

ESL UNDERGRADUATES' PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHER SELF-DISCLOSURE IN A MALAYSIAN WRITING CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

Past studies have indicated that teachers' self-disclosure has a direct influence on students' learning. It has impacted students' motivation, participation, interest, affect for teacher and course, solidarity, affinity seeking behaviours and out-of-classroom communication. However, little is understood about how this phenomenon affects teaching and learning across different cultural contexts and ESL environments. This study attempted to investigate ESL teachers' self-disclosures in a Malaysian writing classroom. Fifty second-year undergraduates enrolled in an academic writing course and the respective teacher were interviewed using semi-structured interview protocols. The thematic analysis indicated that seven themes, learning strategy, writing strategies, content generating strategies, affective learning, teacher-student communication, classroom climate and appropriateness were important factors that influenced teachers' self-disclosures in the ESL writing classroom. The results from this study demonstrate that ESL students' perceptions towards teachers' self-disclosure have important implications for affective, instructional and learning strategies. This study concludes that teachers' self-disclosure has potential use as a pedagogical tool that could enhance the teaching and learning of ESL writing.

Keywords: Content Generating Strategy, Communication, Classroom Climate, Instructional Strategy, L2 Writing, Teacher Self-Disclosure

INTRODUCTION

English Language is the medium of instruction in most universities in Malaysia and academic writing courses are offered to undergraduates to produce writing that fulfills the required writing conventions in their respective fields. However, Ramanathan and Atkinson (1999) point out that joining a discourse community possessed both linguistic and cultural problems. In Malaysia, English as a Second Language (ESL) writing is often perceived as difficult and problematic, contributing to poor writing performance among Malaysian undergraduates (Nooreiny & Mazlin, 2013). Research has shown that the writing performance of Malaysian ESL undergraduates are affected by lack of writing readiness among undergraduates (Fareed et al., 2016; Yah Awang Nik et al., 2010), inability to gauge university expectations (Giridharan, 2012), generating ideas (Hiew, 2012; Nor et al., 2019), limited organizational and vocabulary skills (Ashrafzaedah & Nimehchisalem, 2015; Misbah et al., 2017), writing anxiety (David et al., 2018) and low grammatical accuracy (Kho-Yar & Tan, 2015). From a survey conducted on

Malaysian public university students, David et al. (2015), found that respondents believed writing as the most difficult task to master due to low self-efficacy and weak syntax. Another study was conducted by Nooreiny and Munusamy (2015) to gauge learning experiences and difficulties in acquiring English as a second language in a Malaysian public university. Undergraduates in this study pointed out their learning environment, quality of education, role of educators and teaching approaches as the main factors affecting their learning of English as a second language. These challenges indicate that there is a need to find new ways to improve the pedagogical practices and strategies of ESL instructors to improve the writing performance of ESL students. This is further emphasised by Rohaida et al. (2020) that innovative instructional strategies are central to coping with the ever changing landscape of global educational needs.

Classroom: Teacher-centered Communication

Sorenson (1989) defined teacher's self-disclosure as "teacher statements made in the classroom about oneself that reveals information that would otherwise be inaccessible to students" (Sorenson, 1989, p, 260). When students' perceived their teacher's self-disclosures as positive, it improved their overall teaching and learning climate and classroom outcomes such as teacher-student solidarity (Wheless, 1978), motivation (Strickland, 2016; Žardeckaitė- & Paluckaitė, 2013), verbal and non-verbal immediacy (Mazer et al., 2014), teacher narratives and humor (Karaduz, 2010), class attendance, situational interest and liking for course content (Sanders, 2014; Webb, 2014), classroom participation and cognitive learning (Frisby & Martin, 2010; Goldstein & Bennis, 1994), course content clarity (Cayanus, 2004), out of classroom communication (Aniljeet et al., 2018; Knapp, 2008), relevance and credibility (Gray et al., 2011), motives to communicate (Cayanus & Martin, 2008) and affect for teacher (Mazer et al., 2007).

