate, so the interview will be in-depth and focused. Note that if more participants agree to be interviewed than are needed, then the researcher will select those who best represent different perspectives in the survey.

#### **Project Procedures**

Once the researcher has identified students who are willing to be interviewed through the questionnaires, the researcher will select students randomly based on the levels of self-concept. The researcher will contact the students and arrange for a follow up meeting. An Information Sheet and Consent Form will be posted via email to ensure that you are aware of the purpose of the study and the procedure. You will be involved in two interviews over two weeks (one interview each week). Each interview would take no longer than an hour. Interview times and locations will be set for your convenience. In these sessions, I would like you to share with me your experience learning writing in English, your self-concept in academic writing and your engagement in the Academic Writing class. All interview sessions will be audio taped. You may choose to do the interviews in English or Bahasa Malaysia. You will be given summaries of the transcripts of the interview sessions in which you have participated and you can change any points which you feel that I may have not understood.

**Data Management**

All audio tapes will be transcribed into a computer. The audio-tape and the transcription will be safeguarded with access limited to only myself and the thesis supervisory committee. I will retain the tapes for five years following the completion of the study and will then destroy them. A summary of the study will be made available to you. Your response will be fully confidential as only pseudonyms will be used in the final report. The analysis will be done in New Zealand and the e-data will be stored in the researcher's laptop which is password protected. The data will be destroyed five years after the completion of the study.

**Participants' Rights**

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you take part in the study, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study before September 2009;
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview;
- ask for a copy of the audio tape;
- ask for and make amendments to the transcription;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded. Please leave your contact details in the consent form for this purpose. A copy of the thesis will also be made available in UNIMAS library upon completion of the study in 2013.

**Project Contacts**

If you are willing to participate in the interview, please provide contact details by emailing me the researcher, Pn. Ida Fatimawati bt Adi Badiozaman of Massey University at my email, [mizzida79@yahoo.com](mailto:mizzida79@yahoo.com) or telephone +64 021 0601199/ 64 06 3533991).

If you have any questions about this research please contact my research supervisor, Dr. Penny Haworth of Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand, [phaworth@massey.ac.nz](mailto:phaworth@massey.ac.nz) at 64 06 356 9099 ext 8869.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, Application 09/ 04. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor John O'Neill, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, telephone 06 350 5799 x 8771, email [humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz).

Yours Sincerely,

---

(Ida Fatimawati bt Adi Badiozaman)

# ***Impak Konsep Kendiri Mahasiswa Malaysia Mengenai Penulisan Akademik dalam Bahasa Inggeris ke atas Penglibatan dan Penyertaan Mahasiswa di Institut Pengajian Tinggi***

## **KERTAS MAKLUMAT UNTUK TEMU BUAL**

### **Nama Penyelidik**

Ida Fatimawati bt Adi Badiozaman

### **Pengenalan**

Surat ini bertujuan memberi satu penerangan ringkas mengenai penyelidikan yang sedang saya lakukan dan juga merupa pelawaan kepada anda untuk menyertainya. Setelah menjadi guru bahasa Inggeris di sekolah menengah dan di instiut pengajian tinggi selama tujuh tahun, sekarang saya sedang mengikuti pengajian peringkat PhD dalam bidang pendidikan di Universiti Massey New Zealand. Saya meminati pembelajaran bahasa kedua, terutama sekali dalam bidang penulisan akademik. Saya ingin memohon kerjasama anda untuk terlibat sama sebagai responden kepada soalselidik dalam kajian saya mengenai 'Impak Konsep Kendiri Mahasiswa Malaysia Mengenai Penulisan Akademik dalam Bahasa Inggeris ke atas Penglibatan dan Penyertaan Mahasiswa di Institut Pengajian Tinggi'. Kajian ini adalah sebahagian daripada keperluan dalam pengajian peringkat Ijazah Kedoktoran Falsafah saya di Universiti Massey New Zealand.

### **Penerangan Mengenai Projek dan Pelawaan**

Kajian ini bertujuan melihat konsep kendiri anda mengenai penulisan akademik dan hubungannya dengan penglibatan serta penyertaan anda dalam kelas penulisan akademik anda. Secara khusus kajian ini bertujuan untuk:

1. meninjau konsep kendiri mahasiswa berhubung dengan penulisan akademik, terutama sekali mengenai peranannya dalam mempengaruhi penglibatan serta penyertaan mereka dalam kelas penulisan akademik;
2. mengenalpasti ruang dan peluang untuk penambahbaikan kurikulum penulisan.

