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ABSTRACT (8)

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE READING HABIT AMONG FORM ONE MALE STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY OF SMK SS17 SUBANG JAYA

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The purposes of this study are to investigate which factors influence the reading habit and choice of reading materials among form one boys of SS17 Secondary School in Subang Jaya. This research helps to find out the factors that contribute to the lack of interest in reading among form one male students, the reading materials that are often read by form one male students and the problems that male students face in cultivating their reading habit. This is a quantitative study that emphasizes on the relation of three main factors which are the materials read, the time spent reading various reading materials and the person who influences the reading habit. The research instruments used are questionnaire and structured interview. Data obtained from these two research instruments were analysed using the Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS). The data revealed that the respondents read from a wide range of reading materials (20%) each for books, magazines, newspapers, comics and websites. A majority of the respondents read less than an hour for the following reading materials; reference/exercise books, general knowledge books, novels/story books and newspapers. Encouragement to read is important for all students in order to increase their interest towards reading. It should come from multiple sources such as home, school and also community.

ABSTRACT (9)

MALAYSIAN TEACHERS' PERCEPTION REGARDING THE IMPACT OF THE CHOICE OF TOPIC ON ESL LEARNERS' MOTIVATION IN WRITING

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A number of researches have investigated whether or not the choice of topic for writing will impact ESL learners' motivation to write. Yet, most of these studies were conducted in the environment where English is used as first language. Though several studies were conducted in a second language environment, the socio-cultural backgrounds of the environment do not reflect the situation in Malaysian education system. This study thus investigates Malaysian teachers' points of view regarding the impact of the choice of topic on ESL learners' motivations in writing. Specifically, this research aims to identify whether the suggested motivating factors to be considered in selecting topics for writing by previous researches are applicable in Malaysian context as well as to identify other factors Malaysian teachers believe should be considered when selecting topics for writing in order to increase learners' motivation to write. A number of school English teachers were interviewed regarding the relation between the choice of topics and learners' motivation in writing. A group of pupils were interviewed to find what factors affect their motivation to write. The findings suggest that learners' socio-cultural background, prior knowledge and audience are important determiners of their motivation in writing, while learners' experiences and teachers' rewards are other factors that matter in the Malaysian context.

ABSTRACT (10)

INVESTIGATING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INDIRECT COMMUNICATION STRATEGY AMONG PRACTICAL TRAINING STUDENTS IN THE WORKPLACE CONTEXT

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In the working environment, communication is one of the most important aspects in transferring information between employees and superiors and also between the employees themselves. This qualitative study was conducted in order to identify the reasons why the practical training students are implementing indirect communication as one of the communication strategies in the workplace. This study can further clarify the correct time and occasion to use indirectness in daily communication. Audio recordings of conversation that occurred in Carlist.my Sdn Bhd and structured interview were used to elicit data. The recordings were orthographically transcribed in order to identify the elements of indirectness in the speeches. Follow up interview were then conducted in order to identify whether the speakers realized the presence of indirectness in their daily conversation. The practical students were also interviewed in order to clarify the reasons why indirectness occurred in their daily transactions. The findings revealed that indirectness occurred between superiors and subordinates and also among the subordinates when they were making request, responding to request, rejecting request, giving orders, complaining and making jokes. Indirectness also occurred in accordance to the reasons of saving their face, offering help, avoiding conflict, delivering short message, asking from someone who is unfamiliar, avoiding from harming faces, voicing out disappointment, reducing the risk of offence and avoiding harm in relationship. Therefore, the occurrence of indirectness is a good method to maintain relationship and avoid conflict especially in the professional working context.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE READING HABIT AMONG FORM ONE BOYS: A CASE STUDY OF SMK SS17 SUBANG JAYA

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Abstract

The purposes of this study are to investigate which factors influence the reading habit and choice of reading materials among form one boys of SS17 Secondary School in Subang Jaya. This research helps to find out the factors that contribute to the lack of interest in reading among form one male students, the reading materials that are often read by form one male students and the problems that male students face in cultivating their reading habit. This is a quantitative study that emphasizes on the relation of three main factors which are the materials read, the time spent reading various reading materials and the person who influences the reading habit. The research instruments used are questionnaire and structured interview. Data obtained from these two research instruments were analyzed using the Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS). The data revealed that the respondents read from a wide range of reading materials (20%) each for books, magazines, newspapers, comics and websites. A majority of the respondents read less than an hour for the following reading materials; reference/exercise books, general knowledge books, novels/story books and newspapers. Encouragement to read is important for all students in order to increase the interest of students towards reading. Encouragement to read should come from multiple sources such as from the home, school and also community.