Mottet et al. (2006) explained that in order to understand teaching and learning as a communication process, it is vital to consider communication patterns, characteristics and the contexts in which it occurs. Instructional communication researches have demonstrated that teachers' socio-communicative traits have in fact contributed positively towards building a constructive classroom atmosphere (Kaufmann, 2011), improving acquisition process and examination performance (Babonea, 2012) and boosting students' morale and persistence (Da Luz, 2015). According to Gehlbach et al. (2012), a two-way communication process is vital for building a positive classroom climate as the teacher-student relationship takes place in the classroom, where teachers are important agents who aid learning. By establishing communication on this interpersonal continuum, students and teachers are able to integrate their social worlds, by bringing their own experiences, emotions and attitudes into the classroom discourse. Furthermore, studies on teachers' self-disclosures in the ESL classroom have found a positive relationship between teacher self-disclosure and pre-service teachers' attitudes towards self-disclosure (Zhang et al., 2008), speaking skills (Pishghadam & Torgabeh, 2009), learner autonomy and task completion (Eckhart, 2011; Serag, 2011), content relevance (Schrodt, 2013), attitude towards language learning (Farani & Fatemi, 2014), appropriateness of teacher's self-disclosures (Paluckaite & Zardekaite, 2016; Rahimi & Bigdeli, 2015) and writing performance (Pakirathan & Kepol, 2018). Studies pertaining to teachers' self-disclosure as an instructional tool in the ESL classroom, especially ESL writing, however, have been left out. Hence, this study aims to fill the research gap by exploring teachers' self-disclosure in a Malaysian ESL writing classroom and was guided by the following research questions:

- RQ1: Do teachers' self-disclosure affect ESL undergraduates' learning of academic writing?*
RQ2: What are undergraduates's responses to teacher self-disclosures?

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach was used to achieve the purpose of the study. A group of 50 second-year students enrolled in an academic writing course in a private university in Malaysia were selected through purposive sampling. First, written permission were sought from the respective faculty where the study was conducted. The tutor for the academic course was consulted and briefed. The tutor and students then signed a consent form given by the researcher. The focus group method was used to elicitate the

participants' lived experiences, attitudes, beliefs and reactions towards their teachers' disclosures. Fifteen groups, each comprising between 3-5 students were formed. Each group interview sessions lasted between 10 to 15 minutes, were audio recorded before they were transcribed and shown to the participants. Subsequently, a one-to-one interview was conducted with the tutor. The 25-minute one-to-one teacher interview was also audio-recorded and transcribed. The questions in the interview protocols were constructed based on the research questions of this study. The recorded data were then thematically analysed. The themes were inductively derived from the codes identified in the data collected. Themes induced from the teacher interview were used to support the data derived from the students focus group interviews. The software NVIVO Version 12 was used to manage the collected data. Codes FG (Focus Group) and T1 1 (Teacher 1) were used to describe the profile of the participants in this study. Two inter-raters with ELT background were roped in to ensure consistency in the identification and categorisation of teacher self-disclosure while, member checking with the teacher and students was conducted to validate the qualitative data.

FINDINGS

The analysis of the interview data resulted in seven main themes which were learning strategy, writing strategies, generating content, affective learning, teacher-student communication, classroom climate and appropriateness in understanding ESL students' perceptions towards teacher self-disclosure in the language learning context of the Malaysian ESL writing classroom. Each category is made up of at least three or four sub-themes.

Figure 1 illustrates the main themes and sub-themes identified from the interview data on the ESL students' and teacher's perceptions towards teacher self-disclosure.