### **Pengenalan dan Pemilihan Responden**

Anda dijemput menjadi responden kerana anda telah mengambil Kertas Penulisan Akademik atau kertas keperluan bahasa di UNIMAS. Anda juga dijemput untuk temu bual kerana anda telah menyatakan persetujuan untuk penglibatan anda di dalam soal selidik yang telah dijalankan. Untuk bahagian temubual ini seramai 6 mahasiswa akan dijemput untuk ditemubual. Bilangan ini ditetapkan bagi memastikan temubual ini berupaya memberi maklumat yang lebih terperinci.

### **Prosedur Projek**

Setelah penyelidik mengenalpasti mahasiswa yang telah menyatakan persetujuan untuk terlibat dalam temu bual ini,

penyelidik akan menghubungi mahasiswa berkenaan untuk mengatur sesi temubual. Kertas maklumat temubual dan borang keizinan untuk temubual akan dihantar melalui email untuk memberi penerangan tentang tujuan penyelidikan dan penjelasan mengenai hal-hal etika seperti mengenai hak responden. Dua sesi temubual akan diadakan dalam tempoh dua minggu. Sesi temubual tersebut tidak akan mengambil masa lebih daripada satu jam. Anda dijemput untuk berkongsi pengalaman anda menulid di dalam Bahasa Inggeris, konsep kendiri anda mengenai penulisan akademik dan juga penyertaan dan penglibatan anda di dalam kelas penulisan akademik. Sesi temubual ini akan menggunakan medium Bahasa Malaysia atau Bahasa Inggeris, berdasarkan pilihan anda. Temubual ini juga akan dirakam secara audio. Anda akan diberi rumusan transkrip dan berhak untuk membetulkan transkrip temubual tersebut.

### **Pengurusan Data**

Semua rakaman pita audio akan ditranskripkan ke dalam komputer. Hanya penyelidik dan penyelia penyelidik akan mempunyai akses kepada rakaman, transkrip dan e-data tersebut. Rumusan penyelidikan ini akan diberi kepada peserta setelah penyelidikan ini tamat. Segala maklumat yang diberi di dalam sesi temubual adalah rahsia dan pseudonym atau nama samaran akan digunakan didalam penulisan tesis ini. Semua analisis akan dilakukan di New Zealand dan pita audio dan transkrip daripada temubual ini akan dimusnahkan selepas penyelidikan ini selesai dijalankan.

### **Hak Responden**

Anda tidak diwajibkan untuk menerima pelawaan dan jemputan ini. Sekiranya anda menerima, anda mempunyai hak untuk:

- Tidak memberi respon kepada mana-mana soalan yang difikirkan tidak munasabah;
- Menarik diri daripada menyertai kajian ini sebelum September 2009;
- Bertanya tentang kajian ini pada bila-bila masa di sepanjang tempoh penyertaan anda;
- Memberi maklumat atas dasar bahawa nama anda tidak akan digunakan kecuali anda memberi kebenaran kepada penyelidik;
- Diberi kebenaran untuk melihat rumusan dapatan daripada kajian ini apabila ia sudah selesai dilakukan.
- Meminta penyelidik untuk mematikan perakam audio pada bila-bila masa during temubua
- Meminta salinan pita audio
- Meminta salinan rumusan transkrip dan membetulkan transkrip temubual yang telah dilakukan. Sila isi alamat email atau pos di dalam boring keizinan bagi tujuan oenghantaran rumusan kajian.

### **Kontak Projek**

Sekiranya anda bersetuju untuk menyertai soalselidik ini sebagai responden, sila beri maklumat perhubungan anda kepada saya, Pn. Ida Fatimawati bt Adi Badiozaman dari Massey University melalui alamat e-mail, [mizzida79@yahoo.com](mailto:mizzida79@yahoo.com) atau +64 021 0601199 / +64 06 3533991.

Sekiranya anda ada apa-apa pertanyaan mengenai penyelidikan ini, silalah berhubung dengan penyelia penyelidikan saya, Dr. Penny Haworth, Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand, [phaworth@massey.ac.nz](mailto:phaworth@massey.ac.nz) atau di talian +64 06 356 9099 ext 8869.