Keywords: reading, motivation, socio-cultural background, encouragement

1.0 The problem

1.1 Introduction

The problem of non-reading, especially among school students has drawn public attention in recent years. A Malaysian survey on the reading behavior by the Ministry of Education (New Straits Times, 29 August 1996) on 22,400 individuals and 6,050 households revealed that only 20 per cent of Malaysian read regularly. This survey further stressed that the small figure includes students who read just to pass examinations.

This phenomenon should not be left unchecked as it can prevent the development of knowledge, intelligence and maturity in an individual. As Malaysia aspires to be a fully developed nation by the year 2020, she needs individuals who are progressive in striving for self-development. To ensure progress, a good reading habit is important.

This study investigated the following research questions:
1. What are the materials read by form one male students at home and at school?
2. How frequent different types of reading materials are read by form one male students at home and at school?
3. Who is the person that influences form one male students to read the most?

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Types of readers

Irene (2001) and Beers (1996) categorized readers into three groups; dormant readers, non-committed readers, and unmotivated readers. The dormant readers were those who like to read and consider themselves as readers but did not take time to read regularly or update their knowledge. They did not have a negative attitude to reading but gave priority to other activities such as social life, sports and school work.

The second and third groups of readers were the non-committed and unmotivated readers. These two groups have negative attitudes towards reading and did not like to read. The non-committed readers have positive attitudes towards reading and agreed to suggestions on reading in the future. The unmotivated readers have negative attitudes towards reading and were not open to suggestions on reading in the future.

2.2 Types of reading motivation

The reader types are closely related to the motivation to read, as reflected in the various kinds of reading chosen. According to Bamberger (1975) and Irene (2001), four primary types of reading motivation can be identified which are informative reading, escapist reading, literary reading and cognitive reading.

First is informative reading. Informative reading's primary motivation is the need for direction in life and in the world. The importance of informative reading is the importance of information it brings to function for personal life and life in the community. Second is escapist reading. Escapist reading's motivation is the need to fulfill wishes; escape reality and live in a world without responsibilities and limits.

Third is literary reading. Literary reading's motivation is the need to seek inner meaning and recognition of typical everyday events. Lastly is cognitive reading. Cognitive reading's motivation lies in philosophy; longing for knowledge about understanding oneself, others and the world.

2.3 Boys' reading choices

Doiron (2003) examines the content of elementary classroom and school libraries and considers gender differences in students' personal or independent reading. Doirin concludes that educators are doing well at presenting and promoting the reading of fiction. His findings show boys read a balance of fiction and information books.

Blair and Sanford (2003) have recently focused on boys, male interests in reading and writing, and created a Boys and Literacy website to highlight their research. They state that literacy for boys is a social practice which shapes their identities and helps them to develop and maintain relationships with peers. Boys tend to interact socially over non-fictional texts, magazines, newspapers, Internet sites, and videogames. They choose reading material to help inform their interests and those of their peer group. Their common choices of books are "how to", informational, and fantasy.

Boys are adapting and reshaping or "morphing" the traditional academic literacy skills they are learning at school to apply to new literacies that appeal to them: war, sports, computers, video games, and chat rooms. Blair and Sanford (2004) outline five reasons boys read and write: personal interest, action, success, fun, and purpose.

Lewis (1999) states that the boys tend to choose by genre and, if considering fiction, look for action with some violence. According to Lewis, boys are learning about themselves in relation to authority, power and aggression. She feels that "independent reading" and "free choice" are activities which students are learning social identities from the surrounding culture.

3.0 Research Methodology

Sixty form one male students were surveyed and a subset of those students was interviewed to investigate whether or not differences existed between avid and reluctant readers. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used for this study as the questionnaire revealed statistical data while the individual interviews investigated the students' perspective on reading.

Data collected for research question one revealed the type of reading materials preferred by form one male students to be read. It further investigates why the students chose those reading materials, their reading attitudes and motivation.

Data collected for research question two revealed the frequency of reading and length of time spent on reading in relation towards other activities. Date collected for research question three revealed the people whom influence form one male students to read, how the people modeled the reading behavior and how they promoted the reading habit.

4.0 Findings

4.1 Introduction

The questionnaire data is compared with the data from the interview before a conclusion is made to see any relations or not. The findings are organized into three which are factors that contribute to the lack of interest in reading, the reading materials that are often read and the problems faced in cultivating their reading habit.

4.2 Data gathered

	Questionnaire Data	Interview Data
Factors that contribute to the lack of interest in reading	Reasons for reading various reading materials: Reference/Exercise Books Succeed in examinations (61.7%) Forced to read by parents (28.3%) General Knowledge Books To gain knowledge (41.7%) For Entertainment (31.7%) Novel/Story Books For entertainment (55.0%) To fill up leisure time (28.3%) Newspapers To gain knowledge (36.7%) To fill up leisure time and entertainment (36.6%) Magazines To fill up leisure time and entertainment (66.6%) Comics To fill up leisure time (50%) For entertainment (50%) Websites For entertainment (36.7%) To gain knowledge (31.7%)	Number of reading materials available at home: Avid Readers (3/5) More than 100 Reluctant Readers (3/5) Less than 100 Types of reading materials available at home: Avid Readers Newspapers, Reference books, Textbooks, Exercise books, Novels and Story books. Reluctant Readers Magazine, Newspapers, Textbooks and Exercise books.