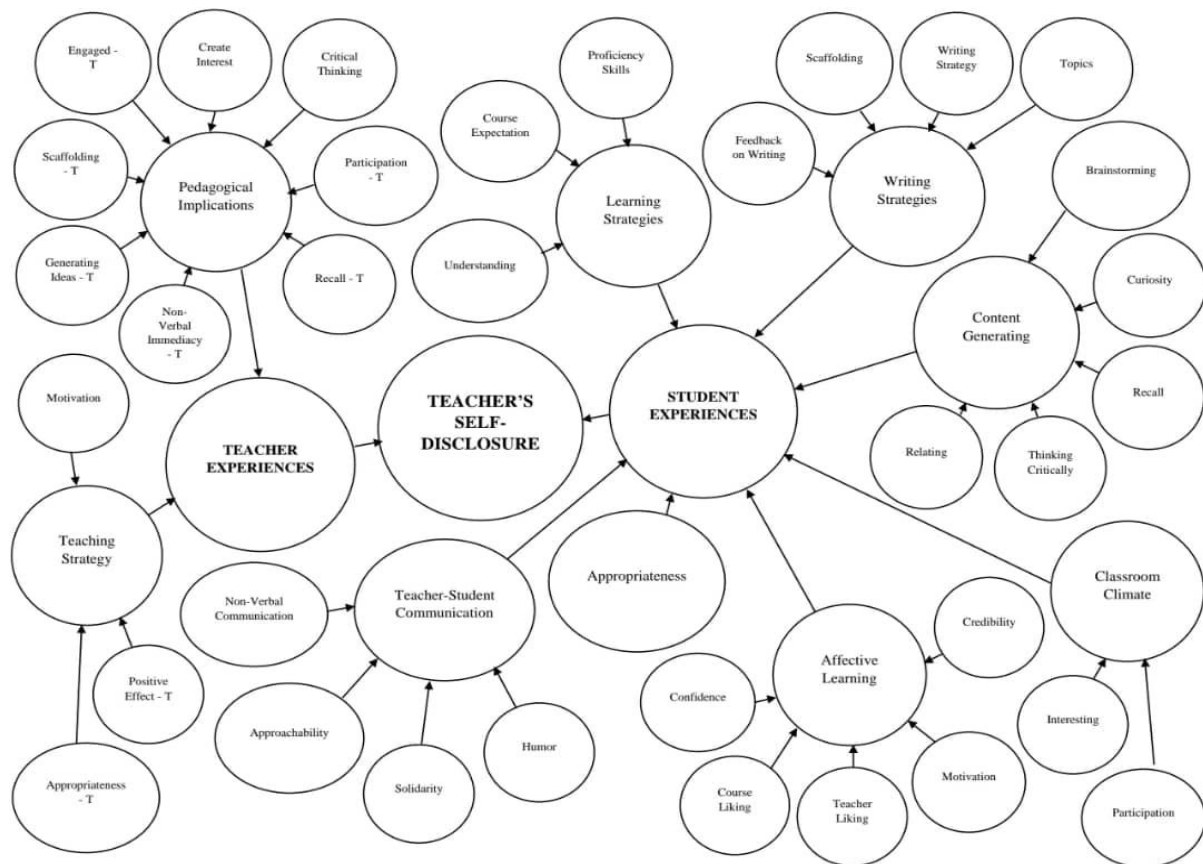


Figure 1. Categories of ESL teachers' self-disclosures in a Malaysian undergraduate writing classroom

Learning Strategy

The first theme identified was learning strategies with the sub-themes understanding, course expectations and proficiency skills.

Understanding

Students have reported that when their teacher self-disclosed in the classroom they were able to understand course content, obtain clarification about concepts and apply them in their own writing. This is evidenced by:

“...There are many things we cannot understand straight from the lecture slides, but when teacher explains (personalize) these concepts we can understand better and relate to it...” (FG 7)

Data from the teacher interview has also verified that she finds self-disclosure as a practical technique when she needed to explain complicated terms and introducing new concepts in the classroom. This is evidenced by:

“...I think it will be a very good practice, especially beneficial for students if teachers could relate their experiences rather than depending on textbooks, journal or academic materials, especially for content based subjects that use a lot of theories...” (TI 1)

Teacher self-disclosures are instrumental in helping ESL students to grasp important course concepts and use them in their own writing processes.

Course Expectation

Students generally responded that teacher self-disclosure helped them to understand specific requirements for assignments and quality of the academic work expected. This is evidenced by:

“...she would give examples of...what we need to do, let's say, assignments and ...yeah basically assignments...” (FG 13)

Teacher's self-disclosure, which allowed personalising course requirements are important to gauge university standards and for students to produce and submit work that is acceptable to the teacher.