Projek ini telah dilulus dan dilulus oleh Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, Application 09/ 04. Sekiranya anda mempunyai sebarang kemuskilan mengenai pengendalian penyelidikan ini, silalah berhubung dengan Professor John O'Neill, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, di talian +64 06 350 5799 sambungan 8771, atau melalui alamat e-mail, [humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz).

Yang benar,

---

(Ida Fatimawati bt Adi Badiozaman)



**Massey University**

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
Te Kupenga o Te Mātauranga

SCHOOL OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES  
Private Bag 11 222  
Palmerston North 4442  
New Zealand  
T 64 6 356 9099  
F 64 6 351 3385  
www.massey.ac.nz

***Impact of Self-Concept in Academic Writing on  
Malaysian Learners' Engagement in  
One Higher Learning Institution***

**PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEW**

**This form will be held for a period of five (5) years**

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I wish to have my tapes returned to me Yes / No

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the  
Information Sheet Yes / No

I would like a copy of the summary report to be sent to me Yes / No

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Full Name Printed \_\_\_\_\_

Email/ Postal  
Address to send  
summary if  
required \_\_\_\_\_



***Impak Konsep Kendiri Mahasiswa Malaysia  
Mengenai Penulisan Akademik dalam Bahasa  
Inggeris ke atas Penglibatan dan Penyertaan  
Mahasiswa di Institut Pengajian Tinggi***

**BORANG KEIZINAN PESERTA UNTUK TEMUBUAL**

Borang ini akan disimpan untuk tempoh lima (5) tahun

- Saya telah membaca semua maklumat dalam Kertas Maklumat dan telah diberi penerangan secara terperinci tentang kajian ini. Pertanyaan saya juga telah dijawab dengan baik, dan saya difahamkan bahawa saya masih boleh bertanya pada bila-bila masa.

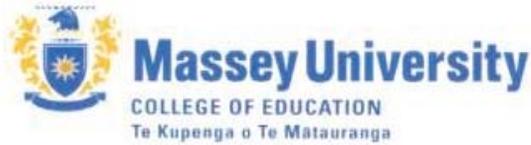
Saya bersetuju / tidak bersetuju temubual ini dirakam Ya/Tidak

Saya bersetuju untuk pita audio dipulangkan kepada saya Ya/Tidak

Saya bersetuju untuk terlibat dalam kajian ini berdasarkan peraturan yang ditetapkan dalam Kertas Maklumat Ya/Tidak

Tandatangan \_\_\_\_\_ Tarikh: \_\_\_\_\_

Nama Penuh:  
Email/ Alamat Pos  
untuk tujuan  
rumusan kajian  
\_\_\_\_\_



SCHOOL OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES  
Private Bag 11 222  
Palmerston North 4442  
New Zealand  
T 64 6 356 9099  
F 64 6 351 3385  
[www.massey.ac.nz](http://www.massey.ac.nz)

***Impact of Self-Concept in Academic Writing on  
Malaysian Learners' Engagement in  
One Higher Learning Institution***

***AUTHORITY FOR THE RELEASE OF  
TRANSCRIPTS***

This form will be held for a period of five (5) years

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to read and amend the transcript of the interview/s conducted with me.

I agree that the edited transcript and extracts from this may be used by the researcher, *Pn. Ida Fatimawati* in reports and publications arising from the research.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Full Name - printed \_\_\_\_\_



**Massey University**

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
Te Kupenga o Te Mātauranga

SCHOOL OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES  
Private Bag 11 222  
Palmerston North  
New Zealand  
T 64 6 356 9099  
F 64 6 351 3385  
www.massey.ac.nz

***Impak Konsep Kendiri Mahasiswa Malaysia  
Mengenai Penulisan Akademik dalam Bahasa  
Inggeris ke atas Penglibatan dan Penyertaan  
Mahasiswa di Institut Pengajian Tinggi***

**KEIZINAN UNTUK PENGGUNAAN TRANSKRIP**

Borang ini akan disimpan untuk tempoh lima (5) tahun

Saya sahkan bahawa saya berkesempatan membaca dan membetulkan transkrip temubual yang telah dilakukan.

Saya bersetuju transkrip yang telah disunting atau sebahagian daripadanya digunakan oleh penyelidik, Pn. Ida Fatimawati dalam laporan atau penerbitan yang berkaitan dengan penyelidikan ini.