Reading materials that are often read	Amount of time spent by reading materials:	Where the materials obtained:
	Reference/Exercise Books Less than 1 hour (46.7%) 1 – 3 hours (36.6%) General knowledge Books 1 – 3 hours (46.7%) Less than 1 hour (28.3%) Novel/Story Books 1 – 3 hours (46.7%) Less than 1 hour (28.3%) Newspapers 1 – 3 hours (50%) Less than 1 hour (26.7%) Magazines 1 – 3 hours (53.3%) Less than 1 hour (30%) Comics Above 4 hours (41.7%) 2 – 3 hours (25%) Websites Above 4 hours (41.7%) 2 – 3 hours (25%)	Reference/Exercise Books Bought by parents (83.3%) Bought (8.3 %) General knowledge Books Bought by parents (75%) Bought (13.3%) Novel/Story Books Bought by parents (66.7%) Borrowed from friends (16.7%) Newspapers Bought by parents (80%) Bought (16.7%) Magazines Borrowed from friends (66.7%) Bought (16.7%) Comics Bought (75.0%) Borrowed from friends (16.7%) Websites Access from home (35%) Access from outside of home (65%)
Problems faced in cultivating the reading habit	People that promote the reading habit: Mother (51.7%) Brother/Sister (13.3%) People that give advice on materials to be read: Friends and own interest (50%) Mother (41.7%) Reading materials read by person who gives advice in selecting materials: Books (60%) Websites (25%)	Frequency of visit to the school library: Once (38.3%) Never (36.7%) Reasons for going to the school library: To read magazines and newspapers (41.7%) To rest/relax (35.0%) When the school library is visited: During recess (63.3%) Do not go (16.7%)

4.3 Summary of the findings

It can be concluded that most of the respondents are dormant readers. Dormant readers were those who like to read and consider themselves as readers but did not take time to read regularly or update their knowledge. They did not have a negative attitude to reading but gave priority to other activities.

5.0 Discussion and conclusion

5.1 Reading frequency

5.1.1 Reading at school

A majority of the respondents go to the school library to rest/relax (35%) and read magazines (25%). Most of the respondents borrowed no books from the school library. This is because they believed that their library did not have enough reading materials. This indicates that most of the respondents do not do read much at school.

5.1.2 Reading at home

First and foremost are reference/exercise books. A majority of the respondents (48.7%) read less than one hour, followed by an equal number (18.3%) each read for one hour or two to three hours. Secondly are general knowledge books. A majority of the respondents (28.3%) read for less than one hour, followed by one hour (26.7%) and two to three hours (20%). Thirdly are novel/story books. A majority of the respondents (28.3%) read less than one hour, followed by one hour (26.7%), and two to three hours (20%).Next are magazines. A majority of the respondents (30%) each read either for less than one hour or up till one hour, followed by two to three hours (23.3%).After that are newspapers. A majority of the respondents (26.7%) read less than one hour, followed by an equal number (25%) each for one hour or two to three hours. Besides all these are comics. A majority of the respondents (41.7%) read above four hours, followed by two to three hours (25%). Finally are websites. A majority of the respondents (41.7%) read for more than four hours, followed by two to three hours (25%).

5.2 People who influence the reading habit

5.2.1 Friends

Fifteen respondents (25%) state that their friends gave advice on reading materials to be read. Only two respondents (3.3%) state that their friends promoted the reading habit to them. This indicates that friends play a significant role in promoting reading materials to be read but not the reading habit itself.

5.2.2 Family members

Mothers play a significant role in promoting the reading habit as 31 respondents (51.7%) state that their mother as the most prominent member of their family who promotes the reading habit. In addition to this, 25 respondents (41.7%) also state that their mothers recommended reading materials to be read. This indicates that mothers play a significant role in promoting both the reading habit and reading materials to be read.

5.3 Problems in promoting the reading habit

5.3.1 Length of time reading

A majority of the respondents read less than an hour for the following reading materials; reference/exercise books, general knowledge books, novels/story books and newspapers. It is interesting to note that most respondents read above four hours for comics and websites. This indicates that the respondents spent less time reading materials that are filled with a lot of information and prefer to read reading materials that contain entertainment and concise information.

5.3.2 Less encouragement to read

Only mothers play an active role in promoting the both the reading habit and selection of reading materials to be read by the respondents. The books that are recommended by their mother may not suite their interests. This will directly discourage the interest in reading as they may have to read materials that they do not like.

5.4. Implications of the study

This research has come up with several suggestions to increase the reading habit among students.