Proficiency Skills

The student interviewees also indicated that listening to their teacher's disclosures helped them to improve their speaking and vocabulary skills. This is due to the fact that when the teacher self-disclosed, she generally moved away from the dependency of delivering from the slides, opening opportunities for a more personalised and expressive form of delivering the lectures. This is evidenced by:

“...For me, the most important thing is I can learn the way to speak, the voice, the tone...” (FG 1)

Also, because self-disclosures are used to elaborate, exemplify and explain, there is a need for teachers to employ a variety of terms, words and jargons to facilitate their presentations. Thus, this had indirectly influenced the students strategy for learning new vocabulary and using them in their writing. This is evidenced by:

"...But when she starts talking about her experience, certain key words come out, from her opinion, her examples, so, its easy to catch those words and remember them when you want to write them down next time..." (FG 13)

When the teacher is less constrained by a formal atmosphere in the classroom, communication could become more effective and put the students at ease with their teachers. This would allow them to be able to use their teacher's conversant nature as their own role-model and improve their own language skills.

Writing Strategies

The second theme induced from the students' interview data was writing strategies. The sub-themes included feedback on writing, scaffolding, writing strategy and topics.

Feedback on Writing

Data from the focus group interviews also revealed that the teacher disclosed her personal feelings, opinions and thoughts when providing feedback on students' writing. This is evidenced by:

"...We can know our mistakes through the teacher's feedback- when she talk about what she thinks about our writing..." (FG 10)

When the teacher's personalised feedbacks on students' essays are expressed through self-disclosures, it could help students to identify their mistakes and inevitably compare and evaluate their own personal writing strategies.

Scaffolding

The focus groups participants have also informed they could apply their teachers' ideas as a point of departure and reference to compare their own experiences during their own essay writing process. This is evidenced by:

"...When teacher discloses something, we can identify the topic with the issue. From there, we can come up with our own idea statements (thesis) to establish what we want to talk about in our essay...." (FG 7)

This point is validated by the teacher's response on how her disclosures affected students essay writing that her disclosures provided students an avenue to think and create their own ideas. This is evidenced by:

"...probably to get them to focus on the topic, focus on different perspectives that we could discuss and also to allow them the space to construct the ideas and give them feedback like asking them to give their personal opinions or experiences..." (TI 1)

The teacher's sharing of her personal ideas and opinions about the topic of discussion could have helped students to be exposed to not only new perspectives on their overall essay topics, but also produce and elaborate on new content ideas.

Writing Strategy

Students' further responded that the writing strategies suggested by their teacher were useful for their writing. They felt that when their teacher self-disclosed her own experiences as a writer and suggested her own strategies, it improved their own understanding and the appropriate application to fulfill writing tasks that determined the success in essay writing. These responses were found in the following excerpts

"...teacher also disclosed her opinion about our writing and explained how to write better, what kind of strategies will be helpful..." (FGS7S3)

Topics

Students informed that the teacher usually provided personal experiences and opinion when a topic or issue surfaces during the lectures or tutorial discussions. Students iterated that their teacher's self-disclosures depended on the topic and if those topics were relatable to the lecture or tutorial as evidenced by the following data:

"...When certain topics or issues, come up, she gives her own experience and opinion...for example, like when we are doing academic writing, and it is the topic or essay we are going to write..." (FG 13)

The teachers' self-disclosure topics on the other hand ranged from personal experiences, home, education, school, movies and childhood. The teacher interviewed in the study responded by saying that she employed personal and emotional experiences if she needed to elaborate on an interesting point brought up by a student. Her disclosure also depended on the availability of time. This is evidenced by the following vignette:

"...If a student brings up an interesting point, then maybe I will elaborate on that particular point from my personal and emotional experience, and I think timing is an important factor in this..." (TI 1)

Content Generating

The third theme identifying ESL students' perceptions on teacher self-disclosure was content generating. This theme was further classified into five sub-themes.

Brainstorming

The participants have also highlighted that information disclosed by their teachers were helpful in generating ideas during their pre-writing stage. This is especially significant while discussing new topics that they are unfamiliar with. This is evidenced by the following excerpt:

"...Because, part of academic writing that the lecturer emphasizes is brainstorming, so, with all these stories from her, we can actually get the feel of the topic and sometimes generate the ideas that we never had before because, most of us have not had those experiences, like studying abroad, so, we wouldn't know what its like unless until someone like the teacher tells us-like studying abroad..." (FG 5)

When asked during the teacher interview, at which point of the writing lesson she felt self-disclosures were most significant, the teacher suggested that it was during the brainstorming sessions while introducing new topics. This is evidenced by the following excerpt:

"Many of them admit that they don't do a lot of reading, so, it's good that the lecturer kind of gives them an idea on which they can explore." (TI 1)

This shows that when teachers brought their own experiences and interpretation of concepts through self-disclosures into the classroom, self-disclosures could be ideal for opening up new ideas or even extending them regarding content topics.