Tanda tangan:

Tarikh:

Nama Penuh:



MASSEY UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
TE KUPENGA O TE MĀTAURANGA

***Impact of Self-Concept in Academic Writing on  
Malaysian Learners' Engagement in  
One Higher Learning Institution***

**CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT FOR TRANSLATOR**

I ..... (Full Name - printed)

agree to keep confidential all information concerning the project .....

I will not retain or copy any information involving the project.

**Signature:**

.....

**Date:**

.....

**Appendix O** Detailed Breakdown of the Distribution of Responses for  
Section B Item Analysis

	Item	Mean	SD	Distribution of responses (%)			
				<i>F</i>	<i>MF</i>	<i>MT</i>	<i>T</i>
SC18	It is important for me to do well in academic writing	3.56	.564	0.6	1.8	38.2	59.4
SC20	I find writing essays challenging	3.35	.619	42.4	51.2	5.9	0.6
SC17	I enjoy studying for academic writing	3.10	.812	5.3	12.4	49.4	32.9
SC24	I make a lot of mistakes when writing in English*	2.86	.859	22.9	47.6	21.8	7.6
SC12	I like writing in English	2.81	.859	7.6	25.3	45.9	21.2
SC16	I learn things quickly in my Academic Writing class	2.81	.764	5.9	22.9	55.9	15.3
SC19	I find writing essays interesting	2.73	.889	7.6	33.5	37.1	21.8
SC10	I always look forward to my Academic Writing	2.71	.866	11.2	22.4	50.6	15.9
SC14	I often do badly in academic writing tests*	2.60	.873	14.7	41.8	32.4	11.2
SC9	Academic Writing is one of my best subjects	2.58	.882	14.1	25.9	47.6	12.4
SC23	I feel confident in my ability to write in English	2.55	.877	10.6	38.8	35.3	15.3
SC15	I have poor writing skills*	2.30	.876	8.8	31.2	41.2	18.8
SC11	Tasks in Academic Writing classes are easy for me	2.26	.824	17.6	45.3	30.6	6.5
SC13	I often need help in the Academic Writing class*	2.15	.833	7.1	21.8	50	21.2
SC25	I have always done well in academic writing	2.15	.789	20	50	25.3	4.7
SC22	I am hopeless when it comes to academic writing*	2.08	.843	5.3	23.5	44.7	26.5
SC21	Academic writing is easy for me	2.00	.746	23.5	57.1	15.3	4.1
SC26	I consider myself a good writer	1.98	.745	25.9	53.5	17.6	2.9

*Note.* F = False; MF = Mostly False; MT = Mostly True; T = True. SD= Standard Deviation.

<sup>a</sup>\* Refer to negatively worded statements.

**Appendix P** Detailed Breakdown of the Distribution of Responses for  
Section C Item Analysis

	Item	Mean	SD	Distribution of responses %			
				<i>F</i>	<i>MF</i>	<i>MT</i>	<i>T</i>
E36	I think that AW is important for my future	3.64	.571	1.2	1.2	30	67.6
E35	The writing class feels like a waste of time*	3.58	.613	62.9	32.9	2.9	1.2
E40	I take care that my essays are done properly	3.42	.602	1.2	2.4	50	46.5
E43	I feel that Academic writing helps me to do well in my content papers	3.41	.658	1.8	4.1	45.3	48.8
E41	I often look for ways to improve my English writing	3.36	.631	1.2	4.7	50.6	43.5
E38	In class, I really care that I do my best work	3.33	.651	0	10	47.1	42.9
E30	I pay attention in class	3.24	.701	2.4	8.2	52.4	37.1
E39	Writing in English helps me organize my ideas	3.24	.684	2.9	5.3	56.5	35.3
E29	When writing gets difficult, I stop trying*	3.18	.804	38.8	44.7	12.4	4.1
E34	I am proud to be in the AW class	3.16	.787	3.5	13.5	46.5	36.5
E28	I do as little as possible; I just want to pass*	3.09	.830	34.1	46.5	14.1	5.3
E27	I work hard in my AW class	3.01	.758	4.1	15.9	55.3	24.7
E31	I always participate in class discussions	2.88	.830	5.3	25.3	45.9	23.5
E32	I prepare two or more drafts of an assignment before final submission	2.69	.925	11.2	29.4	38.8	20.6
E33	I look forward to my AW class	2.67	.902	10.6	30.6	40	18.8
E42	It is easy to organize my thoughts into sentences in English	2.46	.871	12.4	42.4	32.4	12.9
E37	I often help others on the AW class	3.64	.571	1.2	1.2	30	67.6
E44	I find it hard to express my ideas effectively in English*	3.58	.613	62.9	32.9	2.9	1.2

*Note.* F = False; MF = Mostly False; MT = Mostly True; T = True. SD= Standard Deviation.