5.4.1 Give more time to use the school library

Most of the students use the school library during recess. Recess is usually a short period of time in schools and much cannot be done during recess. The school should allocate a special time period for the use of the school library for each class in the school by their respective forms. The school library should lengthen its operation hours especially in the afternoon session and also on weekends. This will allow students to have the freedom to use the school library according to their own free tine.

5.4.2 Encourage students to read

Encouragement to read is important for all students in order to increase the interest of students towards reading. Encouragement to read should come from multiple sources such as from the home, school and also community. Both parents should play a huge role in promoting the reading habit to their children. They should spend time reading to and reading with their children. Besides this, they should be role models in reading; show interest in reading and read a lot themselves. In addition to this, parents should also provide adequate reading materials at home and provide a quiet and suitable reading place and to read for their children. Teachers that teach language subjects should recommend suitable reading materials for their students to read based on the subject that they are teaching. They should recommend reading materials that are appropriate to their students' language proficiency, psychosocial development and interests.

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INVESTIGATING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INDIRECT COMMUNICATION STRATEGY AMONG PRACTICAL TRAINING STUDENTS IN THE WORKPLACE CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

In the working environment, communication is one of the most important aspects in transferring information between employees and superiors and also between the employees themselves. The qualitative study was conducted in order to identify the reasons why the practical training students implement indirect communication as one of the communication strategies in the workplace. The research can further clarify the correct time and occasion concerning the use indirectness in daily communication. The methods used were analysing audio recordings of conversation that occurred in a corporate working environment. The recordings were then orthographically transcribed in order to identify the elements of indirectness in the speeches based on the thematic analysis approach. The data collected revealed that indirectness has taken place between superiors and subordinates and also among the subordinates when they were making request, responding to request, rejecting request, giving orders, complaining and making jokes. Indirectness also occurred in accordance to the reasons of saving owns face, offering help, avoiding conflict, delivering short message, asking about something to a stranger, avoiding from harming

faces, voicing out disappointment, reducing the risk of offence and avoiding harm in relationship. Therefore, the occurrence of indirectness is a good method to maintain relationship and avoid conflict especially in the professional working context.

1.0 Introduction

In any working environment, communication is a vital aspect in maintaining harmony and peace among co-workers. In an office, we will have to deal with all sorts of people who are older and younger, or people with lots of experience, people who are new at work and many other attributes. Other than that, we also have to consider our method of communication with the co-workers, the supervisees and even with the superiors. In order for an organization to get things done and run their business, communication is one of the most significant aspects that need to be highlighted (Nor Azni Abdullah, 2010). According to Kierkegaard (as cited in Turnbull, 2009) indirect communication, strategy can be described as a 'vehicle' to carry ambiguous information among the speakers involved. Turnbull (2009) also mentioned that indirect communication is another sphere of ambiguity in delivering messages which involves the use of language and level the of the interlocutors' literacy. Such assumption pointed out by Turnbull (2009) correlates with the importance of speakers' and receivers' understanding in regards to the representation of the ambiguous message. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (seventh edition) also defines the term indirect as avoiding from saying something in a clear and obvious way.

The same situation of excessive use of indirectness can also occur in the workplace environment. Technically, the over-use of indirectness can also reduce the company's profit. Superiors tend to disguise the message in order to save the employee's face. According to Yule (1996), the term "face" can be defined as the public self-image of a person. According to Fung (2009), power distance plays a major role in determining the degree of indirectness use by a worker. In a corporate setting, especially in a meeting, the functions of indirectness are determined by the goal of the meeting and business relationships between the participants of the meeting (Fung, 2009). Participants in a meeting that have less power in the hierarchy tend to apply indirect communication in order to express their disagreement, thoughts or even complains. Nevertheless, in certain serious events such as negotiation that involve monetary issues, the superiors tend to use indirectness in order to get more support in his views. In communication, using indirect strategy might leave room for the imagination to grow. Brenner (2006) mentioned that when people receive incomplete information, they tend to make up things that they do not know. An incorrect message can cause delay to the project, or it can increase costs through reworking, confusion, unnecessary

work, conflict and delay. This is because the incomplete message might be ignored or misinterpreted by the employees.

This study has two main objectives:

- To identify when practical students use the indirectness strategy in conversations among themselves and also with their superiors.
- To determine what are the themes that can be derived from the conversations among the practical students and also with their superiors.

This study has two main research questions:

- When do the practical students use the indirectness strategy in conversations among themselves and with their superiors?
- What are the themes that can be derived from the conversations among the practical students and with their superiors?