Relating

The participants also felt that teachers' self-disclosures were useful as it helped them to relate to new or prior knowledge to the current course content. Information that the teacher disclosed during the lessons helped them to apply this knowledge to understanding their own experiences and link it to the real world. This is evidenced by:

"...Because usually the things she would disclose are related to the course, so, it helps in a way to understand new meanings, even our old experiences in a better way..." (FG 15)

The teacher also disclosed that self-disclosures are important in helping students to personalise examples and the experiences of others. When they are able to do this, they can revert to their own experiences and write from their own perspectives. The teacher also explained that such approach/conceptualising to teaching and writing would be more interesting. This is evidenced by the following excerpt:

"...Learning is actually a different thing from applying the skills, so when teacher SD, they are actually humanizing the writing courses, and get students to relate these topics to real-life experiences. So, when students are able to see how their personal experiences, personal opinions can affect the way they write, then they'll probably be more interested in writing, or more positively inclined in the approach towards writing per se..." (TI 1)

Effective delivery of content is an important component of teaching and learning. In a writing classroom, it is vital that students are exposed to stimulating content to help them visualise and make sense of ideas, both known and unknown through teacher's self-disclosures.

Recall

Recalling information had recurred in both the students' and teacher's interviews. Students explained that it was easier to remember course content, especially ideas that the teacher related in class during lectures and tutorials. This had proven to be an effective strategy while completing assignments and essays as supported by the following excerpt:

"...For me it's a source of inspiration, I could recall back to whatever she has said. I try to implement inside the essay..." (FG 13)

The teacher responded similarly as shown below:

"...I did ask them personally whether the TSD- what I told them in class- actually helped them to write, and it actually, because they got, to think about the topic, they could recall some of the points I made about myself in relation to the topic..." (TI 1)

Teacher's self-disclosures are vital as they provide realistic representations of concepts to course content and ideas, making it memorable for students to recapture and deliver them in their own writing tasks.

Thinking Critically

The participants also responded that teachers' disclosures of personal opinions on current issues had helped them to be critical and matured while selecting ideas and making propositions before they begin to write their essays. An example of such response is:

"...The disclosures also help us to look at different topics from different angles, because there is always two truths to any topics... Maybe I will agree or disagree with her opinions..." (FG 7)

Although critical thinking emerged as one of the more salient sub-themes for generating ideas and language learning strategy of ESL writers, the teacher has remained apprehensive of this, as her response shows:

"...But maybe it would happen subconsciously- helps them to be selective of ideas than critical..." (TI 1)

Teacher's disclosures of personal opinions on current issues may help students to be critical of their existing opinions while selecting ideas and making propositions before they begin to write their essays.

Curiosity

Students reported that when their teacher self-disclosed, they brought up new terms or topics. This stimulated curiosity and motivated them to explore for more information and extend new knowledge. The following excerpt provides a representative response:

"...I think yes, because it intrigues the course mates, and it creates curiosity - about the topics shared or disclosed. Like she talk about feminism, maybe I will explore more - especially when I am reading literature..." (FG 13)

Because teacher's self-disclosure exposes students to an array of ideas that they may have not heard of, or when such ideas are intriguing enough, these self-disclosures could motivate students to further approach content subjects at a deeper level and gain new knowledge through personal research and further reading.

Affective Learning

The fourth theme induced from data pertaining to ESL students' perceptions towards teacher self-disclosure was affective learning, which generated four sub-themes.