<sup>a</sup>\* Refer to negatively worded statements.

**Appendix Q**                      Detailed Breakdown of Exploratory Factor Analysis Results  
of Section B

**Q.1**    Total variance for Section B - Exploratory Factor Analysis

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	4.094	22.744	22.744	4.094	22.744	22.744	2.855	15.863	15.863
2	2.684	14.909	37.653	2.684	14.909	37.653	2.730	15.168	31.031
3	1.457	8.097	45.750	1.457	8.097	45.750	2.649	14.719	45.750
4	1.146	6.369	52.120						
5	1.038	5.765	57.885						
6	.996	5.534	63.419						
7	.866	4.814	68.233						
8	.818	4.542	72.775						
9	.795	4.416	77.191						
10	.693	3.848	81.039						
11	.633	3.515	84.554						
12	.572	3.175	87.730						
13	.545	3.025	90.755						
14	.422	2.345	93.100						
15	.378	2.102	95.201						
16	.337	1.870	97.071						
17	.271	1.506	98.577						
18	.256	1.423	100.000						

Note. <sup>a</sup> Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

## Q.2 Factor Structure of Self-concept Items

Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
SC14 I often do badly in academic writing tests	.783		
SC15 I have poor writing skills	.759		
SC22 I am hopeless when it comes to academic writing	.674		
SC13 I often need help in the Academic Writing class	.526		
SC23 I feel confident in my ability to write in English	.518		
SC16 I learn things quickly in my Academic Writing class			
SC24 I make a lot of mistakes when writing in English			
SC25 I have always done well in academic writing		.804	
SC21 Academic writing is easy for me		.743	
SC11 Tasks in Academic Writing classes are easy for me		.697	
SC26 I consider myself a good writer		.542	
SC17 I enjoy studying for academic writing			.681
SC10 I always look forward to my Academic Writing class			.676
SC20 I find writing essays challenging			.576
SC19 I find writing essays interesting			.512
SC9 Academic Writing is one of my best subjects			.504
SC12 I like writing in English			
SC18 It is important for me to do well in academic writing			

*Note.* <sup>a</sup> Extraction method: Principal component analysis. <sup>b</sup> Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. <sup>c</sup> Rotation converged in 4 iterations .

**Appendix R**                      Detailed Breakdown of Exploratory Factor Analysis Results  
of Section C

R.1      Total variance for Section C- Exploratory Factor Analysis

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	4.074	22.632	22.632	4.074	22.632	22.632	2.834	15.746	15.746
2	1.710	9.499	32.131	1.710	9.499	32.131	2.024	11.246	26.992
3	1.398	7.769	39.900	1.398	7.769	39.900	1.622	9.013	36.005
4	1.242	6.900	46.800	1.242	6.900	46.800	1.499	8.327	44.331
5	1.035	5.749	52.549	1.035	5.749	52.549	1.479	8.218	52.549
6	.986	5.478	58.027						
7	.955	5.303	63.330						
8	.888	4.932	68.262						
9	.842	4.679	72.941						
10	.707	3.930	76.871						
11	.685	3.803	80.674						
12	.661	3.670	84.345						
13	.580	3.222	87.567						
14	.536	2.977	90.544						
15	.503	2.796	93.340						
16	.444	2.464	95.804						
17	.396	2.199	98.003						
18	.359	1.997	100.000						