2.0 Materials and Method

The researcher has decided to utilize the phenomenological approach in the process of analysing the data. Merriam (1998) mentioned that phenomenology is a qualitative research, which concentrates more on the essence or the basic structure of the phenomenon. Therefore, the data analysed were derived from the informants and the investigator's first-hand experience (Merriam, 1998). The study was conducted in an advertisement company that offered internship for students who are seeking for industrial experience in the professional corporate setting. The company is located in Damansara Perdana, Petaling Jaya, Selangor. The recording process were conducted based on the availability of the practical training students. Such step was taken due to the company's policy that the staff regardless of permanent or internship posts would be asked to go out and meet their clients for marketing purposes. Before the recording process can be conducted, the researcher had to clarify the purpose of the research with the organization and informants involve in order to avoid any ethical issues from ascending.

2.1 Researcher as the Instrument

According to Merriam (1998), the second characteristic of a qualitative research is the primary instrument for the research is the researcher. This is because the researcher will be moderating and facilitating the data collection process throughout the study.

2.1.1 Data Gathering and Analysis

Recordings of several conversations were done throughout the research process. These conversations were recorded during lunch hour, working hour and at the end of the working hour. Such casual talks involved topics both related and unrelated to work. Eight informants were involved in the audio recording procedure. The conversations between the practical students were recorded using the researcher's laptop recording feature and a MP3 recording device. The recordings were then orthographically transcribed and analyse using the thematic analysis approach. Thematic analysis is a qualitative approach that can help the researcher to identify sets of themes within any sets of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher has incorporated the six approaches listed by Braun and Clarke (2006) which are: 1) Becoming familiar with the data 2) Generating initial codes 3) Searching for themes 4) Reviewing themes 5) Defining and refining themes 6) Producing the report.

3.0 Data analysis

3.1 Functional categories

In order to analyse the data, a total of six patterns or functional categories were taken into consideration namely making a request, giving order, responding to request, complaining, rejecting a request and making jokes. These patterns were analysed based on the orthographic transcription from the recorded conversations. These patterns help the researcher to identify when the practical students use the indirectness strategy in conversations among themselves and with their superiors.

Table 1: Functional categories

FUNCTIONAL CATEGORIES	RECORDED CONVERSATIONS
Making a request	Conversation 1, conversation 2, conversation 3, conversation 6
Giving order	Conversation 6
Responding to request	Conversation 1, conversation 2, conversation 4, conversation 6
Complaining	Conversation 5, conversation 6
Rejecting a request	Conversation 2

3.1.1 Development of themes

Indirectness also occurred in accordance to the reasons of saving owns face, offering help, avoiding conflict, delivering short message, asking about something to a stranger, avoiding from harming faces, voicing out disappointment and avoiding harm in relationship.

Table 2: Development of themes

RECORDED CONVERSATIONS	THEMES
Conversation 1	Saving owns face, offering help
Conversation 2	Avoiding conflict
Conversation 3	Asking about something to a stranger
Conversation 4	Delivering short message
Conversation 5	Voicing out disappointment, avoiding from harming faces
Conversation 6	Avoiding harm in relationship

In making a request, an interlocutor might want to prevent himself from losing his face in front of his colleague. Indirect communication strategy is an option that can really help to deliver the request without harassing anybody's feeling. Indirectness essentially will involve politeness strategies. According to Tsuda (1993), politeness strategies are implemented in order to save other people's faces. Face is clearly defined as individuals' self-esteem. Politeness strategies uses are determine by three factors that are power distance, social distance and rank of impositions. In making a request, especially to a superior, subordinates must try to distance themselves and try to protect both faces. The rank of imposition also determine the level of indirectness apply in such conversations. According to Fung L (2009), higher ranking participants tend to use indirect strategy when the discussion involve critical moments such as negotiation in business and also issues relating to the use of money. Higher-ranking participants will also apply indirectness in order to gain support from other participants. Indirectness can make the person looks approachable and help to gain trust from the others. Other than that, in responding to a request, superiors also try to avoid conflict by rejecting the request (if rejected) in a more acceptable manner. Therefore, superiors applied indirect communication strategy to avoid harm in both faces and to retain respect from the subordinates. Although both of the speakers might have a huge gap of social distance, there is still