Teacher Liking

Students generally developed inter-personal liking when the teacher self-disclosed. Teacher seems to have appeared as congenial and identifying with the teacher's stories and experiences have drawn a lot of affection and created a sense of attachment to the teacher. This is evidenced in the following excerpt:

"...We also think the teacher becomes 'nicer' because she is willing to share her life stories and what or how she feels about something..." (FG 4)

When students showed affection to the teacher, this inadvertently motivated her approach towards her students. This is evidenced by:

"...I feel more motivated to approach my students- maybe because I feel that they are accepting me as a person rather than a lecturer..." (TI 1)

Course Liking

Students have also indicated that they have become interested in the course content when the teacher included her own opinions and experiences in the lessons. This is evidenced by:

"...We were motivated to attend the lectures than before. Because it suddenly became very interesting..." (FG 4)

The teacher on the other hand said she was aware of the increase in her students' attentiveness, especially when she says something outside the lesson context. This is evidenced by:

"...I found that the moment you said something out from the slides, especially is talked about myself, or even their lives as students, I found that they paid more attention..." (TI 1)

Motivation

The data also indicated that when students perceived their teachers to be interested in them and developed a liking for their teacher and course, they were motivated to not only attend lectures but also influenced to learn. They also began to see the teacher as their role-models, and take cues from their communication styles to improve their own selves. This is evidenced by:

"...Because the teacher used proper English, so I have been motivated to become like her. I also become more expressive like the teacher. I copy her style. I am motivated to learn." (FG 8)

The teacher also expressed that students were more responsive during lectures, especially when she self-discloses. This has motivated her to improve her teaching strategies. This is evidenced by:

"...I feel that the environment is lighter, I don't feel so stressed while delivering the lectures, I feel better when I realize that the students are responding to me when I self-disclose. I feel the students are more interested and it actually motivates me when I am preparing the slides, the lectures, I have started using illustration and etc...not notes..." (TI 1)

Confidence

Students also responded that listening to their teacher's self-disclosures have given them confidence in their writing. They feel more assured in relating their own experiences and opinions. This is evidenced by:

"...I become more assured in explaining my ideas and thoughts..." (FG 2)

The teacher feels that self-disclosure provided more avenues for students to open up after observing their teachers, in turn self-disclosing their personal experiences and ideas in their own essay writing. This is evidenced by:

"...If students get used to this kind of communication style, they might be able to apply it to themselves- in putting out their own opinions or experiences in their essays..." (TI 1)

When teacher's self-disclosures were positive, students' predisposition towards the writing course and the teacher generally improved. This could be influenced by students' inter-personal liking and congeniality towards the teacher that helped them to identify with the teacher's stories and experiences.

Teacher-Student Communication

The fifth theme, with five sub-themes, is related to the dynamism of interpersonal communication coded as 'teacher-student communication'.

Solidarity

Students also indicated that solidarity feelings emerged as a an important communicative effect in the classroom. When the teacher self-disclosed her own experiences about her student days and challenges she faced, students felt that they could trust their teacher as someone who empathises with their own feelings and experiences. This is evidenced by:

“...I feel that the teachers’ opinions and personal information makes us become closer with us. Sometimes I feel the teacher is sharing because she is caring towards us. Like an effort to make sure she understands and trusts us...” (FG 9)

Humour

The students’ interviews have suggested that the teacher has also inserted the element of humour while she communicated with them and this had improved teacher-student relationship and overall class climate. This is evidenced by:

“...I think when she says these, the teaching session won’t be so dry, its humorous- at the same time, its like bonding with a friend...” (FG 15)

The teacher also felt that being humorous made the class interesting and she could bond closer with the students.

“...and also to bring me closer to the students. It was a useful strategy to connect with them...” (TI 1)

Credibility

The students said that when teachers’ personal experiences and examples are relevant to course topics, they felt that there was more credibility in the delivery of the content. Such disclosures also demonstrated the teacher’s willingness, effort and commitment in her teaching. This is evidenced by:

“...I think we match what the teacher says about herself to the quality of her teaching. The disclosures make them more credible. It influenced our attitude towards the subject....” (FG 9)

Teacher’s self-disclosures pertaining to academic qualifications, teaching experiences as well as personal learning strategies could have largely established the teacher’s authority in the subject matter and improved her rapport with the students.