Note. <sup>a</sup> Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

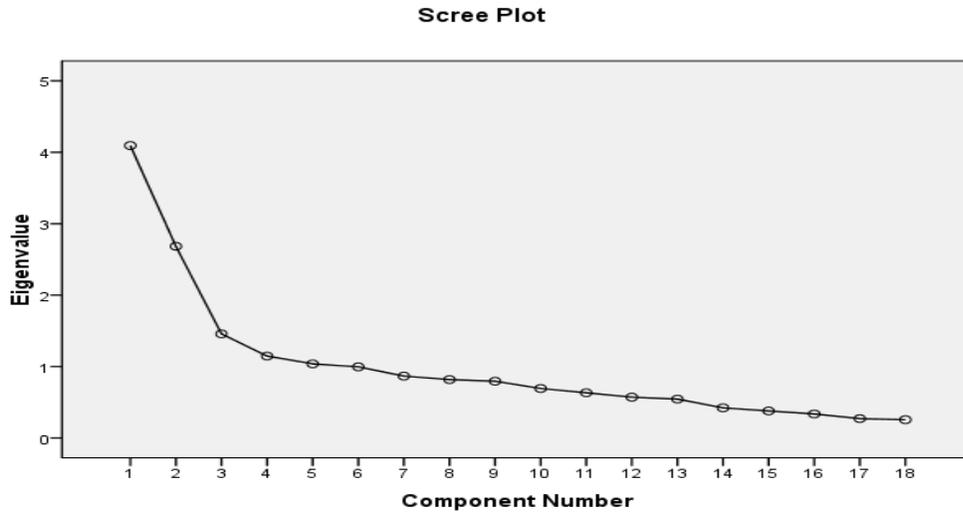
## R.2 Factor structure of Student Engagement in Academic Writing Items

<i>Items</i>	<i>Factor 1</i>	<i>Factor 2</i>	<i>Factor 3</i>
E39 Writing in English helps me organize my ideas	.633		
E28 I do as little as possible; I just want to pass	.600		
E40 I take care that my essays are done properly	.568		
E35 The writing class feels like a waste of time	.541		
E36 I think that AW is important for my future	.539		
E43 I feel that Academic writing helps me to do well in my content papers			
E38 In class, I really care that I do my best work			
E27 I work hard in my AW class		.665	
E33 I look forward to my AW class		.637	
E30 I pay attention in class		.559	
E34 I am proud to be in the AW class		.556	
E32 I prepare two or more drafts of an assignment before final submission		.523	
E41 I often look for ways to improve my English writing		.508	
E44 I find it hard to express my ideas effectively in English			.693
E37 I often help others on the AW class			.563
E42 It is easy to organize my thoughts into sentences in English			.504
E31 I always participate in class discussions			
E29 When writing gets difficult, I stop trying			

*Note.* <sup>a</sup>. Extraction method: Principal component analysis. <sup>b</sup>. Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. <sup>c</sup>. Rotation converged in 8 iterations

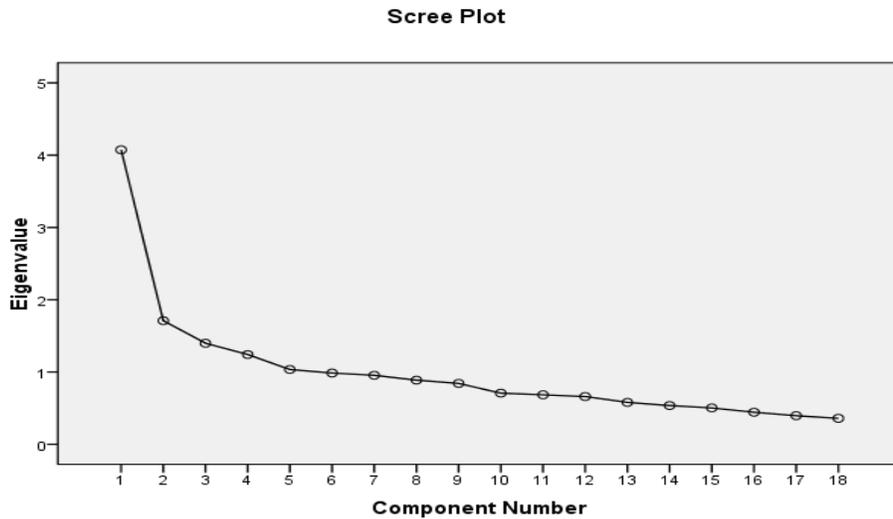
**Appendix S**                      **Scree Plots**

**S.1**      **Scree Plot for Self-concept in Academic Writing Items**



*Note:* <sup>a</sup>. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of sampling Adequacy = .733. <sup>b</sup>. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity Significance = .000. <sup>c</sup>. Cronbach's Alpha = .652

**S. 2**      **Scree Plot for Engagement in Academic Writing Class Items**



*Note:* <sup>a</sup>. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of sampling Adequacy = .778. <sup>b</sup>. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity Significance = .000. <sup>c</sup>. Cronbach's Alpha = .764

**Appendix T**

Coates' (2007) Typological Model of Student Engagement Styles