respect in both ways' speeches. This can help to avoid conflict and miscommunication from both parties. According to Brenner (2006), "Indirect communications are veiled, ambiguous, and excessively diplomatic." In certain situations, a worker who have to deal with his customer through phone calls must use proper statements to avoid from losing the customer's interest in listening to the worker's explanation, especially in promoting the company's product or services. The worker must also know how avoid from confrontation that can cause harm and conflict to his face and the customer's face as well. With proper words and tones, it is possibly for a worker to attract more customers or clients to be loyal to his company's product or services. Implementing indirectness in our communication can contribute towards the increasing of costs (Brenner, 2006). Sometimes, the intended message is not successfully delivered to the exact target. In this case, the message may be ignored because it does not clearly mention the intended receiver. If this happens, the speaker may increase costs through reworking, taking a longer time, causing delays and conflicts within the organization (Brenner, 2006). In delivering complain, especially when you are a worker and the message was delivered to your colleagues, you must use a more indirect approach to avoid harm and conflict in your relationship. When we want to convey a statement, especially between critics and superiors, we need to be indirect to avoid further harm to the relationships. Indirect communication strategy can provide a suitable "cover" for our actual statement (Brenner, 2006). Malaysian workers do not like to be ordered by a person with the same social status, as he is (another worker). Indirect approach can help to solve this problem and avoid conflict from happening. The second use of indirectness is to mitigate the risk of offence (Brenner, 2006). When an interlocutor intend to give out orders or ask something from a person with the same social status as he is, he will try to avoid losing his colleague's face in front of the others. In a short period of relationship, both parties tend to be indirect in order to avoid harm to the new relationship that was established in only 1 month. In that case, to avoid conflict, an interlocutor also can reject a request or say "no" in an indirect manner that can be accepted by his colleague

4.0 Conclusion

This study has shown that indirectness occur between superiors and subordinates and between the subordinates when they are making a request, responding to request, rejecting a request, giving orders and complaining. Indirectness also occurred in accordance to the reasons of saving owns face, offering help, avoiding conflict, delivering short message, asking about something to a stranger, avoiding from harming faces, voicing out disappointment and avoiding harm in relationship. The results of the study indicated that social distance, power distance and rank of imposition determine the degree of indirectness in the subordinate's speech with superior and among themselves.

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MALAYSIAN TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THE IMPACT OF THE CHOICE OF TOPIC ON ESL LEARNERS' MOTIVATION IN WRITING

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Abstract

A number of researches have investigated whether or not the choice of topic for writing will impact ESL learners' motivation to write. Yet, most of these studies were conducted in the environment where English is used as first language. Though several studies were conducted in a second language environment, the socio-cultural backgrounds of the environment do not reflect the situation in Malaysian education system. This study thus investigates Malaysian teachers' points of view regarding the impact of the choice of topic on ESL learners' motivations in writing. Specifically, this research aims to identify whether the suggested motivating factors to be considered in selecting topics for writing by previous researches are applicable in Malaysian context as well as to identify other factors Malaysian teachers believe should be considered when selecting topics for writing in order to increase learners' motivation to write. A number of school English teachers were interviewed regarding the relation between the choice of topics and learners' motivation in writing. A group of pupils were interviewed to find what factors affect their motivation to write. The findings suggest that learners' socio-cultural background, prior knowledge and audience are important determiners of their motivation in writing, while learners' experiences and teachers' rewards are other factors that matter in the Malaysian context.

Keywords: writing; motivation; socio-cultural background; prior knowledge; audience

1.0 The problem

1.1 Introduction

Learners' success in academic is very much related to their motivation to learn. According to Dev (1997), learners' high motivation can encourage them to achieve academic success. This is supported by Majnemer (2011) who mentions that motivation is an important factor that can influence children's learning. As Majnemer (2011) continues, motivation can encourage individuals to master skills that are at least moderately challenging to them. Therefore, motivation can be seen as an important force that drives academic achievement among learners. According to Dornyei (2001), motivation is important in language learning as it lowers learners' anxiety and creates positive attitudes towards language learning. However, this is not the case in the Malaysia context as the education system in Malaysia is extremely examination oriented (Ong, 2010), whereby the learning of English is highly motivated by extrinsic desires for school achievements as well as admission into boarding schools and universities.

This research focuses on the issue faced by Malaysian ESL teachers regarding young learners' lack of motivation in learning English specifically in writing. As in many second language (L2) settings, most young learners have poor self-confidence in writing which may be attributed to low exposure of English as well as their perceived lack of purpose for writing (Daly and Sharko, 2010). It may be the result of the

tasks assigned to them being far removed from their prior knowledge, socio-cultural background and interest. This is supported by Tran (2007) who found that the norms of L2 countries such as Malaysia's education system is quite traditional, teacher-authority, and the lessons are mainly based from text books.

The textbook is usually developed by teachers and other academicians. However, the question is how far they incorporate the factor of socio-cultural background, prior knowledge and learners' interest in developing writing activities in the textbooks. Hence, this study seeks to investigate the relationship of the choice of topics for writing with learners' motivation to write.

This research is aimed at exploring Malaysian English language teachers' point of view whether the choice of topic for writing will have an impact on learner's motivation as well as to see if the motivating factors suggested by Lo & Hyland (2007) and Hidi & McLaren (1991) such as prior knowledge, socio-cultural background and audience are applicable in the local environment or not. This is important as writing is regarded as an important skill in language learning. Walsh (2010) supports this by saying that, apart from speaking, writing is a skill students need to master as it is used extensively in many aspects of life. As Walsh (2010) continues, the ability to write well will help individuals to communicate better as it is a very basic function in society. Thus, understanding what kind of topics can motivate learners to write is crucial to encourage them to better master the writing skill and function well in society.