Approachability

Data from the focus group also indicated that self-disclosure has established a less formal communication in the classroom between teachers and students. The students felt that they were less apprehensive when approaching their teachers and engaging in out of classroom communication. This is evidenced by:

“...I like this because, it actually makes the lecturer or teachers appear to be more approachable. The relationship isn’t that formal as in teacher being teacher only and student being student only...” (FG 15)

Non-verbal Immediacy

Students have pointed out that when teachers self-disclosed in the classroom, they have better eye-contact with them as they do not look at the lecture slides. This is evidenced by:

"...Teacher also less looking at the slides. She looks more at the students, got better eye-contact..." (FG 10)

The teacher also felt that students showed positive non-verbal immediacy with body postures, indicating they were eager and attentively engaged in the disclosure information. This is evidenced by:

"...They don't really speak much during lectures, but their facial expressions and body language were more inclined towards the presentation/ lecture/ teacher..." (TI 1)

Classroom Climate

The sixth theme that emerged from the interview data analysis was classroom climate, which produced two sub-themes.

Interesting

Students indicated that when their teacher imbued the lessons with her own disclosures, it inculcated more interest. This is evidenced by:

"...I like listening because it makes the class more interesting and helps to understand more about the topic..." (FG 13)

Participation

Students from the focus group interviews indicated that they were more willing to participate as they felt that the teachers expressiveness had opened more avenues for contributing their own ideas and opinions. This is evidenced by:

"...It increased participation, we get excited, especially when the teacher discloses information that we identify with- and make us want to contribute more in the classroom- participate more in the answering her questions..." (FG 13)

This also encouraged students to ask questions in the classroom. This is evidenced by:

"...We are much more willing to participate. Not afraid of asking questions to her, instead of just waiting for her to ask questions..." (FG 14)

On the other hand, the teacher felt that there is more engagement in the classroom. Students were more willing to participate in discussions and even give verbal and non-verbal responses.

"...Yes, I think they are more willing to participate in the classroom and tutorial discussions, they are more willing to give personal opinions- they are not reserved or shy, they even volunteer, they seem to be confident in answering- at least they don't look away or stare at me. In the lecture, some actually give verbal feedback, some give non-verbal feedback, but this has increased. They are more engaging, makes it easier to discuss in tutorials..." (TI 1)

Appropriateness

In finding out students' reactions to teachers' self-disclosures, appropriateness seems to be a recurring theme across the focus group interviews. Most of the students felt that the teacher's self-disclosures should remain within the peripheries of course and classroom context. This is evidenced by:

"...So, teachers should share, but they need to know where to stop, not go off topic,- self-praising themselves too much and move out from the topic or lecture..." (FG 12)

The teachers' comments also complemented the students' comments on appropriateness. The teacher did feel that self-disclosures must be kept to the topics discussed in class and topics of self-disclosure did not fit in well to the learning needs of every individual in the class. This is evidenced by:

"...It can be used in class/ implemented, but there must be some control, ethical boundaries and limits on what is allowed to be disclosed in the class..." (TI 1)

DISCUSSION

This study has extended the understanding of teacher self-disclosure in a Malaysian ESL writing classroom in three ways.

First, teacher self-disclosure is an important factor as a tool for learning strategies. Giridharan (2012) highlights that undergraduates were unable to gauge university expectations. This study shows that teacher self-disclosure had been helpful for students in not only understanding course concepts but also understanding teacher's expectations from their writing assignments. This is consistent with the findings of Cayanus (2004) and Cayanus and Martin (2008). The study also revealed that teacher self-disclosures helped students to improve in their speaking skills as self-disclosures were usually transmitted in less formal contexts of language use during lectures. This confirms the findings of Pishghadam and Torgabeh (2009). As undergraduates also faced problems with limited organizational and vocabulary skills, (Ashrafzaedah & Nimehchisalem, 2015; Misbah et al., 2017) the students' responses also indicated that teacher self-disclosure was useful in learning new vocabulary such as technical terms and pronunciation. The tenets of social constructivism that proposes that learning takes place through social interaction is especially valid in this context. This study is evident that teachers' socio-communicative role as mediating adults is effective and crucial for students' cognitive learning in the ESL classroom (Frisby & Martin, 2010; Hyland, 2003; Tan, 2013).

Secondly, this study has demonstrated that teacher self-disclosure is an important factor as a content generating strategy. As difficulty in producing ideas (Hiew, 2012; Nor et al., 2019) was one of the problems that affected the writing readiness of ESL students, in this study, when the teacher shared her experiences and knowledge, students could brainstorm and extend their essays with fresh ideas. Teacher self-disclosure was also able to boost critical thinking as it increased students' curiosity in discovering new topics, ideas and concepts on their own. By doing so, students felt that the content production and content relevance of essays improved in terms of relevance and credibility, their learners' autonomy and the overall acquisition process. This is in line with the findings of Babonea (2012), Eckhart (2011), Gray et al. (2011), Pakirathan and Kepol (2018), Serag (2011) and Schrodtt (2013). As suggested by Liang (2007), scaffolding is the result of teachers' sharing of knowledge and experiences to current thinking. Teacher self-disclosure, therefore, was practical to be used as an instructional strategy to provide personalised feedback on writing and scaffolding, comprehend language errors and essay evaluations.

Finally, themes pertaining to teacher-student communication, affective learning and perceptions revealed a strong impact on the outcomes of students' perceptions towards their teachers' self-disclosures. The results indicated that when teachers shared their personal information and empathized,

students felt that teachers were more caring towards them, thus increasing their trust in their teachers. This finding is consistent with the findings of Wheelless (1978). The results also showed that the wide array of teachers' experiences and knowledge made teachers' delivery of course content perceived as more authentic. Teachers' self-disclosure had also made the class climate less strenuous and opened up avenues for humor and active participation. Students also perceived that teachers were more approachable inside the classroom to ask questions and as well as engaging in out-of-classroom communication. These are consistent with the findings of Aniljeet et al. (2018) and Frisby and Martin (2010). Overall, a positive perception towards their teacher had improved students' motivation and interest towards learning of writing and the writing course. Consistent with the findings of Farani and Fatemi (2014), when students attitudes improved through teacher self-disclosure, it also improved their overall aptitude towards the language learning process. Students in this study reported that they were not only motivated to write, but also gained more confidence writing in their self-voices, improved their curiosity and interest in the topics as well as forming an affectional predisposition towards the teacher and the course alike. This has also improved their willingness to participate by answering questions during lectures contribute through discussions during tutorials. This is important as it indicates that students preferred to learn from their teachers rather than lecture slides and textbooks. This finding is consistent Afzal, Siau and Yeoh's (2015) observation that in most South East Asian countries, teaching and learning is teacher-centric and there is a strong bond between teachers, students and the learning environment. These are consistent with the findings of Goldstein and Benassi (1994), Da Luz (2015), Mazer et al. (2007), Sanders (2014), Strickland (2016), Webb (2014) and Žardeckaitė- & Paluckaitė (2013). The results also indicated that the theme appropriateness had proven that teachers need to take a more cautious approach before engaging in self-disclosures with their students. The data have indicated that students preferred teachers self-disclosures to be relevant to the topics discussed during lessons and fall within the topics indicated in the course structure, and not weighed too much on personal issues or stories as confirmed by Rahimi & Bigdeli (2015) and Paluckaitė and Žardeckaitė (2016).

CONCLUSION

This explorative study was conducted to gain a comprehensive understanding of Malaysian teachers' self-disclosure in an ESL undergraduate writing classroom. The study indicated that ESL teachers did self-disclose in the ESL writing classroom and their self-disclosures had impacted ESL students' learning of English as second language and their perceptions towards their teachers. This study has extended the understanding of literature in teachers' self-disclosure in three ways. First, it has established the fact that teachers' self-disclosure has potential as an instructional tool in the ESL writing classroom. Teachers can employ self-disclosure to improve students attitudes towards language learning and learning strategies. Secondly, the findings of this study also show that teachers' self-disclosure has proven to aide content development in the writing classroom, one that involves engaging students' prior knowledge, retention of information, scaffolding and critical thinking. Finally, this study is important as it proves that face-to-face instruction is vital for engaging students in the teaching and learning process of ESL writing. Therefore, teacher self-disclosure as an instructional tool has an important implication in improving the learning environment, quality of education, role of educators and teaching approaches in the ESL writing classroom.

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