This study investigated the following research questions:

1. What are Malaysian teachers' points of view regarding the impact of writing topics on ESL learners' motivations in writing?
2. What are the factors teachers believe should be taken into consideration when selecting a topic for writing activity?

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Motivation and Language Learning

Motivation to learn an L2 can be defined as the degree to which the individual attempts to learn the language because the desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in the effort (Gardner, 1985). However, according to Gardner (1985), motivation in learning L2 is crucial as compared to learning a first language because learning an L2 is commonly regarded as not absolutely necessary. In the same way, Gardner (2006) maintains that as language is an integral part of growing up, it has to take the factor of motivation into account to enable one to communicate and participate in an environment. By relating a successful L2 learning with learners' motivation to learn, Gardner (1985) believes that motivation can play an important role in L2 learning.

According to Tran (2007), learners' motivation does affect their motivation to write. She maintains that most of the problems faced by L2 teachers are related to learners' lack of interest in writing. Accordingly, Dornyei (2001) links motivation and writing by stating that learners' motivation to write can be enhanced by making the lesson relevant to their socio-cultural context as well as providing social interaction and self-expression. According to Hidi and McLaren (1991), learners' motivation to write will increase if they are given topics of their interest provided that they are familiar with them. Hidi and McLaren (1991) added that knowledge factor also plays a major role in the quality of the writing that learners produce. Thus, it can be understood that topics of interest increase learners' motivation in writing but it is the knowledge behind it that determines their quality of writing. Therefore, as Hidi and McLaren (1991) maintain, topic of interest as well as learners' knowledge are important determiners of their motivation in writing. However, as this study was conducted in an English speaking country, the results might not necessarily reflect the L2 situation of Malaysia as English is being used as an L2 instead of L1.

Other research on L2 motivation in writing which can be compared to the situation in Malaysia is the study by Lo and Hyland (2007) which was conducted in Hong Kong. This study highlights the importance of the topics chosen for writing by comparing the impact of the new topics for writing tested to the one from the curriculum. They suggest the topic chosen for writing activity must relate to learners' prior knowledge, their socio-cultural background as well as to include the factor of the audience. Although this study was conducted in an L2 environment in Hong Kong, it took into account the local conditions, socio-cultural contexts and the background of the place where the study was conducted which is obviously different from the situation of L2 in Malaysia.

In response to these situations, this research is intended to fill in these gaps by interviewing Malaysian school teachers in order to investigate the factor of topic in increasing primary learners' motivation in writing by considering the factor of learners' socio-cultural background, prior knowledge and audience as well as other factors they consider in selecting topics for writing.

3.0 Research Methodology

The sample of this study consists of two English teachers and 4 ESL learners from an upper Malaysian primary classroom aged ten to twelve years old. This qualitative study was divided into four stages which are the pre-observation one-on-one interviews with two English teachers (T1 and T2), the teacher-researcher's observations of the teachers' writing lessons and followed by an interview session with four students (two from each teacher's lesson (S1, S2 and S3, S4)) as well as a post-observation interview with the same English teachers. The teachers' opinion will be considered in selecting the students to be interviewed. The teachers' pre-observation interview session aims to explore what they think about the effect of writing topics toward students' motivation to write, what kinds of topics they believe could enhance students' motivation and what are other criteria they take into account in selecting topics for writing activities for the students other than suggested by the literature (socio-cultural, prior knowledge, audience). Meanwhile, the post-observation interview is to know what the teachers think about the lessons they conducted and whether or not it could motivate the learners and how. The students' interview sessions are to investigate their feelings and perceptions regarding the teacher's assistance and the topic of writing applied. The collected data were transcribed and analysed for emergent themes and patterns.

4.0 Findings

4.1 Introduction

The interview data is compared with the data of the observation before a conclusion is made to see whether they synchronize or not. The findings are divided into two, which are T1 (with S1 and S2) and T2 with (S3 and S4).

4.2 Data gathered

	Interview data	Observation
Teacher 1	- Agree the choice of topic will impact learners' motivation to write. - Agree the three factors (prior knowledge/socio-cultural background/audience) are important factors to consider when selecting topic for writing. - Other factor – choosing topic based on what the students have experience (sports day/festivals)	The topic chose considered pupils' prior knowledge and socio cultural background as well as their experience.

Student 1	• Likes to write about something she used to do at home as well as about her family (the factor of prior knowledge and socio-cultural background are considered).	She finds the activity was easy and manages to finish it in time.
Student 2	• Likes to write about something about himself or his family (the factor of socio-cultural background and prior knowledge are considered).	He likes the writing activity and manages to finish in time.
Teacher 2	• Agree the choice of topic will impact learners' motivation to write. • Agree the three factors (prior knowledge/socio-cultural background/audience) are important factors to consider when selecting topic for writing. • Other factor – choosing writing activity that suits the learners' need for examination purposes.	The topic chose considered the factor of audience though it was based from the textbook.
Student 3	• Likes to write to people although he would prefer reading rather than writing. (The factor of audience can be considered. However, the learner might interest more on using the computer).	Though student 3 is not keen on writing, he manages to finish the writing activity.
Student 4	• Likes to write to people and tell them about herself (the factor of audience is considered).	She manages to finish her writing as well.

4.2 Summary of the findings

I found that both teachers agree that the choice of topic does impact on pupils' motivation to write. This is observed from T1 lesson which incorporated the factor pupils' prior knowledge and socio-cultural background in the lesson. In the same way, it is also observed in T2 lesson which incorporated the factor of audience in the writing activity. Thus all the three factors suggested to be infused in selecting writing topics can be seen from both writing lessons.

Accordingly, the four pupils think that they like to write when it comes to writing about themselves, their family as well as writing to somebody. Therefore, it can be said that the factors of prior knowledge, socio-cultural background and audience are the important determiners in selecting writing topics to increase pupils' motivation to write.

4.3 Other findings

Although the three factors mentioned above are important, both teachers also commonly agree that before having the pupils to write, their interest in writing must be enhanced. In this case, T1 believes, by considering what the pupils have experienced in selecting topics for writing will increase their motivation to write as they would have content to write. In the same way, T2 believes, by incorporating ICT in writing will get the pupils to write although if they do not really have the interest in writing. Additionally, T2 also mentioned about giving rewards to the pupils to attract them to write.

5.0 Discussion and conclusion

The findings proved that pupils' socio-cultural background is interrelated with their motivation to write. Myles (2002) notes that social factors affect language learning and it is the reason why there are differences in pupils' rate in L2 learning. This is indeed true as S1 and S2 agreed that the infusion of their socio-cultural background in the writing is also one of the reasons why they were interested to write. Similarly, McInerney & Van Itten (2005) suggests sociocultural factors shape the way pupils' think and how they respond. In relation to this, Bransford (2000) states that if the pupils were thrown out of their socio-cultural context, they would not be able to perform well. As Dornyei (1994) suggests, this includes the learners' daily lives or anything that happen around their family or society. Interestingly, S1 and S2 agreed that they loved the activity as they can write about themselves and their family which they were familiar with. This provides evidence that socio-cultural contexts affect pupils' interest in writing.

As McInerney & Van Itten (2005) continue, pupils' prior knowledge is always derived from their socio-cultural background. This is observed from T1 lesson where as it is related to the pupils socio-cultural context, pupils were writing about something they know; their family activities in the weekend. From the interview, both S1 and S2 mentioned that they liked the activity as they can relate to what they used to do at home during weekend. This is true as DeGroff (1987) affirmed, high knowledge would result a greater proportions of information for writing. Therefore, this is the reason why the activity appealed to the pupils and they managed to finish it in the time given. Queensland Studies Authority (2009) supports that pupils' writing can be enhanced when they see the topic as worthwhile and relevant to their lives. This explains why S1 and S2 mentioned the writing activity was easy and both of them managed to finish it in time.

T2's lesson revealed that the factor of audience has a deep impact on pupils' interest to write. From the interview, both S3 and S4 agreed that they like to write to somebody as they can tell about themselves. Therefore, it is interesting to note that my finding differs from Myles (2002) who states that, many students would prefer conversation instead of writing. For example, S3 who usually does not like writing liked this writing activity as he can write to other people apart from writing using computer. Hence, it can be concluded from the finding that, if the writing activity infuse conversation or interaction, pupils will find it interesting. Chesky & Hiebert (1987) said, student who had a strong sense of audience wrote better than those not. Hence supported by the study, the factor of audience is indeed a crucial factor that determines pupils' motivation to write.

Apart from the three aspects discussed above, it is suggested that pupils' interest need to be aroused before they do the writing. This is supported by Scrivener (2011) who said that it is vital for teachers to get students interested with a lesson by showing pictures or discuss some key issues. Indeed, this is in line with T1's statement that a teacher might arouse pupils' interest by talking about what they have experienced such as the sports day or school carnivals.

Accordingly, Davis (1999) recommends the used of praise and rewards to arouse L2 learners to learn whenever they behave, volunteer or manage to answer questions correctly. In fact, T2 suggests giving pupils token of appreciation to attract them to write. Though the three aspects discussed above are crucial in determining pupils' motivation in writing, English language teachers of the Malaysian context believe making them interested in writing is also important to motivate them to write.

The findings suggest that this research has managed to provide new insights that apart from the three factors investigated, pupils' interest in writing should at first be encouraged to make them interested in writing. It is hoped that this research benefits English language teachers in general and me particularly by being aware on the importance of selecting the right topic for writing activity to motivate primary school learners to write.

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